**Snowed Under**

by Julesmonster

**Summary**

Booth gets snowed in with Zack and must face his hidden desires. Slash SB/ZA. Mild BDSM. Second story (a prequel) in the Rainbow Inn Universe but may be read alone.

**Notes**

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A/N: This is the second story in the Rainbow Inn Universe. It can be read separately or as part of the series. It is a prequel to The Rainbow Inn.

This is also my first Bones fic. I've taken an interest because I find that there is a huge gap in the slash fiction in this fandom. With all the yummy men on this show, you'd think that there would be more people writing about them getting it on together. The potential here is astronomical!

Having said that, I have set this story mid-season 2—though I have taken some liberties with the timeline, e.g. I had Sully and Brennan get together earlier in the season—before the writers started messing with my favorite squint. I think it is deplorable the way they treated poor Zack, so I just choose not to acknowledge it. Instead, I gave him to Booth to play with and let the two of them have a romance as fluffy as new fallen snow! :P I hope you enjoy!

Jules
Agent Seeley Booth didn't think he would ever get used to the way Bones and her merry band of squints could stand poking and prodding remains that were hardly recognizable as human any longer. He had a stronger stomach than most, but their lack of discomfort when handling a body that had been decapitated and then feasted on for days by a pack of wolves made him uneasy. There had to be something seriously wrong with a person who could gather chewed up body parts from a crime scene and speak casually about the teeth marks and partially digested remains that would be found in the wolf scat. It was disturbing.

"Booth," Dr. Brennan called out, gaining his attention. Booth walked over to the gully where Bones was collecting the pieces of body with Zack. "There are remains from at least three people here."

"Make that four," Zack said as he held up what looked like a leg to Booth. "Female Caucasian looks to be post adolescent." He looked at Booth and explained, "She's the first female we've found. The others have all been male. This femur has calcium deposits along the anterior."

"And that's important, why?" Booth asked. He knew that Zack was trying to be helpful in his way, but Booth could never really understand the kid. He was too… squinty. "Wait. Never mind. Just… keep doing what you do and let me know what it all means later."

Booth ignored the shared looks that Bones and Zack sent each other behind his back as he walked away. He knew they thought he was a Neanderthal with the brain the size of a walnut, but that was okay with him. He thought they were creepy little squints. Sexy, but creepy nonetheless.

Booth went to his SUV and climbed inside. It was cold out and the heat in the vehicle was welcomed. Booth held his hands up to the heating vent and let the warm air drive away the sting from his fingers. The icy January wind in the mountains of western Virginia could cut through six layers of protective clothing. Booth wasn't sure how Bones and Zack could stand it. They had been out there collecting body parts for more than three hours without a break. He had brought them coffee the last time he'd gone out, but it wasn't enough. They had to be working on pure adrenaline to stay warm. Unless they had some super science geek way of keeping warm that they hadn't shared with the normal humans.

Booth smiled as he thought about that. The squints were rather endearing the way they could come up with the most ingenious ways to deal with common problems. Like when Bones and Hodgins were buried alive by the Grave Digger. They found a way to extend their air supply, discover their location, get a text message through, and use the airbags to blast through the dirt so that Booth could see where they were buried. And Angela could conjure things from thin air. Booth remembered the Christmas tree she had created for them when they were under quarantine during the holidays a year ago.

The one person that booth really didn't get was Zack. Zack had never done anything that really impressed Booth like the others had. He was weirder than all the others, he was eccentric, he was almost robotic in his interactions with other people, and he was just… well… cute. Booth rarely spoke directly to the newest doctor on the team, but he noticed him. He noticed him more than he probably should. He always had. The question was why. Why did Zack Addy both attract and repel Booth in equal measures? Why did he want to avoid the little squirt and protect him at the same time? And why had this… need to watch over Zack become stronger lately? It was actually overtaking his need to protect Bones. If he had to choose one to save, he wasn't sure
It was strange. He could pinpoint when his feelings towards Bones had changed from grand unrequited passion to this milder affection. It had started with Sully last fall. He had set aside his feelings for Bones, feelings that they both knew could never become more, in order to let her find happiness with the other FBI agent. The fact that they hadn't worked out didn't change the emotional path he started down. He'd talked all of this over with his therapist and he knew he had done the right thing. He loved Temperance. He always would. But the underlying passion and unresolved sexual tension was never going to go anywhere and it was unhealthy for him to hang onto it. So he had begun to let it go. Now, there wasn't much of that feeling left. Bones was more like a sister or best friend to him and he was happy with their relationship that way. He respected her and she respected him and they worked perfectly together.

Without those hormone driven emotions clouding his vision, however, Booth found himself noticing other things, other people, lately. Mostly he found himself noticing Zack. He was like a male version of Bones in some ways. They shared the same specialty. They shared the same strange outlook on life. They even shared the same inability to relate the world around them. But Bones could look out for herself, whereas Zack was like a helpless kitten facing a pack of wolves. Bones had learned the harsher realities in life because of growing up in the foster system, while Zack had been sheltered from anything truly ugly until he'd come to the Jeffersonian. He needed Booth's protection more than Bones ever would. And Booth liked to feel needed.

Booth felt very uncomfortable about this strange urge he felt to protect Zack. This was another thing he'd talked about with Dr. Wyatt. Gordon, Gordon Wyatt had been infuriatingly close-lipped about what he thought it might mean. It was the biggest reason Booth had for avoiding the kid. It was also the reason he wanted to look out for him.

Bones opened the passenger door of the SUV and climbed inside. "You ready to go back to DC or do you have more interviews to conduct in town?"

Booth shook his head. "I'm ready when you and Zack are ready. Where is the junior squint, anyway?"

"He's packing the remains in the transport vehicle," Bones told him. "He'll be back in a few minutes. Speaking of Zack, what is up with you lately?"

Booth did his best to look completely unaware of what she was talking about, but knew she had picked up on his conflicted feelings towards Zack. "I'm not sure what you mean."

"I mean the way you have been studying him over the last couple of months," Bones said. Booth wished sometimes that she hadn't learned how to read him so well. "It started around the same time that Sully and I started dating, about the time Angela gave him that makeover. You can't seem to keep your eyes off of him whenever he's around. You try to look elsewhere, but inevitably your eyes drift back to him. So what is it?"

Booth was saved from having to answer because Zack opened the rear door and climbed into the SUV at that moment. "Good. It's warm in here. I think my fingers are frozen."

"What happened to your hand warmer?" Bones asked.

"It died about half an hour ago," Zack told her. "I knew we were almost finished so I didn't bother to get another one. It would have been a waste of resources."

"You shouldn't have been working out there for that long without taking precautions," Bones said.
matter-of-factly. "There's a reason we use the hand warmers and heat insulated suits."

"That's how you stay out there for so long without coming in to warm up?" Booth asked. "Where can we get some of those suits for the FBI?"

"They cost about $500 per suit," Bones told him. "I doubt the federal government will be willing to shell out that much for every one of their field agents so that they can avoid the cold."

"$500?" Booth whistled. "I have a feeling I'll be freezing my ass off for the foreseeable future."

"Why would the FBI not supply the proper equipment for their agents?" Zack asked. "Isn't it logical to provide the appropriate apparatus so that the job can be completed quickly, safely and accurately?"

"It is logical," Booth agreed. "But logic has little to do with government agencies. If the FBI spent millions of dollars of the taxpayers' money on insulated suits, there would be a national outcry. Politics plays a higher role than logic when it comes to the budget at the FBI."

"So we found parts from at least five bodies," Bones said, bringing the topic back to their work. The rest of their two hour drive back to DC was filled with conversation about the dead guys they had found. Once back in town, Booth drove to the Jeffersonian.

"You can drop me off out front," Bones said. "I'm going to meet the evidence vehicle and get this stuff unloaded before the snow starts. Booth, can you give Zack a ride home?"

"Dr. Brennan, I can stay and help you catalogue the evidence," Zack protested in that strangely monotonous voice.

"No, Zack," Bones said as she collected her gear. "Go home. Once the snow starts it's supposed to come down fast. We'll start after they clear the roads tomorrow. I'm just going to make sure the remains are stored properly and then head home myself. Go on."

Zack looked indecisive for a moment before turning to Booth. "I'd like a ride, if that's okay with you Special Agent Booth?"


Bones left, Zack climbed into the front seat and they were soon on their way again. The SUV was silent except for Zack's tersely worded directions to his apartment. Booth let his eyes stray occasionally to Zack as he drove. There were a few snow flurries starting to fall so Booth had to keep his eyes on the road, but he couldn't help but glance over every once in a while. Zack's hair had lost the wild curls since Angela's make over, but it still had an untamed quality. It was like the kid's new clothes. He was neat and well groomed, but continued to wear the flashy colors and patterns he had favored before. He was attempting to fit into society without losing any of the things that made him unique.

"Special Agent Booth," Zack said after taking a deep breath. "I was wondering if you would come up. There is a matter where your guidance would be invaluable. I could make dinner for you in return."

Booth was rather startled by the offer as he pulled the SUV up to Hodgins' garage. "Um… I guess. Do you always barter food for advice?"

"No," Zack told the agent as they climbed from the vehicle. "Angela and Hodgins usually offer advice without my having to ask because they are my friends. Dr. Brennan will give me counsel upon occasion as well because I am her assistant. But there is no reason for you to help me."
Therefore I felt that an offer of something in return would be a fitting incentive.

Booth chuckled at that as he followed Zack up the outside stairs and into the apartment. Booth had never been to Zack's place and was surprised at just how large the apartment was for a place above a garage. Then again, Hodgins' garage was absolutely huge. The apartment opened up into a great room that was as large as Booth's entire house. There was an area to the right where the kitchen opened up into the dining area and living space to the left of the door. Straight back, there was a hall that Booth assumed led to the bedroom. Or bedrooms. He thought he remembered Zack saying that his apartment had more than one bedroom about a year before when they were discussing Hodgins' money.

While Booth was removing his coat and looking around, Zack had moved through the room and turned on the gas fireplace. "Make yourself comfortable, Special Agent Booth. I'm going to change clothes and then I'll start dinner." Zack said before walking down the hall and disappearing.

Booth shrugged and flopped down on the sectional sofa in front of the fireplace. He was impressed not just by the size of the apartment, but by the way it was stylishly, if sparsely, decorated. Booth wondered if Zack had received help furnishing the place. It was filled with modern pieces that were both nice to look at and comfortable. There was a piece of art on the walls that he recognized as one of Angela's paintings. There were also a few family pictures of the many Addy relatives on the bookshelves which lined the walls on either side of the fireplace. There were a few books here and Booth took a quick look to see what Zack read but, unsurprisingly, most of them were sci-fi novels… Lord of the Rings, Dune, that sort of thing… nothing that interested him. There were also DVD's of Firefly, Stargate, Battlestar Galactica, the entire Star Wars series, and numerous box sets of various Star Trek series and movies.

Booth went back to the sofa and noticed the flat-screen TV above the fireplace. He was rather surprised that the junior squint actually owned a television given that Bones didn't have one. Then again, he knew that Hodgins and Angela both watched television. Booth looked for the remote and found it sitting on the coffee table. A quick press of a button and some weird science program was displayed over 60 inches of television. Booth was amused and curious, so he found the favorite button and began scrolling through Zack's programmed favorites. Unsurprisingly, most of them were channels like Discovery and PBS. Surprisingly, he also had Spike TV in his favorites. Booth grinned and decided to check out what was on the Tivo.

"I've got the entire season of Myth Busters recorded," Zack told him and Booth almost jumped. He hadn't heard him return. "Or there are some of my favorite Simpsons episodes on there."

"You record Dexter?" Booth asked.

"It is a fascinating look into the mind of a serial killer," Zack said as he banged around in the kitchen. "It is purely instructive."

Booth smirked. "It's entirely fictional and therefore completely useless as an educational tool." Booth turned off the television and went to sit at the counter across from where Zack was now chopping up vegetables for what looked to be stir fry. "Admit it. You watch it because it's gruesome and entertaining."

Zack's mouth gave a small quirk that told Booth he had hit the nail on the head. "I may have been drawn in by the idea of observing how the media depicts homicide and crime labs, but I have to admit that I do find the story and characters to be quite compelling. In some ways I empathize with the main character."

"You want to go out and kill murderers?" Booth asked teasingly.
"No!" Zack denied with wide-eyed vehemence but then saw the smile on Booth's face and relaxed. "I meant I can empathize with his inability to make connections with others. I have a difficult time interacting even with other scientists, and I have no way to bond with the average person. I simply lack the necessary social skills and the ability to learn those skills."

"Is that what you wanted to talk with me about?" Booth asked as he stole a carrot stick from the tray of vegetables Zack was almost finished cutting. Actually, Booth was rather impressed with the squint's skill with a knife. "You want advice on how to interact with non-squints?"

"Actually, no," Zack said. He looked up from his task and met Booth's eyes. "I received a missive from the White House requesting that I serve the military as forensic anthropologist over in Iraq. I wanted your opinion about what I should do. You were in the military and faced combat so you have evidence that could be useful in making a decision such as this."

"They want you in Iraq?" Booth asked, completely flabbergasted. On the one hand, he could see why they would want someone with Zack's skills and knowledge. On the other hand, this was Zack.

"I could let you read the letter," Zack said.

"No, that's fine," Booth said distractedly. "Okay. So you want me to tell you if you should go or not?"

"Not really," Zack said as he went back to work. He tossed beef pieces into the heated wok along with some soy sauce and other sauces Booth didn't recognize. "I was actually hoping that you could tell me what I would be expected to do and then I could make an informed decision."

Booth closed his eyes and took a deep breath. This news was wreaking havoc on his need to protect Zack. His first instinct was to scream "NO! You can't go! I won't allow it!" But he couldn't do that. Instead he took another deep breath and tried to speak. "Okay… Okay. Zack…"

Zack added the vegetables to the stir fry and kept his eyes on the food for a few minutes. "You don't have to answer right away. I'm sure that you could use some time to formulate a response. There's beer in the refrigerator if you would like some. I keep it there for Hodgins."

"Actually, I'd love a glass of milk," Booth said. "But I can get it myself if you point me in the right direction. And what can I get for you?"

"Milk is good." Zack pointed out the cupboard with the glasses and Booth got busy pouring two glasses of milk. "I'm surprised that you would choose milk over beer."

"Oh, well, I do like beer," Booth said. "But I always drink three glasses of milk every day. This is number three for today."

Zack gave him a small nervous smile as he removed the stir fry from the stovetop and served it over two plates of rice. Then he took the plates and set them down at the dining table on the other side of the counter. Booth followed him with their drinks and soon they were sitting across from each other and enjoying their dinner.

"Wow, Zack," Booth said. "This is really good. I never knew you could cook. I think the only thing I've ever seen you eat is macaroni and cheese."

"Stir fry is the only meal I can cook," Zack said. "My mother insisted that I needed to learn how to cook to impress dates. This was the only thing I could make successfully. She tried meatloaf, casseroles, steaks, pork chops… I ruined them all. Inevitably I would get distracted by… something more important. Stir fry doesn't leave enough time between steps to allow for distractions."
"I can cook a few decent meals," Booth admitted. "Had to learn or starve when I got out of the service."

"I see," Zack said.

They both ate in silence for a few minutes before Booth spoke again. "Listen Zack, I can tell you stories all night about what it's like to serve in a war zone, but it won't make any difference. You can't understand it without being there."

"So you are saying I should go and experience it first hand?" Zack asked.

"No that's not what I'm saying at all," Booth sighed. "What I'm saying is… Okay. You said you have difficulty interacting with non-squints. If you serve in a military unit, you will not only have to work with non-squints, you'll be relying on them to cover your ass and they'll be relying on you. You'll have to work as a team, as a single unit. They have to trust you and you have to trust them or somebody dies. There's no room for individuality."

"I don't understand," Zack said. "A team, by definition, is made up of individuals."

"Not in the military it's not," Booth muttered. He looked closely at Zack. "In the military, individuality can get you killed. Everyone lives by the same rules and thinks the same way."

"I can live by rules," Zack said.

"But can you think the way the military wants you to think?" Booth asked. "When they ask you to guess and say to you that the details don't matter, when they tell you not to question the reasons behind a decision, when they dismiss your findings because they would create an international incident or tell you to leave off in the middle of an investigation… can you just accept that and walk away?"

"But… Why would they not want the truth?" Zack asked. "The details always matter and scientists do not guess. That's… That's illogical."

"Remember what I told you about the FBI being illogical? Well, the military is worse," Booth said. "There is absolutely no logic in war."

"But you were a soldier," Zack said with some confusion. "Why would you choose to belong to an organization which is illogical?"

"Because not everyone is as tied to logic as you and Dr. Brennan are," Booth said gently. "Life tends to be illogical. People tend to be illogical. And when you are safe in the science lab, you can avoid the chaos of humanity, but in a war zone there is nothing but chaos; rationality is the first casualty of any war. The question you need to ask yourself is if you can set aside your need for logic and accept chaos every day for the next… however long they want to keep you."

"I see," Zack said quietly. "Thank you Special Agent Booth."

"Just call me Booth," Booth told him. "Or better yet Seeley. Yeah, I think you should call me Seeley."

"Why?" Zack asked startled. "You do not like me. I thought we had established that."

Booth chuckled. "No, you just assumed that. I never agreed or disagreed. I'm disagreeing now."

"You are disagreeing?" Zack asked, still confused. "Meaning you do like me?"
"Yeeeesss," Booth drawled. "Here, let me help clean up." Booth gathered their dishes and took them to the kitchen. Zack followed him and together they rinsed the plates and glasses and loaded them into the dishwasher.

"Thank you… Seeley," Zack said nervously. "Are you sure about the liking me thing? Because I've never seen any evidence of that."

"I'm sure," Booth insisted. "You can ask Bones if you don't believe me. She's noticed that I… like you and has commented on it."

Zack blushed at the thought that his boss had spoken with Booth about him. "Do you want a drink? I mean, something besides milk? I have… bourbon I think."

"Sure," Booth agreed with a small smile at the younger man. "And then maybe we could watch one of your Myth Busters shows. I like when they blow stuff up."

Soon the two men were seated on the sofa, Booth with a bourbon and Zack with water, sharing a bowl of popcorn between them and laughing at the antics of the Myth Busters team. Booth had to admit that it was fun having Zack telling him exactly what the team was doing wrong with their devices before they figured it out. They followed that up with a couple episodes of the Simpsons and Booth realized that Zack wasn't as bizarre as he seemed. He may not have social skills, but he shared some normal interests. And when their hands brushed in the bowl of popcorn, Zack blushed again and Booth savored the moment, despite his mixed feelings.

"I should probably get going before the snow gets too bad," Booth said reluctantly after the third episode of the Simpsons.

"Probably," Zack agreed.

Booth smiled and donned his coat. "This wasn't too bad. Maybe we should do it again sometime."

"If you'd like," Zack said. "Though the only other thing I can cook is macaroni and cheese."

Booth chuckled. "Maybe I'll cook next time. I know a few more recipes."


Booth stood by the door and looked down at Zack. There was an awkward pause between them. Booth knew that if he had spent an evening like this with a woman, he would have leaned down and given her a kiss goodnight. Even Bones would have gotten a friendly peck on the cheek for her troubles. But this wasn't a woman. This was Zack. And no matter how odd he could be at times, he was a man. Booth shook himself and opened the door to leave. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Seeley," Zack said.

And then they both noticed that Booth's SUV, parked at the bottom of the stairs was half covered in a snow drift. Almost a foot of snow had to have fallen since they had arrived, and the winds were blowing that snow around into drifts three feet high in some places. The wind and snow also made it almost impossible to see more than the distance to the bottom of the steps. There was no way Booth should be driving in blizzard conditions like this.

"Or maybe you should stay here," Zack said as he eyed the snow.

"That's probably a good idea," Booth said as he stepped back into the apartment and shut the door behind him.
Snowed In

Part 2: Snowed In

Booth was nervous now. It was one thing to spend time with Zack when he knew he had an escape route, but to be stuck with the kid indefinitely was pushing the boundaries of his comfort zone. In this close proximity, how would he be able to keep words like cute and sexy out of his head? This was just not good. And yet he was happy for the excuse to stay longer. Despite his discomfort, or possibly because of it, he wanted to be here. He knew he would never figure out what was going on by avoiding Zack.

"So," Zack said nervously.

"Yeah, so," Booth said. "Since I don't have to drive home, how about another bourbon? Maybe you could join me for a drink?"

"I… I don't really drink," Zack said. "I have a low tolerance for alcohol. But… maybe just one drink."

"No," Booth told him. "You shouldn't drink because you feel pressured. In fact, I think you're right. I have a much better idea."

Five minutes later, Zack was watching Booth stir a pan of milk over the gas flame on the stove and slowly adding shaved bits of chocolate from a large candy bar Booth had in his jacket.

"Are you sure this is the way you make hot chocolate?" Zack asked. "Because I thought it involved some powdered substance and hot water."

"That's… one way to make hot chocolate," Booth agreed reluctantly. "This is better. Just wait until you taste it."

"I have some snickerdoodles we could have with the hot chocolate," Zack volunteered. "Hodgins' housekeeper makes them for me. Hodgins says she's trying to mother me, but that cannot be correct, since I have a mother already and there is no evidence that I share genetic lineage with Mrs. Neilson."

Booth chuckled. "He didn't mean it literally. Hodgins was just saying that she likes to take care of you like a mother cares for a child."

"Ah. A metaphor. I'm not very good with those," Zack admitted. He pulled the tin of cookies from a cupboard and opened them. Then he went to another cupboard and grabbed two mugs for the chocolate.

"Thanks," Booth said with a small smile. He pulled the chocolate from the stove and began to pour. "Got any whipped cream?"

"I think so," Zack said and turned back to the refrigerator and found a can of whipped cream. Booth took it from him and squirted some on each of the mugs of hot chocolate. Zack took one of the mugs and the tin of cookies and went back to the sofa in the living room. "Would you like to watch more television?"

Booth sat down sideways, facing Zack on the sofa, and smiled. "Nah. Why don't we just talk?"
"Talk?" Zack asked. "Is there a specific topic you would like to discuss?"

Booth chuckled. "No, nothing specific. I just thought we could get to know each other. We've worked on the same team for two years now and I know next to nothing about you."

"My name is Zachary Uriah Addy," Zack said. "I have a doctorate in forensic anthropology and am working towards a second doctorate in applied engineering."

"Not that," Booth said. "I know all that. Well, the Uriah part is a surprise, but the rest I know. No, I mean other stuff. You come from a big family, right? What was that like growing up?"

Zack blinked at Booth. "I… was the sixth child out of eight. I have twin older brothers who were born seven years before me, and my three older sisters were born eight, six and four years before me. My younger sister was born three years after me and my younger brother was born six years after. He's a senior in high school this year. They all still live in Michigan in the same town as my parents, except for Sue who is away at college. None of them understand me. I do not understand them. This hot chocolate is very good by the way."

"Thanks," Booth said. "You love your family, though, right? You spend your holidays with them every year and I know they came out for your graduation."

"Yes," Zack said.

Booth shook his head. This was like pulling teeth. "Are they as smart as you?"

Zack looked startled by the question. "No… they are of above average intelligence, but none of them have an IQ nearly as high as mine. Also, they are more like you or Angela. They know how to interact with people. They don't know how to interact with me. But they love me. My parents did their best to try and help me learn social skills. My mother made me take singing lessons as a child. What about you Special Ag… Seeley?"

Booth smiled at Zack's slip. "I have a younger brother. I tried to look after him when we were growing up, protect him. We spent a lot of time with my grandfather, Pops. My parents are both gone now and you've met my son Parker."

"Can I ask… how did…?" Zack couldn't seem to complete the question.

"How did Parker come about?" Booth guessed. Zack nodded so Booth went on. "His mother and I were pretty serious. She got pregnant. I wanted to get married and she didn't. Now I think she made the right decision, but at the time I was devastated. I know now that I wanted a family more than I wanted Rebecca."

"But you have a family," Zack said. "Is Parker not your family?"

Booth's smile was beaming. "Yeah. Parker is my family. But there was a time when I thought that the only way for a family to be happy was to be more… traditional. I never had that as a kid."

"But you accept alternate views of family now?" Zack asked. "Because I've been reading a lot about alternative families recently in my search for understanding of the average person. I have found that there is a wide range of what is considered normal. Some people only accept others exactly like themselves as normal while others believe that almost everything is acceptable."

"By alternate families, do you mean single parent and merged families?" Booth asked.

"Yes," Zack nodded. "But also adoptive and foster families, families with same sex parents, and
chosen families."

"Chosen families?" Booth asked.

Zack paused as he considered how to define the term. "Chosen families are those people who are close to us, that we consider family, even if we have no biological ties. In modern society, it is common for groups of friends or colleagues to form a close familial bond."

"Kind of like the team at the Jeffersonian," Booth said quietly.

"Yes," Zack agreed. He picked up a snickerdoodle and started to nibble like a squirrel. "In many ways I believe we are as much a family as my blood relatives back home."

"You guys are very close," Booth agreed.

"Not just us," Zack insisted. "You are a part of the chosen family as well."

"Well, I like you guys and all, but I never thought that I was a part of that group," Booth said. "I mean, Bones is like a sister to me, and I know she thinks of me like a brother, but I never thought the rest of you would accept me the same way."

"Of course you are a part of the team… family… whatever," Zack said. "But wait, you look upon Dr. Brennan as a sister? That is not what Angela and Hodgins told me."

Booth choked on a bite of cookie and had to take a drink of his cocoa to clear his throat. "You all discuss our relationship? What do Angela and Hodgins say?"

"They say that you two want to have sex," Zack said. "But that you are both too stubborn and afraid to act on your feelings."

Booth laughed. "And what do you say when they say that?"

Zack tilted his head and seemed to think. "I usually don't say much of anything. But if you are asking what I think, I have always believed that Dr. Brennan cannot accept affection in the same way that most people do. She views the emotional and physical as two separate things, whereas you, Seeley, cannot separate the two. For this reason, you and she would not make a compatible couple. Whether there is unresolved sexual tension between the two of you or not, I could not really say."

Booth stared at the younger man in front of him with affection bordering on adoration. How could he have ever thought that Zack was two dimensional?

"You're right," Booth finally conceded. "We have very different views on love and relationships. I believe deep and lasting love is possible and she does not. I think at one time we might have tried for something together, but I know her too well now. And she knows me. She would never allow our relationship to cross that boundary even if I wanted it because she knows she would end up hurting me. And so we have both accepted the limits of our friendship and have moved past the attraction that Angela and Hodgins seem to focus on."

"I see," Zack said. "That is very rational. I am impressed."

"Didn't think I could be rational?" Booth asked teasingly.

"On the contrary," Zack said. "In your line of work, you must employ reason and logic in order to be successful. That your foundation of knowledge is less empirical than our scientific criteria does not detract from the validity of your conclusions as you are dealing directly with the chaos of humanity."
"I think you just complimented me," Booth said with a grin. "But you never told me your take on love. Do you fall under the rational definition of love as a biological outcome from genetic encoding and hormones? Or are you in the true love camp?"

"I believe in both," Zack said. "Just because there is a biological reason for the emotions we feel does not make those emotions any less valid, whether that emotion is love, anger, depression or happiness. And though the initial chemical attraction which draws one to a mate may fade in its potency, it is possible to maintain a companionship which can last a lifetime if you choose your mate with more in mind than procreation and sexual gratification."

"Your parents are still happily married," Booth said with understanding. "I think it's easier for you to believe that because you've witnessed it. Bones never has."

Zack nodded. "I have a question for you, Agent… Seeley. I told you I have been studying the ways in which society views certain family models, but in my readings, I found myself being drawn to several tangential studies. These studies had more to do with the ways in which societies perceive and accept or reject same sex relationships. In the course of that additional study I have come to the conclusion that I may in fact prefer to pursue relationships with my own gender. You have the strongest understanding of human interactions of any person I know. So I would like you to tell me how the others would react if I were to tell them this, because Angela is still trying to set me up on blind dates. Or should I keep this new self-awareness to myself?"

Booth was floored once again by Zack's brutal honesty. "Well, let me see. Bones would talk about the validity of the genetic research that has been done to find the so-called 'gay gene.' Angela would think it was the best thing ever, since she dates both men and women. Hodgins… he's a tough read on this, but ultimately I think he'll care more about your happiness than the gender of your dates. And Cam simply won't care as long as it doesn't affect your job performance. In all, I'd say tell them if you want. But only if and when you're ready."

"I think I am ready," Zack told him. "I have already told my biological family. What about you? You didn't tell me how you would react."

"Since I've already reacted, I thought it was pointless. And I think I reacted pretty well," Booth said. "Or do you want me to say it out loud. It doesn't bother me one way or the other." Even as he said it though, Booth knew he was lying. It did bother him. It bothered him bone deep, but it wasn't the kind of bothered that Zack meant, so he forgave himself the white lie. "You surprise me sometimes. Tell me how you realized that—how did you put it?—you prefer to pursue relationships with your own gender."

"As I read those studies I mentioned, I began to formulate a hypothesis," Zack explained. "The best way to prove or disprove a hypothesis is to collect data until you can be reasonably sure of your findings. So I began collecting data and recording it. I began by recording my physical reactions to attractive people, cataloguing them by gender, age, and race. I then noted heart rate, degree of perceived attraction and scale of physical reaction. The results of that experiment were interesting, but inconclusive."

"Meaning you weren't prone to get an erection from chatting with someone at work or walking by them on the street," Booth said. "No matter how attractive they are."

"That is correct," Zack said. "Though there were several low level reactions, they were not enough to draw a conclusion. So I moved on to more explicit stimuli."

"Pornography?" Booth asked.
Zack nodded. "Again, the results were inconclusive. In this case, there was too much stimulation and I could not accurately determine if it was the result of gender or the libidinous nature of the material. Upon further study, I realized my mistake. I needed to take a more hands on approach. So I went to four different bars, two catering to heterosexuals and two catering to homosexuals. While there, I approached possible subjects until three agreed to kiss me for the sake of science. From a sampling of twelve kisses, I was finally able to make a conclusive determination."

Booth wanted to laugh but Zack was so damn serious about the whole thing so he held back his amusement. "You know, most people do the same thing when they are teenagers. They don't call it science, though. They date and kiss a number of people until they realize what it is they want in a lover. Not just gender, but physical attributes, personality, all kinds of things."

"I was in college and then graduate school in my teens," Zack said. "There was very little time for dating. And very few of my peers would have considered it, as I was much younger than they were. I didn't have my first sexual experience until I was 20. It apparently wasn't very good. The same thing happened with Naomi in Paleontology."

"No spark," Booth said. "A lot depends on that special spark of electricity that you get with some people. Technique doesn't mean a lot without it. You can have good sex without the spark, but great sex doesn't happen without it."

"I do not understand," Zack said. "While there is a low level electrical field in the human body, it does not produce enough energy to cause a spark of any kind. Perhaps you are referring to static electricity in the atmosphere?"

Booth did laugh this time. "No. It's another metaphor. It means that there is a very strong attraction between two people that isn't limited to the physical, but certainly includes it."

"I see," Zack said.

"You'll know it when it happens," Booth told him.

Zack handed Booth another cookie from the tin and there was another jolt of something that Booth wasn't ready to name, but Zack was beginning to realize was significant if the small smile on his lips was to be believed. "That was…"

"Maybe we should get some sleep," Booth said, his discomfort clear in his voice. He stood up and tossed the cookie back into the tin without taking a bite.

Zack looked up at Booth and blinked three times before nodding. "I'll show you to the guest room."

Booth followed Zack down the hall and listened as Zack pointed out the guest bathroom and told him where to find the towels. Then they moved on to another door and he followed Zack inside. Booth was surprised to see that the guest room also appeared to serve as a workout room for Zack. There was a treadmill and free weights in one corner and an exercise mat on the floor at the foot of the bed.

"You work out?" Booth asked. As he went over to the free weights and lifted up a 20lb dumbbell.

"Every day," Zack said. "30 minutes on the treadmill, 100 sit-ups, pushups, and leg-lifts, and 20 minutes of free weights. I am deceptively strong."

Booth chuckled at that. "I'm sure you are."

"Well… goodnight… Seeley," Zack said from his place in the doorway.
"Yeah. Goodnight," Booth replied and watched as Zack reluctantly closed the door behind him.

BZBZBZBZBZ

The next morning, Booth woke early as usual and took advantage of the exercise equipment in the guest room. As he worked out, he recalled just how many times Zack had surprised him the previous evening. The most surprising thing, however, was his own reactions to the younger man's revelations. He had talked about this with Dr. Wyatt and the therapist had refused to spell it all out for him, but he was beginning to understand what it all meant. The protectiveness could be put down to friendship or brotherly love. The fascination with Zack could be explained away by curiosity—who isn't fascinated by a creature so different from oneself?—but he couldn't explain away the physical awareness of the younger man. He couldn't explain the way his heart raced or the sparks that seemed to fly whenever he made contact with Zack's hand last night or the way their eyes would connect and hold for much longer than they should. It was like Zack's experiment: there was conclusive evidence of physical attraction.

Booth scowled at his desire to run away from that thought even as he ran on the treadmill. He did not like to think of himself as a coward, but that's what he was being. He had been hiding from his own feelings for weeks. Booth refused to continue in that way.

There was a knock at the door and Booth was suddenly very conscious of the fact that he was wearing only his boxer-briefs. Zack poked his head through the door. "I thought I heard the treadmill. Do you mind if I come in and start my workout?"

"I was just finishing up on the treadmill," Booth said. "You can have it."

"Thank you," Zack said as he entered the room. Booth noted that the younger man was wearing running shorts and nothing else. And the fact that he did work out everyday was now quite obvious. His muscles were lean, but well defined. He had a flat stomach that did things to Booth that he didn't like to admit.

Booth set his mind on doing pushups and sit-ups and tried to avoid watching Zack, sweet little Zack, turn into a hot and sweaty hard body. He had thought about using the free weights before Zack came in, but now Booth knew he needed to finish up and get the hell out of that room before he totally lost it and did something he might regret later. Then again, maybe he wouldn't regret it.

Booth groaned and flopped onto his back on the mat.

"Are you unwell?" Zack asked.

"I'm fine," Booth told him in a tight voice. "I'm going to go take a shower and get cleaned up."

"Okay," Zack said as he shut off the treadmill and went to the mat to start his sit-ups. "I put clean sweats and a t-shirt in the bathroom for you. I'm afraid nothing else I own would fit you."

Right, thanks." Booth almost ran to the bathroom to escape the vision that Zack made. The fact that he was aroused by Zack was no longer the greatest crisis in his life. Now his biggest problem was dealing with the erection the sight of Zack on his back with his knees up and legs spread had caused. Booth turned the shower on and hoped to god that it would drown out the sound of his orgasm because there was no way he was going to be able to think about anything else until he came.

BZBZBZBZBZ

"It's still coming down pretty hard," Booth said from his spot beside the windows in the living room.
He was wearing the sweats and t-shirt that Zack had left, and they were definitely too small, but at least they were somewhat comfortable. Zack had finally emerged from his own shower wearing jeans and a t-shirt and was now looking for something they could eat for breakfast. "The news said we're under a state of emergency, so unless I get called out for a case and the bureau digs us out, we're not going anywhere anytime soon. They say it isn't supposed to let up for another 24 hours and they expect more than four feet of snow total. When it's all over, it'll be the worst blizzard DC has seen in fifty years."

"I have found eggs and bacon, but I have no idea how to cook them," Zack said. "In fact there are a number of foods in here that I do not know how to prepare."

Booth chuckled as he walked over to the kitchen, "Then why are they in your refrigerator?"

"Mrs. Neilson must have put them there," Zack mused. "It would be like her to stock up my cupboards to make sure I have food before a storm. She does not know I cannot cook."

"Well, why don't I teach you how to make eggs and bacon," Booth said. "It's got to be at least as easy as stir fry."

For the next twenty minutes Booth and Zack laughed as they attempted to work together to prepare their meal. Booth couldn't remember the last time he had heard the younger man laugh, and that sound was enough to put him into a great mood, despite being stuck indefinitely. In the end, Booth dished up the up bacon onto plates where toast was already waiting while Zack served the eggs. Then they each carried their full plates to the table to eat.

Booth was about to put the first forkful into his mouth when his cell phone rang. "Booth."

"Booth, thank god I got you." It was Bones.

"Are you okay?" Booth asked, instantly concerned because of the worry in her voice.

"I'm fine," she said. "I was concerned for Zack. He has not answered his phone and I'm afraid that something may have happened to him."

Booth chuckled. "He's fine. I promise you." Booth switched on his speaker and set the phone down between himself and Zack.

"You can't know that," Bones argued. "Anything could have happened after you dropped him off last night."

Zack seemed surprised by Dr. Brennan's concern for his welfare. "I am fine, Dr. Brennan."

"Zack? You're with Booth?"

"More like I'm with him. Zack offered to make dinner to thank me for the ride," Booth said. "I got snowed in."

"So you are both unharmed?" Bones asked.

"We're both fine," Booth said. "The power's still on. Why's your phone out, Zack?"

Zack blinked twice. "The electricity lines are buried in this neighborhood. Unless the transformer blows we should be fine. Even then, I do believe that Hodgins has a generator which can service the entire property, including this apartment. The phone, on the other hand, relies upon hanging wires. It is just a supposition, but it is possible that the phone lines were weighted down by ice and snow and
disabled the connection. And I never keep my cell phone on at home.”

"All the utilities to my building are underground," Bones said. Booth smirked at the intelligent tones they both adopted even when discussing something so mundane. "I have spoken to Angela. She is with Hodgins at his house, so they are both safe. And Dr. Saroyan has been in touch. Obviously, we will not be able to examine those remains today. We will see how the weather and roads are before making a judgment about tomorrow."

"Yes, Dr. Brennan," Zack agreed.

"You've checked with everyone else," Booth said. "I assume you're okay?"

"I am perfectly fine," Bones said. "As I stated earlier, the utilities to this building are all underground, making loss of power unlikely. And I have plenty of supplies to see me through several days of confinement if it comes to that."

"And I'm sure you can entertain yourself," Booth teased. "Well, my cell phone's battery is going to die soon and I don't have a charger with me."

"You may contact either of us on my cell phone," Zack said. "I will turn it on now."

"Thank you Zack," Bones said. "Be safe."

They disconnected the call and Booth set his phone to forward his calls to Zack's cell while the younger man went to fetch said phone from his bedroom. Afterwards, they finally ate their breakfast and cleaned up their dishes.

"So now what?" Booth asked.

"We could watch a movie," Zack said. "Or play scrabble. That is the only board game I have."

"Do you have any jigsaw puzzles?" Booth asked. "My Pops always used to pull out the puzzles on snowy days after Jared and I were too cold and tired to stay outside any more. We'd sit in the living room and drink warm milk and do the puzzle all afternoon."

"I do have several puzzles," Zack said. "My mother gives me one every year at Christmas. I'm not sure why. She does not give puzzles to any of my siblings."

"You're studying for a second doctorate in engineering," Booth mused. "That means you aren't just good with numbers; you're also good with spatial relations. Add in your interest in forensic anthropology and I'd guess that you liked puzzles a lot when you were a little kid. I bet she's just trying to help you remember being that child."

"It does sound like something she would do," Zack said even as he went to a cupboard and pulled out several puzzles from which to choose. "It is not the most efficient way to achieve her goal, however. Would it not make more sense to just say what she wishes for me to recall? Verbal prompts are much less ambiguous."

"But they don't hold the same weight," Booth argued. He opened one of the boxes on the coffee table and began sorting the pieces, looking for edge pieces to start with. "Sense memory is always more powerful."

Zack had taken a seat beside Booth on the sofa and picked up a puzzle piece. He allowed his fingers to run over the surface and edges, feeling the dips and ridges, feeling the rough back and the smooth front. The smell of cardboard dust wafted up from the table and encircled them both. Booth could tell
Zack was getting lost in some long forgotten memory and smiled when a small secretive grin crossed Zack's lips for just a moment before returning to his usual blank look.

"It is logical to begin with the most recognizable pieces," Zack said as he helped Booth sort for the edges.

BZBZBZBZBZ

Three hours later, the puzzle was finished and they were on their second cup of coffee each. It wasn’t the warm milk flavored with vanilla beans and cinnamon that Booth recalled from his childhood, but Zack didn’t have cinnamon sticks or vanilla—of any kind—in his cupboards. Booth had checked. It was a good excuse to get up and move around for a few minutes. Sitting so close beside Zack on the sofa as they worked on the puzzle together was doing strange things to Booth.

Seeley Booth could not be gay. He had been a jock in school. He was a Ranger in the US Army, a sniper sent behind enemy lines in war torn countries like Iraq, Kosovo and Guatemala. He had survived torture as a Ranger and as an FBI agent. He had survived bombs. He had survived an abusive alcoholic father. He was strong and tough and manly. And yet…

And yet this little squirt of a squint could turn him on without even trying. Hell, Zack Addy probably wouldn't know where to begin trying to seduce him. That was one of the things that appealed to Booth. Zack was so smart, but he was also so innocent and so vulnerable. Booth wanted to protect him and debauch him at the same time. And if that wasn't disturbing enough, he wanted to dominate the young man, possess him, as well.

Booth had never really shown any inclination towards control games in the bedroom. In fact, Bones liked to poke and prod at his relatively unadventurous views on sex. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Zack was male. Maybe he had never allowed himself to explore any need to dominate a woman precisely because they were women. Both his father and his pops had beaten it into his head that you treat every woman like a lady. And ladies do not get tied to the bed posts and let their partners have their way with them. But Zack was no lady and Booth couldn't keep images of the things he could do to the younger man out of his head.

So Booth had made up many excuses to get up and away from Zack for a few minutes several times as they had talked and worked on the puzzle together. Now the puzzle was finished and Booth needed to find another distraction from his own screwed up libido. He'd blame it on being stuck together if this hadn't been building for quite some time. Booth had never been fond of lying, even to himself.

"I'm going to go into the study and work for a while," Zack said, breaking Booth out of his quiet introspection. "I have to finish editing my engineering dissertation, incorporating the changes my advisor suggested before next week."

And with that, Zack disappeared back down the hall, leaving Booth alone to deal with these self-revelations. Booth went to the kitchen and found the bottle of bourbon Zack had put away last night. He poured himself a generous portion and put the bottle away so he wouldn’t be tempted to drink the entire contents and get lost in the oblivion alcohol offered. Booth took a small sip and carried the glass over to the sofa. He found the remote to the stereo and let some soft jazz fill the room while he stared into the fire.

Zack had admitted to being atheist once, but Booth believed in God. He believed that God was a loving God and didn't make mistakes. So, no matter what the Church's official stance was on homosexuality, Booth was okay with it. He would never condemn another person for loving anyone, no matter what gender, race or religion. That was something his Pops had taught him. His father
preached bigotry of all kinds in his drunken ramblings, but Pops had always taught tolerance. Pops had believed that you could believe in God and keep your faith and still accept that homosexuality—amongst other things—was okay.

It wasn't his faith that was holding Booth back. It was his pride. He had an image. It was an image that he portrayed to others, but also one he had always believed himself. Being attracted to, wanting to care for and protect another man did not fit his self-image.

Booth picked up Zack's phone from where he had left it on the coffee table after cleaning up the puzzle. With only a moment's hesitation, he dialed Dr. Wyatt's number.

"Gordon, Gordon Wyatt," the British accent came over the line.

"Gordon, it's Booth," he said quietly, as he watched for any signs that Zack might return down the hall. "You got a minute to talk?"

"Agent Booth," Gordon said and Booth could hear the smile in the other man's voice. "I had wondered if you would use the snow to avoid our session. I now know the answer, though you are a couple hours early."

Booth frowned. "I had actually forgotten about our session. That's not the point. I need to ask you something."

"Go right ahead," Gordon said. "I'm all ears."

"Okay, so the thing is, I'm stuck at Zack's place," Booth said. "I have been since last night and I have no idea how long I'm going to be here."

"Zack? Dr. Addy? The one you have been fancying for these past weeks?" Gordon asked for clarity.

"I haven't been fancying anyone," Booth hissed and darted a glance back towards the hall before getting up to pace. "But yes. That's the one."

"I see," Gordon said in the mild way that Booth just knew meant the doctor was reading something into what he had just said. "Do go on."

Booth growled. "Doc, I really hate when you get like that. Okay. So, I'm stuck here with Zack and he tells me he's gay. And now I can't sit next to him for more than a few minutes without getting... And he was working out this morning... and... the way his... What the hell is happening to me?"

"I think you know what is happening to you," Gordon said. "The better question is what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it?" Booth asked in a panicked voice. "What do you mean? There's nothing I can do about it. I mean, up until last night the little squint thought I didn't even like him!"

"But you changed his mind about that, didn't you?" Gordon asked, but didn't give Booth time to reply. "How exactly did you end up snowbound with Dr. Addy. It seems rather careless of you, which is quite out of character for you."

"He wanted my advice about something," Booth sighed. "He offered to make dinner in exchange."

"He invited you to dinner and solicited your advice even though he believed you didn't like him?" Gordon asked with no small measure of curiosity. "That doesn't sound like the actions of a man who believes you dislike him."
"Maybe not," Booth said. "But that's his psyche. Can we stick to my issues for just a minute?"

"I am simply trying to understand why you are so suddenly upset," Gordon said. "We have discussed your feelings for Dr. Addy on several occasions. You were well aware of those feelings before you agreed to have dinner with the young man. You knew the danger the snow presented and yet you ignored that danger. I posit that you subconsciously wanted to be snowbound with young Dr. Addy. You wanted to indulge your crush by spending time alone with him and talking with him… things you do not normally allow yourself. What has you so upset now, Agent Booth, is the fact that Dr. Addy could very well return your feelings. It is that possibility that has thrown you off your game so completely."

"I'm upset because someone I may or may not have feelings for has the potential to return those hypothetical feelings," Booth said.

"Your feelings are not hypothetical," Gordon corrected. "Tell me, Agent Booth, what pictures ran through your mind after seeing Dr. Addy during his workout? What did you do with those images?"

"I am not indulging your prurient curiosity!" Booth said.

Gordon chuckled over the phone line. "Never mind, I get the picture. Then tell me this, what were you feeling when you were sharing that meal last night, or when you were dispensing that advice? Forget the physical reactions for a moment and think about what it is you actually feel for the young man."

"I was… I felt…" Booth couldn't say it.

"Okay, let's try another tactic," Gordon said. "Were your feelings positive or negative?"

"Positive," Booth said with some relief. One word answers he could do. "I felt positive."

"And were these positive feelings romantic in nature?"

"…Yes. Romantic feelings."

"Okay," Gordon said. "Now we are getting somewhere! Aside from sexual fantasies, give one word that summarizes what you think about when you look at Dr. Addy."

"…he's cute?"

"Is that a question or an answer?" Gordon asked cheerfully. "Never mind. Let's move on. Are there any other words you would use to describe Dr. Addy?"

"Um… he's smart, naïve, honest, vulnerable and… sexy."

"Okay, let's explore these words and what you mean when you use them," Gordon said. "We'll start with cute. Why did you choose that particular descriptor?"

"'Cause he is," Booth said. He had stopped pacing somewhere along the way and was now sitting at the breakfast bar in the kitchen area with his back to the hall. "He's kind of like a puppy. He's curious and he gets so excited about things. Granted they aren't things that would excite me, but he pretty cute when he's all hyper over finding a nick in some bone that tells him exactly how that person died. That's why I called him smart too."

"Okay, what about honest?" Gordon prompted.
"He doesn't know how to lie," Booth said. "I mean, he's smart and he understands the concept, but he couldn't actually do it if he tried. And he values the truth more than he does people's sensibilities. Sometimes that makes it hard for him to connect to people, but I think it's refreshing."

"Because you deal with liars everyday," Gordon suggested. "What about naïve and vulnerable? Why would those traits make Dr. Addy more attractive to you?"

"Because I want to protect him," Booth said evenly. "I want to wrap him up and keep him safe from the world. At the same time, I want to strip away his virtue. I want to keep him innocent to the world but make him experienced in my bed."

"Ah, so you finally admit that you do want him in your bed," Gordon said. "That is a big step."

"But it doesn't change my situation here," Booth said. "How do I act around him when those thoughts keep plaguing me?"

"When you have been around women you have cared for in the past, how did you behave around them?" Gordon asked.

"That's different," Booth said.

"Why?"

"Because they were women," Booth told him. "It was… expected."

"And because this goes against expectations you don't know how to proceed," Gordon said. "But whose expectations are we talking about? Yours? The world's? Dr. Addy's?"

"Yes. To all of those," Booth said.

"Well, I would suggest that you ignore expectations and go with what feels right in your gut," Gordon said. "What is your gut telling you to do?"

Booth was quiet for a moment. "My gut is telling me to kiss him until he can't see straight."

Gordon laughed. "Well then, there you are. I would suggest, however, that you do not do that without some warning to and consent from Dr. Addy."

Booth chuffed a humorless laugh. "Great."

"Look at it this way," Gordon said. "According to the weatherman, you have at least another 24 hours before the snow lets up. Use that time wisely. Now, I simply must go. The timer on my oven is buzzing which means my pie is done. Goodbye and Good luck, Agent Booth."

"Thanks, Doc," Booth said and disconnected the call. When he turned around it was to find Zack standing in the doorway, completely frozen with shock. "Zack? Shit. How much of that did you hear?"

"I came in when you said, 'I am not indulging your prurient curiosity,'" Zack told him. "Were you talking about me?"
"Thanks, Doc," Booth said and disconnected the call. When he turned around it was to find Zack standing in the doorway, completely frozen with shock. "Zack? Shit. How much of that did you hear?"

"I came in when you said, 'I am not indulging your prurient curiosity,'" Zack told him. "Were you talking about me?"

There was a long pause as Zack waited for an answer that Booth couldn't give him. It was okay, though, because Zack already knew the answer. "Did you call me cute, smart, honest, naïve and… sexy? It had to be me. You used the pronoun 'he' and you said this person gets 'hyper over finding a nick in some bone that tells him exactly how that person died.' Wait, did you compare me to a puppy?"

"Zack…"

"You said you like my honesty and want to protect me from being hurt," Zack continued without acknowledging Booth. He had taken a couple steps in Booth's direction as he spoke. "And you said you want to strip away my virtue."

"Yes to all of those things," Booth said. His face was turned away; he couldn't meet Zack's eyes.

"I think you should listen to your gut, then, Seeley," Zack said. He was much closer. He had continued to move steadily closer while Booth wasn't looking and was now in his personal space.

"My gut?" Booth asked, finally looking into Zack's eyes.

"Your gut which is telling you to kiss me until I can't see straight," Zack said.

Zack's voice was as flat and unemotional as ever, but Booth could see a light of something new and thrilling in his eyes. It was that light that spoke more to Booth than any of the words from Zack's mouth. It was that light which drew him in like a moth to a flame, willing to take the risk of being burned. It was that light that grew brighter as Booth's lips finally met Zack's and then the older man couldn't take the brightness any longer and had to close his eyes and focus on the feeling of Zack in his arms.

One simple kiss turned into two turned into a dozen and then Booth lost count. It didn't really matter. What mattered was the feeling of Zack in his arms, smaller than Booth, and yet solid with the hard angles and planes of a man. What mattered was the way they fit together, body to body, mouth to mouth. What mattered were the soft moans that he had never heard come from Zack and the deep groans that were torn from his own throat.

When those kisses stopped being enough, Booth slowly guided Zack back towards the hallway. It was slow and clumsy and they almost fell twice before even reaching the doorway. Booth laughed at his own clumsy need and let his forehead rest against Zack's.

"We should walk to the bedroom," Zack said. His voice had that familiar flat tone, but it was now colored by heavy breathing and an undertone of quiet desperation. "It would be much more efficient."
"Lead the way," Booth said, but he refused to let go of Zack's hand as they made their way to the master suite. Booth didn't pay much attention to the décor other than to note it was similar to the rest of the apartment. He was too busy trying to tear off Zack's clothes the minute they reached the bedroom. "God! I want you so much."

"The feeling is mutual," Zack said. He was shaking and Booth couldn't be sure if it was from arousal or from fear.

Booth wanted to soothe whatever doubts Zack might have, but his need was outweighing his good sense. Instead, he tried to slow down enough to make it good for the younger man. It was a first time for both of them, and it should be better than a frenzied fuck. Booth drew Zack's t-shirt over his head, discarded it, and then tugged his own shirt off. Then he drew Zack back into his arms, his hands tugging at Zack's hips so that their groins were in direct contact. Booth groaned again when he felt how hard Zack was through his jeans.

Booth kissed Zack's mouth once again and claimed it with a ferocity that he didn't know he could feel. Zack belonged to him, even if the younger man didn't know it yet. Booth's hands traveled up Zack's smooth chest and arms, over his shoulders and down his back, finally coming to rest on Zack's ass. Zack seemed to be too lost in the kisses and caresses to do anything but respond to Booth's attention with moans and attempts to get even closer.

Booth broke away from Zack's mouth to explore his neck and ear. When his soft kisses turned into soft nibbles and sharp nips to Zack's shoulders and neck, Zack's cries of pleasure were echoed by thrust of the younger man's hips that told Booth more than words ever could of Zack's wants and needs. He needed the words, though.

"Tell me what you want, Zack," Booth whispered hotly into Zack's ear.

Zack's body broke out in goose bumps and he stammered out, "I... I want... want you to... fuck me. Please!"

Booth grinned down at Zack and began undoing the younger man's fly. He allowed his fingers to brush over Zack's erection as he slid the denim, along with his briefs, down over his hips and helped him step out of the garments. Now Zack was standing before him completely naked and vulnerable, and Booth lost all ability to think of anything but the man in front of him.

"Fuck, you're beautiful," Booth said.

Zack seemed puzzled by that comment. "That seems to be an incongruous compliment."

Booth pieced together what Zack was saying and smiled as he rose to his feet. "Men can be beautiful too. And trust me Zack, you are beautiful." Booth pushed his own sweats down and kicked them off so that they were now standing just inches apart, completely naked and aroused. "On the bed," Booth commanded in a soft but firm tone.

Zack backed up until he reached the bed and then he scooted until he was sitting in the center of it, his eyes never leaving Booth. Booth followed Zack and straddled his thighs before pushing Zack back so that he was lying prone. He positioned Zack's arms above his head and told him to keep them there. Then Booth began exploring Zack from head to toe. Every inch—with the deliberate exception of the places Zack wanted most to be touched—was stroked, kissed, nipped, or laved with excruciating care and tenderness until Zack was gasping and panting and begging for Booth to touch his cock, to fuck him, to let him come. The most amazing thing to Booth was that Zack didn't even consider moving his arms or trying to take any sort of control. He begged for more, but he allowed Booth to move him, touch him and torment him without complaint. Zack was pliant and willing to
hand control over to Booth and Booth was turned on by that more than anything Zack could have done with his mouth or hands.

Booth flipped Zack over and grabbed a pillow. He patted Zack's hip and said, "Lift." Then he placed the pillow under Zack's hips. The younger man immediately began to seek relief by thrusting his erection into the cushion. Booth swatted his ass lightly and Zack stopped thrusting. "Keep still. I promise it will be worth it." And with that, Booth began to give Zack a light massage, helping the younger man relax. He'd never had sex with a man, but Booth knew the fundamentals of male anatomy and had explored anal sex with a couple women in his time. He knew that relaxation and stimulation were key to making this good for his partner. And he wanted this to be better than just good for Zack.

Using long, sure strokes of his hands to soothe Zack's tension away, Booth continued to simultaneously arouse his partner with kisses and nips along his spine. And when Booth reached those temptingly round ass cheeks, he couldn't help but take a small bite. Zack's groan of pleasure was enough to make Booth smile with satisfaction before he carefully spread those same cheeks and dipped his head back down for further exploration. The pinker pucker of Zack's anus seemed to wink at Booth as he kissed and licked a path down and then back up his crease. Zack's mind seemed to be leaking out his ears as his moans turned into full out gasps and half-formed syllables. Booth paused and looked to see Zack's reaction and found the younger man had not moved his arms from where Booth had placed them but his hands were clutching tightly onto the duvet beneath them. Booth smiled again and went back to work.

When Booth's tongue finally dipped deep into Zack's tight passage, the younger man let out a startled cry. "That… that cannot be… sanitary," Zack gasped out, though he made no move to stop Booth.

In fact, Zack's ass seemed to press back into Booth's face almost with a will of its own. Booth listened to the man's body instead of his words and continued his most enjoyable task. He loved being able to make Zack feel this good. When it was clear that Zack wasn't going to be able to come up with any further coherent words, Booth added a finger to his ministrations. The combination of tongue and digit were enough to set Zack's hips back to rocking unconsciously.

Booth swatted Zack's behind once again, a little harder this time, and the undulations stopped. "That's a good boy. If you stay still now, I'll make you come so hard you'll pass out in just a little while."

Two fingers and Booth was able to find Zack's prostate. It was amazing what a quick graze over that small bump could do to a man when he's already aroused. Zack's whole body shivered uncontrollably. Booth gave up trying to fit his tongue in with his fingers as he added a third finger.

"Hah, ah!" Zack's panting became more desperate and Booth knew it was time to move things along.

"Do you have lube and a condom?" Booth asked.

Zack couldn't answer while Booth was finger fucking him, so the older man reluctantly pulled his fingers free and repeated the question.

"Top drawer," Zack gasped.

Booth leaned over and grabbed the necessary items and brought them back to the bed with him. Then he helped Zack, still shaking with need, turn over onto his back and positioned the pillow beneath his hips. "I want to see your eyes when you come," Booth whispered huskily. "I want to watch your face and see you get lost in the pleasure until it just sweeps you away. And I want you to see who is giving you that pleasure. I want you to see who is claiming you, who possesses you."
"Yes," Zack said breathlessly. "I want that."

While they were speaking, Booth had rolled the condom over his aching cock and then opened the bottle of lubricant. With a good amount coating his fingers, he went back to stretching and preparing Zack. This time, Booth took some small pity on Zack and grasped his erection tightly. He gave several firm strokes while he finished his task, but made sure it wasn't enough to make the younger man come. Zack was shaking and twitching with need when Booth finally removed his fingers for the second time.

"You ready?" Booth asked with a smile that showed more emotion than Booth would have been comfortable sharing if he had known he was so easy to read.

"Please!" Zack begged once again as Booth lifted one leg to rest on his shoulder and Zack instinctively wrapped the other around Booth's back. His arms were clutching at the sheets above his head.

And then Booth was sliding inside of Zack's deliciously tight heat. Zack was gasping for breath but he wasn't pulling away in pain, so Booth continued his slow and steady plunge into his lover until he could go no further and both men groaned in ecstasy.

"You okay?" Booth thought to ask, hoping the answer was yes, because he wasn't sure he could actually pull out without thrusting right back in.

"Little pain," Zack said. "But it's fading now. You can move."

Booth grinned when Zack actually used his free leg to try and make Booth move. It was rather impossible; no matter how much Zack worked out, he would never be a match for Booth. "I'll move when I'm ready."

Zack's eye widened as he realized that Booth wasn't done prolonging his torture. "Please?"

"Well, since you asked so nicely," Booth said and began a torturously slow rhythm. Again Zack tried everything he could to make Booth move faster, harder—everything short of moving his arms from their assigned position—but it was useless. Booth was on a mission to torment them both until they could no longer hold back their orgasms. So his slow rhythm became a cycle of quick shallow thrusts followed by long and slow thrusts. It was enough sensation to keep them both on edge, but not enough to pitch them over. Booth began stroking Zack's cock again, matching the pace of his thrusts and reveling in the beautiful sounds his lover was making—not quite words but more than grunts and groans.

It seemed to go on forever, and yet, Booth was sure it was going to end entirely too soon. If given a choice, Booth would spend the rest of his life buried inside this man beneath him. He didn't know what the future would bring, if they would walk away and never do this again or if they would proclaim their love to the world. What he did know was this fleeting moment was worth whatever consequences came after and he would do everything he could to prolong the experience.

The cyclic rhythm began to deteriorate, however, and Booth knew he wasn't going to be able to hold out forever. He could feel his orgasm trying to explode from his balls but wouldn't allow it to come just yet. His grip on Zack's throbbing cock tightened and he quickened his strokes. He also gave up the rhythm and just let his baser nature take over, thrusting harder and faster with each plunge. He had to come, but he had to make sure Zack came first. And then Zack was jerking and twitching beneath him and his come was shooting from his cock leaving little pearls of ejaculate on Zack's belly and chest and on Booth's hand. Booth thrust twice more, feeling Zack's channel squeezing around him before he was lost in his own orgasm. Without thought, he leaned down to capture
Zack's mouth with his own and he rode out his pleasure with his tongue fucking Zack's mouth as he continued to fuck Zack's ass through his orgasm.

As he came down from his orgasm, Booth changed the nature of their kiss from demanding to a more sedate and gentle caress of lips and tongues. He was so sated and languorous that he could have just stayed right there in bed all day and never gotten up again.

"Was that good?" Zack finally asked when Booth released his lips so they could climb beneath the sheets.

Booth chuckled good-naturedly. "That was better than good. Or didn't you think so?"

"It was the best sex I have ever experienced, but my knowledge on such matters is extremely limited," Zack stated. "I do believe I understand what you meant about sparks. There was none of that with Naomi from Paleontology. Does it get better than that? Because I am not convinced I could survive better than that."

Booth grinned from ear to ear and pulled Zack so his head was resting on his shoulder. "You'd survive, I can promise you that. And it was definitely sparks… and damned great sex, and that comes from my vast experience."

They were both quiet for some time before Zack spoke up again. "I do not know what the protocol is in these situations. What do we do now?"

"Do you mean right this minute?" Booth asked. "Or were you referring to the more vague future?"

"I was referring to this moment," Zack said. He hesitated as he allowed his fingers to draw some unknown pattern on Booth's chest but then went on. "But I am interested in knowing the answer to the other question as well."

"The first is easy," Booth said. "After sex is made for snuggling—maybe a nap if you're so inclined—followed by a shower to rinse away all the sweat and semen. Showers are always best when shared. As for the vague future… well, I don't know. It depends on what you want out of this."

"What I want?" Zack asked. "But your feelings and desires are as important as my own."

Booth smiled at that and agreed with a nod. "Yeah, but I'm willing to let you take the lead on this. If this was just some accident of proximity to you and you want to walk away, I'll let you. But if you want to give this thing a go, I'd like that more. You've got to know that I'm probably going to get all alpha male on you if we do give it a shot. I'll probably be possessive and domineering. Mostly in bed, but probably outside of the bedroom as well."

"You were serious when you said you wished to protect me and possess me," Zack said. "And awaken my sexuality."

"Very serious," Booth confirmed and tightened his hold on the younger man.

Zack pushed away just enough so he could look up into Booth's eyes. "I would like to be yours. I would also like that nap and shower."

Booth smiled before leaning down to kiss Zack slowly and gently. "I'll give you the world if I can."
Part 4: Snow Angels

Booth woke to the sound of a phone ringing. At first he wasn’t sure where he was, he just blindly reached out to silence the evil device. It took several blind gropes before he found the phone, but eventually he got it and picked it up. "Booth." Even as he spoke, he became aware of the fact that he wasn’t alone in bed and the memories of the day and night before flooded back. Zack. Zack was in bed with him. He was in bed with Zack. He was in Zack’s bed, where they had sex numerous times over the course of the afternoon and evening. Of course, they hadn’t limited it to the bed. There had been some major groping in the shower on at least two occasions. And Booth recalled bending Zack over the kitchen table while they were trying to eat their dinner some time after midnight.

"Um, I'm not sure I have the right number," and tentative female voice said over the line. "I was looking for Zack Addy."

Booth cleared his throat, still hoarse from sleep, and then shook Zack to wake him. "Zack. Zack! Phone for you."

Zack mumbled and buried his face into Booth's shoulder. Booth smiled at the move but didn't let up. "Hey! Sleepyhead. If I have to be awake to answer the phone, so do you!" A pinch to the ass was enough to get Zack moving.

"Ow!" Zack said with a pout as he rubbed his ass. "That hurt."

"Phone," Booth said and handed him the cordless.

"Hello?" Zack said sleepily into the phone. "Oh, hi mom. What? Oh, that's Seeley Booth… Yes, he's the FBI agent that works closely with Dr. Brennan… He got snowed in with me…. What? Yes, he is…. Yes, we did…” He turned to booth and handed him the phone. "She wants to talk to you."

For the next ten minutes Booth was quizzed by Mrs. Addy about his life, his prospects and his intentions towards her boy. Booth had to pinch Zack several times when the younger man snickered at his predicament, but in the end, he was able to hand off the phone with a sigh of relief. Zack took the cordless back and got up to get dressed. Booth took the opportunity to use the bathroom and then went out to the kitchen to start breakfast. He turned on the television and checked the weather reports while he worked.

When Zack emerged a little while later, Booth had finished making French toast with a side of sausage and fruit salad. "Looks like the snows done, but they say it'll take a while before the roads are passable. Probably won't be going anywhere until tomorrow morning at the earliest. And that's assuming Hodgins gets someone to plow this huge driveway of his."

"He has a service," Zack confirmed. "But they will not be able to come until the road is cleared. My mother asked if I was going to bring you home for Easter."

"And what did you tell her?" Booth asked with no small measure of curiosity.

"That we have just begun the sexual phase of our relationship and I could not know for certain what might transpire between now and April," Zack said easily, as though the question and answer hadn't been a potential minefield.
"Good answer," Booth said as he leaned down to kiss Zack. "Come on. Let's eat. And then maybe we can go play in the snow."

**BZBZBZBZBZ**

The food was eaten and the table cleared and now Booth and Zack were looking for clothes that Booth could wear to play in the snow. In the end, Zack found an old ski suit Zack's brother had given him for his first ski trip.

"I never actually put on skis," Zack told Booth as he dug through a box of clothes at the back of his walk-in closet. "I only went that time because my academic advisor insisted that I participate in some activities away from the classroom or lab. Since then, I've gone a couple times with Hodgins. I like sipping hot cocoa by the fire in the lodge while Hodgins skis. Anyway, my brother gave me his old ski suit for that first trip. It was huge on me. He's about your size. Oh, here it is."

Booth stared at the black jacket and pants with bright green and pink insets and stripes down the side of each arm and leg and took a deep breath. Definitely not something he would have picked, but it was this or freezing his ass off in sweats that were a couple sizes too small and a trench coat.

"Thanks."

"Seeley," Zack said as he sat down on his bed and watched Booth pull the ski pants over his sweats.

"We have both agreed that we would like to see where this relationship can take us, but we have not discussed what we are going to tell our colleagues, if anything."

Booth sat beside Zack, his snow boots in hand, but didn't move to put them on. He sighed and took Zack's hand. "I know you are ready to tell all your friends about being gay, and I won't stop you from doing that if that's what you want to do, but I'm just not there yet. This is all really new to me, Zack. Until very recently, I have never even looked at another man in a sexual way. It's only you that has brought this out in me. I don't know if that makes me gay, bisexual or straight with a fetish for… you. So, for now, I'd like a chance to figure this out in my own head before we tell everyone else. Is that okay with you?"

Zack looked at Booth with wide eyes. "Yes that will be acceptable. You only… for me?"

Booth smiled at his lover and leaned over to give him a soft kiss. "Just for you."

"Wow."

"Wow."

"Wow." Zack said. He leaned into Booth, seeking more kisses and Booth was happy to oblige him. Soon, those soft kisses began to heat up and Booth knew their time in the snow was going to be delayed when Zack started pushing at the straps on his snow pants and whimpering with his need. Booth didn't like to deny Zack anything, so he helped the younger man remove the black snow pants, sweats and t-shirt before stripping Zack bare and pushing him back on the bed. Booth looked down and thought it was going to be quite a while before they made it outside to play.

**BZBZBZBZBZ**

They didn't actually make it outside until after lunch. That round of lovemaking had turned into two, and then there was the shower where Zack tried sucking Booth's cock for the first time. He looked so damned irresistible on his knees like that—and Booth hadn't really tried to resist—so they ended up having a very fast and very hard fuck against the shower wall. Once they were dry and dressed again, it was past time for lunch. So, once the lunch dishes were put away they began the process of dressing for the outdoors again—Booth in his black green and pink suit, and Zack in a really nice blue suit with white and aqua accents. It fit him like a glove and Booth had to force himself not to attack before they could even make it outside. There would be time enough for that later.
Once outside, it became obvious that they weren't going to be able to go far. The snow at the bottom of the stairs was only about a foot deep, but there were snow drifts that were taller than Zack. One of those drifts almost completely covered Booth's SUV. There was enough space with shallow snow in the yard beside the garage for them to actually be able to get around and play. The snow was just wet enough to be really great for packing.

"Wanna build a snowman?" Zack asked. "I always loved doing that when I was a kid."

Booth grinned. "I'd love to."

Zack was very precise in how he wanted to build the snowman and Booth had to laugh several times when Zack's precise measurements didn't prevent a chunk of snow from falling off the snow sculpture. They were able to find rocks for the eyes and used a twig for the mouth and small branches that had been blown from a nearby tree in the storm for the snowman's arms. When they were finished, they stood back and admired their handiwork. Or Booth did. Zack was too busy gathering up a handful of snow to admire anything.

When the first snowball hit him, Booth was shocked. When the second one landed on his shoulder, sending snow shrapnel into his face and down the collar of his jacket, he was ready to fight back. "Oh this means war, little squint."

"Only if you can hit me!" Zack taunted.

Booth had to admit the kid could move fast. Then again, with so many siblings, he probably had to move fast. They traded snowballs and chased each other around the yard for a while before Zack landed another really big one to the back of Booth's head. Booth got an evil grin on his face when he turned around to face Zack.

Zack looked nervously at his new lover. "Um… sorry?"

"You're going to be," Booth promised as he began stalking the younger man. Zack knew when to run, and so he tried to make a break for it. But Booth was on him before he got more than a few steps away. The larger man tackled him and they both went down hard in a deeper section of the snow. Booth covered Zack's body with his own and held the younger man's wrists in one of his own. And then they were kissing and the thoughts of snowball wars drifted away as their body heat kept the chill at bay.

After a while, Booth groaned in frustration and rolled off Zack. "These damned suits are just too thick to get any real friction going."

"We could always go back inside," Zack suggested. "But I want to make snow angels first."

Booth's smile was back. Zack could be such a kid sometimes. He loved that about him. "Alright, but I haven't done this in forever. You'll have to remind me how to do it."

Zack was giddy with excitement as he led Booth over to a section of deep snow that hadn't been disturbed in all of their play. He explained what he was doing as he did it. Booth watched him flop on his back into the snow and move his arms and legs to create the robe and wings of the angel. Then he held out his hand so Booth could help him up without disturbing the impression he had just made.

"Your turn," Zack said. Booth grinned and found another area of undisturbed snow and flopped back into it.

He was moving his arms and legs, feeling really quite silly, when he heard a familiar voice. "I never
thought I'd see tough guy FBI agent Seeley Booth making snow angels!" Then he heard the familiar click of a cell phone camera.

"Hodgins!" Booth growled. "That better not end up anywhere I don't approve or Angela's going to be a very rich widow, 'cause you won't live past your honeymoon."

"Don't be such a spoil sport," Hodgins said with a grin as he and Zack helped Booth stand up.

"What are you doing here?" Zack asked.

Hodgins rolled his eyes. "Angela insisted I come over and check on you guys," Hodgins said. Now that Booth was standing he noticed Hodgins was wearing snow shoes to help him traverse the deep snow. "She seemed to think that Booth might harm you for some reason."

"Seeley would never hurt me," Zack said with a frown.

"Yeah!" Booth chimed in indignantly. "I'd never hurt Zack."

"I know that," Hodgins protested. "Tell Angela. She seems to think you threaten to shoot Zack more often than anyone else."

"We were going to go in and get dried off," Zack said. "Would you like to come in?"

"I think I have enough chocolate in the SUV to make more hot chocolate," Booth said. "If we can get the door open."

"Sounds good," Hodgins said and soon the three of them were on a mission to get to the treasure buried in the SUV.

Later, they were all sitting around the gas fireplace, sipping their cocoa and letting the warmth seep into their cold extremities.

"This is really good," Hodgins said. "Where'd you learn to make cocoa like this?"

"My Pops," Booth said with a shrug. "He took care of my brother and me after our dad ditched us."

"Seeley can cook a lot of things," Zack said. There was a hint of pride in his voice that made Booth smile.

"Seeley, huh?" Hodgins said with a sly grin. "You two become best buds or something?"

"Maybe," Booth said challengingly. "You got a problem with that?"

Hodgins chuckled nervously the way he always did when Booth got all growly with him. "No problem at all. Does that mean I can call you Seeley, too?"

"No, it doesn't," Booth said but his demeanor was less aggressive and Hodgins could almost sense his amusement.

"So, besides cooking, what else have you two been doing to stay occupied?" Hodgins asked.

"We did a jigsaw puzzle," Zack said. "It had 1500 pieces."

"And Zack worked some on his dissertation," Booth added.

"We both worked out," Zack said.
"And we talked," Booth said.

"What did you talk about?" Hodgins asked. "I can't imagine you two have much in common to talk about."

"You'd be surprised," Zack said with that small grin that Booth was beginning to recognize. It was the one that told him Zack was thinking about sex. And it was also the one that could make Booth hard in an instant. Their eyes met and the electricity passed between them. For a moment they forgot all about Hodgins and were totally lost in each other.

Hodgins felt the change in the room, but couldn't understand what it was or what had caused it. He looked back and forth between Booth and Zack and finally said, "O…okay. Well, I better get back before Angela thinks I got lost in a snow drift down by the pond. Thanks for the cocoa."

He was up and dressing for his trip back before either of the other two men remembered he was there. Zack got up and followed him to the door while Booth took their empty mugs to the kitchen. He could hear Zack and Hodgins whispering to each other, but couldn't make out what they were saying. He shrugged it off. He figured Zack would tell him later.

"By the way," Hodgins called to Booth before he left. "The plow service should be here sometime overnight, so you should be able to get out fine in the morning."

"Thanks," Booth said. "See ya."

"Bye," Hodgins said with a rueful shake of his head and then he was gone.

Zack came over to the kitchen where Booth was making something for their dinner. "What is that?"

"It's going to be meatloaf," Booth said. "What were you and Hodgins whispering about so intently?"

"He lied when he said it was Angela who was worried," Zack said as he took a seat at the breakfast bar to watch Booth cook. "He thinks I need to be careful and not trust you. He thinks you must have some ulterior motive for being nice to me. Why else would you be considerate to a squint?"

Booth grinned. "I do have an ulterior motive, but it's one that you already know about."

"And one which I share," Zack said. The small smile was back and Booth groaned. He rushed to finish putting the meatloaf together and getting it into the oven. He washed his hands, set the timer and then walked over to Zack and pulled him into his arms and tried to devour him with kisses.

"We have 40 minutes until the meatloaf is done," Booth gasped out between kisses.

"Then let us hurry," Zack said and led the way to the bedroom.

BZBZBZBZBZ

The rest of their evening seemed to fly by: dinner, dishes, sex, a movie, more sex and finally sleep. Booth set the alarm to go off extra early so they could take their time getting ready the next morning, meaning they had sex one more time before rushing down the stairs to find Booth's SUV completely cleaned off and the driveway cleared.

"Good service," Booth remarked.

"Why are we leaving so early?" Zack asked once they were in the car. "I do not need to be at the Jeffersonian for more than an hour and a half."
"Yeah, but I still have to go home and change into a clean suit," Booth said. He was wearing the suit he had worn on Monday night again, and it did look a bit worse for wear.

"So you are going to drop me off early?" Zack asked.

"Actually, I thought you could come with me and then we could grab breakfast at the diner," Booth said. "Let someone else cook for a change."

"That is agreeable," Zack stated and sat back for the rest of the ride. He had never been to Booth's apartment before and he was curious to know where his new lover lived. He did not like riding in cars, but Booth's driving, even with the roads still messy with snow, was better than anyone else he had let drive him, so he enjoyed the ride. "Am I your boyfriend?"

Booth choked. "Um… I don't think that's the word I'd use."

"What word would you use?" Zack asked with some curiosity. He wasn't hung up on vocabulary, but it was helpful to be precise when defining a thing.

"We're dating. We're friends and lovers," Booth said. "But does it really matter? I thought we weren't going to tell anyone yet."

"We aren't," Zack said. "It just helps me to have a clearer definition of our relationship. Thank you."

They arrived at Booth's building and Zack was surprised that is was actually almost half way between the Jeffersonian and his place above Hodgins' garage. They had only gone one or two blocks off the route that Hodgins used to drive them to work each day. They were in a small historic residential neighborhood with numerous row houses, and Booth's building was obviously about fifty years older than the houses in the neighborhood where he lived. It was on the corner of the block and had obviously once been a single family dwelling, but was now divided into apartments. Zack liked it. He could be comfortable here if were going to spend time with Booth.

"This is nice," Zack said as Booth showed him into his place.

"Come on, I'll give you the tour," Booth said. "Living room here, kitchen there, bathroom over there. And this is the bedroom."

"It is very compact," Zack said.

Booth chuckled. "Not all of us have rich best friends who let them live over their gigantic garage. Apartments are expensive in DC. Especially in a decent neighborhood."

"I like it," Zack assured him. Booth laughed again and let Zack wander around looking at his possessions while he pulled out a suit and quickly changed. "You have a lot of memorabilia."

"I like collecting things," Booth said. "There's not really any rhyme or reason to it. There's a story behind most of the stuff around here, though. That poster over there? That was the movie my Pops took me and Jared to see the day we went to live with him in Pittsburgh. And that Baseball? I caught a homerun at a Phillies game with my dad, one of the few happy memories I have of him."

"They are items that trigger happy memories," Zack said. "I have never collected such things. I have never understood the reasoning behind it. But I do believe you have made me understand the value of such items now."

Booth straightened his tie and walked over to Zack and pulled him into his arms. "Maybe I can help you start your own collection."
"That would be welcomed," Zack said as he rested his head on Booth's shoulder. "If we are to eat breakfast at the diner, we should probably go."

Booth pulled away and smiled down at his ever practical lover. "You're right. Let's go."
Dating

Part 5: Dating

Booth dropped Zack off at the Jeffersonian and was glad for the tinted windows on his vehicle which allowed him to kiss Zack goodbye one last time. And then he was off to the J. Edgar Hoover Building to try and catch up after two days out of the office. He knew it was going to be a hectic day and he was right. It was a crazy day, but he still seemed to have time to get lost in his thoughts of Zack several times. He lasted until 11 am and then he gave in and called.

"Hey," Booth said. "How busy are you?"

"We are still sorting through the remains we found in the mountains," Zack said into his cell phone as he walked into his lab area, away from Hodgins and Angela. "I have assembled three of the skeletons and will soon begin to work on the fourth. After that, we will begin to look for indications of the cause of death."

"Okay," Booth said. "But are you too busy to get away for lunch?"

There was silence over the line for a moment. "Unfortunately yes. Dr. Brennan has left me in charge of the investigation while she works on a set of remains brought in by the archaeology department."

"Congratulations," Booth said. "But I'm sorry you aren't free. What about dinner?"

"Unless I find something completely unexpected I anticipate finishing by 6," Zack said.

"Good," Booth said. "Tell Hodgins you've got a ride home. I'll pick you up at 6."

"Seeley, he is very curious about what you and I talked about," Zack said. "I told him that it is not his business. He was not pleased with my answer."

Booth chuckled. "Tell him I threatened you if you told him anything."

"But that is fallacious," Zack said. "It really isn't his business."

"I know that," Booth said. "But it will get him to stop pestering you. He'll believe it because it's what he expects of me."

"You see, this is why I do not know how to interact with others," Zack said. "People are not logical. There is no evidence to make Hodgins distrust you and yet he distrusts you to the point he would choose to believe a lie."

Booth laughed. "If you were observing wolves in the wild and an outsider came into the pack's territory, a wolf that was stronger than any of the wolves in the pack, how would the male wolves in the pack react?"

"I do not study wolves…. But I suppose if I did, the wolf pack would be distrustful and antagonistic," Zack said. "They would fear that the outside wolf would attempt to wrest control of the pack from the alpha so they would attempt to run him off… But you and Hodgins are not wolves and humans do not run in packs."

"We act a lot like animals at times, Zack," Booth said. "Anyway, he likes me and I like him, but Hodgins, on some level, perceives me as a threat. Maybe to his friendship to you, maybe as a
competitor for Angela, maybe for his position as the alpha male in this little pack you guys have going at the lab. It may not be logical, but it's just how things are."

"I see," Zack said. "So using an untruth to counter an illogical presumption will temporarily eliminate the issue."

"Temporary being the key there," Booth said. "It'll only stop him for a while because he knows that any threat I may make is an idle one."

"I shall consider your advice," Zack said. "And I shall be ready when you arrive this evening."

"See you," Booth said and disconnected the call. He had a sappy grin on his face and he wasn't sure he could wipe it away any time soon.

BZBZBZBZBZ

"Hodgins did not believe my lie," Zack said when he climbed into the SUV that evening. "He said I am a horrible liar."

Booth glanced sideways at Zack as he pulled the vehicle into traffic. "You are a pretty bad liar."

"Then why would you advise me to lie to him?" Zack asked.

"Because either he would believe you and leave you alone, or he would know that you were lying and believe that it is important enough for you to lie about and leave you alone," Booth said.

"Dead people are less confusing," Zack told Booth with a frown. "And numbers and the laws of physics are always logical."

"Can't have sex with dead people," Booth countered. "And numbers and the laws of physics are pretty lousy company when you want to laugh with a friend."

Zack was silent for a while, which Booth took to mean he was thinking about what he had said.

"Where are we going for dinner?"

"There's a place in Alexandria that I really like," Booth said. "It's a traditional English pub and they serve really great pub food."

"I do not believe I know what pub food is," Zack said. "But I am willing to try something new."

They chatted about their days as they drove. Or rather, Booth chatted and asked Zack questions, which Zack answered perfunctorily. When they arrived at the Black Thorn Pub, Booth parked and led Zack inside. They went through the noisy bar, where many people were crowded to enjoy the after work happy hour specials, to the small dining room at the back of the pub. A waitress saw Booth and greeted him by name before showing them to a quiet corner booth in the rear of the room. Booth scooted to the center of the rounded bench and Zack followed him. They ended up sitting closer than what could be considered strictly platonic, but was not overtly romantic either.

"Hey Booth," another waitress greeted him once they were settled. "Who's your cute friend?"

"Marissa, this is Zack," Booth said. "Zack, this is Marissa, the biggest flirt in this place. But she's also happily married."

Zack nodded to her. "Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too, sweetie," Marissa sighed. "But, I can tell when my charm is wasted. What
can I get you to drink?"

"Pint of stout and a glass of water," Booth said with a smile.

"I'll just have a root beer," Zack told her.

"Alright then," Marissa said. "Menu's on the board. Specials are at the bottom. I'll be back in a few to take your order."

Zack looked at the chalkboard she indicated and began to read. "What is bangers and mash?"

"Bangers are the British version of sausages and they are served with mashed potatoes," Booth explained.

"And jacket potatoes?" Zack asked.

"Basically a baked potato," Booth said. "They serve them stuffed with different things." Booth looked over the rest of the list. There were the regulars lamb stew, fish and chips, fish pie, steak and kidney pie, ham… "If you're feeling a bit nervous about trying something new, I'd recommend either the shepherd's pie or the fish and chips. Or you can stick to a plain old cheeseburger. That's always safe."

"I would like to try something new," Zack said. "You know more about this food than I do, so perhaps you could order for me."

Marissa returned and Booth smiled up at her. "I'm gonna have the roast strip-loin of beef with Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes and seasonal vegetables with the parsnip and ginger soup to start. And Zack'll have the seared sea bass on a smoked salmon and creme fraiche cake with sautéed mange tout and sauce vierge with the filo wrapped tiger prawns and sweet chili sauce to start."

"Great choices," Marissa said. "The sea bass is my favorite, but we don't get it very often. Gotta have a good catch to put it on the specials."

She left and Booth turned to Zack. "So how did the investigation go once you got the bones together?"

"I am fairly certain that the group of hikers were killed in an avalanche with no foul play involved," Zack said.

"What about the scrapes that were found on some of the bones," Booth said. "It looked like a tool of some sort was used on them."

"The markings on the bones were actually from two different sources," Zack said. "The first marks were left by the jagged edges of stones that were caught up in the same avalanche as the hikers. Hodgins confirmed that the deposit of stone dust left in the marks was consistent with native stones in the area. The second set of marks was from animal teeth, more specifically the teeth of coyotes. I believe the hikers' bodies were scavenged by several coyotes after the avalanche."

"So no murder," Booth said. "Well that's good I suppose. Any luck identifying them?"

"Angela is working on the facial recreations and will input them into the computer to search for matches tomorrow," Zack said. "I have estimated that they died approximately three years ago, based on the amount of bone degradation which results from freezing and thawing."

"You'll send me the results when you get them?" Booth asked.
"Of course," Zack said. "I am glad that you are not disappointed that Dr. Brennan is not leading this investigation."

"Why would I be disappointed?" Booth asked.

"Because she is the world renowned forensic anthropologist," Zack said. "She has also been your partner for more than two years now."

"I think you are damned good at your job, Zack," Booth told the younger man and grabbed his hand on top of the table. "And no, I don't want to replace Bones as my partner, but I don't mind working with you sometimes. In fact, I think it would be kind of fun to work a case together every once in a while. You are certainly qualified enough. Bones did train you, after all."

Zack gave Booth that special secret smile and said, "You just want an excuse to boss me around out of bed."

Booth grinned and ignored the tightness in his pants. "Maybe. But I'll never admit it. Besides, who said I need an excuse. You seem to like when I take charge, wherever we are."

"I do," Zack said. "Is that strange? Does that make me weak or weird?"

"Is it weird that I like taking care of you?" Booth asked with a shrug. "You said that normal is a varying concept. I think it's normal for us. And no, I don't think that it makes you weak. I think it makes you smart. Why do everything for yourself when someone else is willing to do it for you?"

"That is logical in an odd way," Zack said.

Marissa returned with their appetizers and Booth noticed that she eyed their still clasped hands. He felt a small moment of panic but then realized that he simply didn't care what she thought. She was a polite acquaintance and nothing more. And the strangers at the other tables were even less important. It was a liberating feeling.

Once Marissa had gone and before Zack could start to eat, Booth leaned over and kissed him, uncaring of who saw them.

BZBZBZBZBZ

Booth took Zack home and when Zack invited him to stay, Booth grabbed the bag he had packed when he'd stopped by his place before picking Zack up for dinner and followed him up the stairs. It was odd how comfortable Booth felt in Zack's home after only two days. It felt almost as familiar as his place in some ways.

"Can I ask you a question?" Zack asked after they had sated their first rush of need. They were lying naked in Zack's bed enjoying the afterglow.

"Anything," Booth said languidly.

"Why did you kiss me at the pub?" Zack looked genuinely confused. "You have stated that you are not ready for others to know we are a couple."

"I also said I'm working on that," Booth said. "And kissing you there was part of that. I just realized suddenly that those people don't matter. I don't care what they think of me, of us. Their opinion is meaningless. So it suddenly seemed silly to try and hide my feelings for you."

"But it is different with the people you care about. You are afraid that they will judge you in some
"Yes," Booth said. "I know I told you that everyone would be okay with you coming out. I know that hiding like this makes me a coward, but I just don't know if I can be that brave yet. In some ways, I think you are braver than I am. You are never afraid to tell the truth."

"That is not true," Zack said. "I believe that truth can be hurtful and bring about consequences that are unpleasant at best. But I also believe that truth is a better option than lies because the truth will eventually emerge and those consequences may be worse for putting them off. I cannot see how a thing will play out, so I assume the truth is the better option and go with it. It is what we scientists spend our lives exploring."

Booth smiled at that. "I'll be ready to share our truth in time. In fact it's getting easier the more time I spend with you."

"Why is that?" Zack asked. He shifted away from Booth's chest so that he could look at his lover. "Because being with you makes me happy," Booth said. "And when I'm happy, I want to share my happiness."

"You may share your happiness with me again, now," Zack said.

Booth grinned and pushed Zack onto his back and covered his body with his own. Where their first coupling had been heated and fast, this one was slow and had a tenderness that was even more exciting in many ways. And Zack shared his happiness with Booth in equal measures.

BZBZBZBZBZ

The days that followed seemed to fly by in a blur. Friday morning, Booth drove Zack to work again, but before he could even leave the parking lot, he got a call about another case. This one was big. Booth got Bones and Hodgins drove Zack and Cam in the truck. A safety inspector had been doing an inspection and found body parts in a local trash dump. He'd called the cops, who had called the feds because the dump serviced three states. The FBI had in turn called Booth. They had found a graveyard of body parts and it would take a good deal of time just to sift through the piles of garbage, let alone identify the remains.

They all spent seven straight days at the dump, sifting through snow covered garbage in 40° weather. Cam had even called in more than a hundred graduate students to help sort through the mess. Along with the FBI forensics team, they made slow progress. Hodgins was in his element, finding and cataloguing bugs and trace evidence. Zack was preoccupied trying to piece the body parts together as they were found. Cam and Bones were busy trying to keep the students and Feds from contaminating the evidence. For seven days straight they all worked for twelve hours a day and went home exhausted every night.

Booth was glad that Zack never once protested when Booth said he would give him a ride home. And never once had he failed to invite the agent to stay. They were often too tired to actually make love, but they still curled up together each night. Booth had even begun leaving some of his things at Zack's.

"Why do we always stay at my place?" Zack had asked one night as they were getting ready for bed. "No reason," Booth said. "Bring a bag with you tomorrow and we'll stay at my place tomorrow night."

It didn't seem odd to either of them that things were moving along so quickly. It felt right and so they
didn't question it.

When the team had finally finished at the landfill, their hours were a little better but, as long as they were trying to identify the 24 bodies they had found, they would still be very busy. And it wasn't just trying to identify the victims. They also needed to find out how they were killed and catch the killer. Booth was on edge with the possibility that they were hunting a serial killer, but somehow Zack kept him grounded.

"You do not know that it is a serial killer," Zack told him about two weeks into the case. "Until we can determine cause of death for each of the victims, we can't even know if it is murder. I find that it is better not to speculate."

"Body parts don't just show up in a dump without some major crime being committed," Booth argued.

"But that crime isn't necessarily ritualistic serial killing," Zack said. "There are other possibilities."

Booth took a deep breath and pulled his lover tighter. "You're right. It could just as easily be a mob hit man's dumping ground."

They found the identity of the first victim the next day. She had been declared dead long before her body ended up in the landfill. She had died of natural causes according to the official death certificate on file at the courthouse. Things started to roll after that. It turned out that each of the victims had died in the same local hospital. One of the morgue employees was working with a partner at the landfill and snatching the bodies of the indigent people who died there. They stole the corpses and removed their organs for sale on the black-market. Booth and Bones were able to capture both the morgue employee and the landfill employee using the evidence that the team gathered.

When it was finally over and they could all take a break again, Booth realized that he had spent every spare moment of the last month with Zack, and that he was happier with Zack than he had ever been with any of his other lovers, including Rebecca. It was a startling revelation for the agent.

The team had a week off to make up for the long hours they had put in on the last case and Booth had taken Zack out to a Thai restaurant after they finished work. He had continued to introduce Zack to new foods and new experiences and Zack seemed to enjoy almost anywhere they went.

"So I was thinking," Booth said as he watched Zack eat the crispy banana fritters topped with honey and sesame seeds that Booth had ordered for their dessert. Zack paused and looked at Booth inquisitively. "We've been together every day for the last month. And I think I'm pretty comfortable with people knowing now. Not completely, but enough that I can actually think about telling people. So, even though I know it's really fast, I think maybe we should think about living together."

"Okay," Zack said easily.

Booth paused at Zack's casual acceptance. "Okay you'll think about it, or okay, you'll do it?"

"Okay, I'll do what ever you think is best," Zack said. "You are the one with experience in these matters. If you think the time is right then I trust your judgment."

Booth sat in stunned silence for a moment and then chuckled. "You know this is why I love you."

"Why?" Zack said. It was the first time Booth had ever said he loved him.

"Because everything is just so easy with you," Booth said. "There are no games. You tell me exactly what you think and what you want."
"I am awfully agreeable," Zack concurred. "Would you like to know why I love you?"

"More than anything," Booth said with a wide smile.

"Because you see beyond the exterior," Zack said. "Very few people see past my social awkwardness and high IQ, but you do. And you love me because of my imperfections not in spite of them."

Booth took Zack's hand and lifted it to his mouth. He pressed a soft kiss to the younger man's knuckles before setting their hands back on the table, still clasped together.

"So we're going to tell our friends and then move in together," Booth said. "And you have to meet Parker."

"He's going to hate me," Zack said. "All little kids hate me."

"He might," Booth laughed. "But I doubt it. It's more likely that he'll take some time to get used to you. But Parker's a great kid. Give him time and he'll come around. He still loves that robot you made."

"I'll trust your judgment there as well," Zack said. "Where will we live?"

"Your place is bigger," Booth mused, "But we'll have to see how Hodgins feels about it once we tell him. I think my place is definitely too small, so if Hodgins doesn't want me there, we could look for something else together."

"So we will tell our friends," Zack said. "All at once or one at a time?"

"I have no idea," Booth said. "I've never done this before, so I'm as in the dark as you are on this one."

"Why don't we go back to my place and we can think about it?" Zack said, but the small smile told Booth that Zack had other things in mind besides talking.

"Let's go," Booth said. He'd already taken care of the bill and so there was no reason to wait.
They drove from Silver Springs where the Thai restaurant was located back into DC. It was a bit of a long drive, but Booth and Zack had found that they could find many things to talk about to make the time pass. This time, they discussed Baseball. Booth believed the most talented baseball players were like artists, they were born with a gift that they had to work at to perfect. Zack thought baseball was all about physics, numbers and statistical probabilities. It was a lively debate that never got too heated as they each presented their side.

"I still say that the designated hitter is just plain wrong," Booth argued as he shut off the engine and climbed from the SUV. "It's cheating!"

"Statistically, there is very little difference between teams that use a designated hitter and those that don't," Zack said. "If it does not improve the outcome of the game, how can it be cheating? And pitchers in the American League pitch an average of .62 innings longer per game and play an average of 1.6 years longer."

"But—"

"Well, well, well."

Booth pulled Zack behind himself and had his weapon out before the fact that he knew that voice registered. It was Hodgins, sitting on the steps in the shadows. Booth sighed and holstered his weapon.

"Jesus, Hodgins!" Booth bellowed. "I could have shot you!"

"But you didn't," Zack said calmly. "What is the matter Hodgins?"

"What's the matter?" Hodgins asked as he stood up and walked towards them. "You've been sneaking around with Booth for a month and you ask me what the matter is?"

"Maybe we should take this inside," Booth suggested. It was cold out and he really didn't want to argue with Hodgins while freezing.

"Yes," Zack agreed. "Booth can make warm milk for us. You must taste this, Hodgins. He uses vanilla beans and cinnamon sticks and some other things I have no idea what they are. But the result is just lovely."

Hodgins rolled his eyes and followed Zack up the stairs while Booth just laughed. Only his Zack could defuse a situation by ignoring that it existed. Once inside, Zack hung up all their coats while Booth went to work on making the warm milk. Hodgins sat at the breakfast bar and stared at him as he worked. Neither of them said a word.

Zack returned and took the stool next to Hodgins. "Now, you had questions for me and Booth?"

Booth could tell that Hodgins wanted to hang onto his anger, but he just couldn't in the face of Zack's cool demeanor. "Yes. Like what exactly is going on with you two? Every night Zack is busy and can't hang out. He never needs a ride to or from work. Your SUV is parked outside this apartment almost every night. And the nights it isn't are the nights Zack doesn't answer his phone."
Booth had finished adding the ingredients to the pan of milk and only needed to stir, so he was able to turn most of his attention to Hodgins. "Zack and I are dating."

"Wha- what? Whoa! What?" Hodgins asked as he almost fell off of his stool. Only Zack's hand on his back kept him from falling. "Wait a minute. There's something very weird going on here. This is a joke, right?"

"No joke," Zack said calmly. "We have been dating since the blizzard. And we would like to move in together, so we thought now would be a good time to tell our friends."

"You can't just spring something like that on people!" Hodgins yelled. "You could give someone a heart attack! Okay, okay… who else knows?"

Booth shrugged, "My shrink."

"My mother," Zack said and then frowned. "And since she knows, probably the rest of my family."

"My Pops," Booth said quietly.

Zack looked up at Booth in surprise. "Really? You told him? When?"

"A couple days ago," Booth said. "I went to the home to visit him with Parker Saturday. I told you about that. Anyway, I thought that things seemed to be getting pretty serious, so I should tell him. I wanted to know how he felt about the whole thing before I brought you to meet him."

"You want me to meet your Pops?" Zack asked; his voice was soft and filled with more emotion than Booth had heard before. More emotion than exchanging words of love had conjured.

"Well, yeah," Booth said. "I want you to meet Parker too. I told you that. And I want to meet your family. Remember, your mom invited me for Easter."

"Okay," Zack said and he nodded as if he had solved some puzzle in his head. "Then we will go to Michigan for Easter."

"Good," Booth said with a smile.

"God," Hodgins said as he slumped in his chair. "You two aren't joking."

Booth poured the warm milk into three mugs and handed one to Hodgins. "Here, this will make you feel better."

Hodgins took a sip of the milk and groaned. "This is amazing. Even better than the hot cocoa. A little spicy and yet soothing…"

After that, tension seemed to dissipate quickly. They took their drinks over to the sofa and talked for a while about how they had actually gotten together and how they worked, despite their obvious differences.

"We work because we are so different," Booth said with a grin. "Zack needs someone to look out for him."

"And Seeley needs to take care of someone," Zack said with a rare teasing smile. "It helps keep his recklessly heroic tendencies in check."

"Oh my god," Hodgins said. "Angela's never going to believe me when I tell her."
"Is she at the house?" Zack asked. "She should come over."

And so Hodgins called Angela and invited her to join them.

"Oh my god! Z-man! I'm so proud of you!" Angela said when they shared the news with her.

"Why proud?" Hodgins wanted to know.

Angela wrapped an arm around Zack and told her fiancé, "Because not only did he finally come out, but he landed the hottest man in DC!"

"Hottest?" Hodgins demanded indignantly.

"Oh sweetie, don't be an idiot," Angela scolded. "Of course he's hot. But I'd rather have you any day. Now, tell me everything!"

So the four of them spent the rest of the evening laughing and talking about new relationships. And it was easier than Booth had expected.

"Where are you going to live when you move in together?" Angela asked.

"We think here," Zack said. "But Booth said we should check with Hodgins first."

They all turned to Hodgins. "What? I don't care if they live here!" Angela gave him a look. "In fact, just to show you that you two are more than welcome here, I'll have the contractors in and open a doorway into the storage area."

"What storage area?" Booth asked.

"You never noticed the other set of stairs on the far end of the garage?" Angela asked. Booth shook his head so she continued. "There used to be two apartments way back when. A few decades ago, all the servants moved off the property and Jack's dad took the smaller apartment to set up a separate storage room for his collection of ventriloquist dummies that Jack's mother wouldn't let him keep in the house." Angela rolled her eyes and shook her head at the weirdness of the dead man.

"Anyway, after my father died, I sold off all the dummies," Hodgins said. "They were really creepy. The storage area has been empty since. It'll need cleaned up, some paint and whatnot, but I can get a crew in here and have it done in no time."

"So the apartment, which already has a huge great room, two bedrooms, two baths and a study, is going to be even bigger?"

"It's just three more rooms and another bathroom," Angela said. "You'd be able to move the work out room out of the guest room. And have a room for Parker when he stays over."

"And another room just for you," Zack said. "I have the study, and you could have your own space too."

"Wow," Booth said. "That's… really generous Hodgins."

"Consider it a housewarming gift," Hodgins said. "Zack's my best friend. I want him to be happy."

"Me too," Booth agreed and the two men came to a silent understanding.

"Good," Hodgins said. "In that case, I'll make some calls tomorrow and get things rolling."
"We should probably get going," Angela said. "It's after midnight already."


"You and me are going to have a guy's night," Hodgins told Zack. "Just you and me. And no excuses. Booth can see you any time. Apparently I have to make an appointment these days."

"You get to see him at work every day," Booth said with a cheeky grin. "Just call before coming over and I'll let you have him one night a week."

"Make it two nights a week," Hodgins bartered.

"One night and an afternoon every other weekend."

"Deal," Hodgins said and held out his hand to shake Booth's.

Angela and Zack stared at the two of them like they had lost their minds. Angela put her arm around Zack and said, "Men!" in an exasperated tone. Zack just nodded his agreement.

BZBZBZBZBZ

Booth knew he had to be the one to tell both Bones and Cam. And now that Angela and Hodgins knew, he knew he couldn't put it off. So, instead of enjoying his first full day off in a month with his lover, Booth was waiting for Bones at the Founding Fathers. He watched her enter the bar and waited nervously for her to join him. She ordered a drink from the bartender and they both waited for it to be delivered before speaking.

"Soooo, what's so important you just had to meet today?" Bones asked.

"I need to tell you something," Booth said hesitantly.

"You're seeing someone," Bones said.

"Yeah," Booth agreed.

"And it's someone I know," Bones said.

"Yeah."

"And you're still nervous, so there's more," Bones said. She paused to study Booth. "It's Zack."

Booth was astounded. "How did you do that?"

"Easy," Bones said. "I overheard him talking to you on the phone a couple weeks ago."

"And you never said anything?" Booth asked in confusion.

"I figured you'd tell me when you were ready," she shrugged. "The last time I tried to bring it up, you avoided answering the question."

Booth thought back. "That was before we got together. I was still freaking out about the very possibility that I might have feelings for a man, and on top of it he was a squint."

"I take it you have realized your fears were irrational?" Bones asked.

"We're moving in together," Booth said. "Hodgins is going to expand Zack's place so we have room
for me, and an extra room for Parker. Until that work is done, we'll stay at my place."

"Sounds like you two are moving very fast," Bones said. "Is that wise?"

"I'm not sure," Booth admitted. "But it feels right. And Zack makes me happy."

"And do you make him happy as well?" Bones asked.

"I think I do," Booth said with a small smile.

"Then I suppose that's what matters most," Bones said and raised her glass. "To you and Zack."

Booth clinked his glass with hers and grinned. "Thanks Temperance."

**BZBZBZBZBZ**

Cam sighed and stared at Booth for a long minute. "I suppose this means no more booty calls?"

"I tell you I'm in love with—and moving in with—Zack Addy, a man, and that's your biggest concern?" Booth asked incredulously.

Cam shrugged. "What do you want me to say? We aren't together. Your sexuality doesn't reflect on me in any way. And if my 'squints' are happy, they work better. So my only concern in all this is that you keep him happy."

"And that you won't get any more no-strings sex from me, apparently," Booth muttered.

"Oh don't get all pouty," Cam said. "You didn't want strings either. We both know we're better off as friends. So don't get all offended when I don't get jealous that you've moved on."

"I'm not pouting," Booth said, but it was obvious that he was. Cam's raised eyebrow called him on it. "Okay. I won't pout. But are you happy for me? For us?"

"Honey, of course I'm happy for you," Cam relented. "You deserve to find a little joy in life. If Zack Addy can give you that, then I'm happy for you."

"Okay. Thanks." Booth hugged Cam and then they moved on to other topics.

**BZBZBZBZBZ**

Booth entered Zack's apartment using his new key and found his lover in the bedroom packing a couple suitcases. They would move to Booth's apartment for the duration of the renovation, though Hodgins assured them that it would only be a week, two at the most. Booth didn't like the idea of breathing in the dust while the crew worked. Besides, they needed time to get Booth's apartment packed for the move.

"How did it go?" Zack asked when he noticed Booth watching him from the doorway.

"Better than I expected," Booth replied honestly. "Bones knew already, said she overheard one of our phone conversations, and Cam just doesn't care as long as it doesn't affect the way the team works together."

"That is a rational response," Zack mused. "Then again, Dr. Saroyan is a scientist. Sort of."

Booth chuckled. "Need a hand?"
"I am just finishing up," Zack said. "I have work clothes in the hanging bag over there and casual clothes in this suitcase. I just need to pack a few toiletries and I'll be ready for the move."

"Tomorrow's Friday," Booth said. "We'll make the move and get started packing my place up. And then Parker will be over on Saturday. I was thinking we might all go to the Jeffersonian Museum of Natural History. Parker loves dinosaurs and I'll bet you know a lot more about that stuff than I ever will. It will help you guys bond."

"I'm still rather dubious about this whole thing," Zack said. "Children simply do not like me."

"Well, I'll be there to smooth over any rough edges," Booth assured as he stood behind Zack and wrapped his arms around the younger man. "Did you eat?"

"You said not to wait for you so Hodgins and I ordered pizza and watched the Matrix," Zack said. He leaned into Booth's embrace. "Then we argued about the many laws of nature and science that the movie disregards. I simply do not understand why anyone would believe that computers would be able to be powered by human thoughts."

"But you can accept the idea that a man can out maneuver a bullet?" Booth asked wryly.

"Under the strictures of the world that was created, yes," Zack said as if that was the most obvious answer in the world.

"Okay then," Booth said. "If you are finished packing, and we've both eaten, there's nothing stopping us from going to bed early."

"But I'm not really tired," Zack said. "I could work in the study for a while if you'd like to sleep."

"I didn't mean go to sleep," Booth said huskily as he pressed his erection firmly against Zack's ass.

"Oh," Zack said breathlessly.

"You ready for bed now?" Booth asked in a low whisper as he let his hands burrow beneath the t-shirt and wander over Zack's chest. He tweaked one nipple and then the other and felt Zack press back against him.

"Oh yes," Zack breathed.

Booth let go of Zack and the younger man let out a whimper at the loss. Booth was too busy removing the suitcases from the bed and chair to notice. When he returned to Zack, he grabbed his hand and led him over to the chair in the corner of the room. Booth sat down and positioned Zack to stand between his legs.

"Strip for me," Booth said. "I want to watch as you reveal your body for my pleasure." Zack moaned but began to pull his shirt over his head obediently. He tossed it aside and went straight for his pants, but Booth's hand stopped him. "No. Slow down. Show off what you've uncovered. Touch yourself. Do what you wish I was doing to you right now."

"Oh god," Zack murmured.

He began by tentatively stroking his hands up and down his chest, over his shoulders, down his arms. Booth sat back in the chair and watched intently as Zack closed his eyes and got bolder with his caresses. He used one hand to rub his nipple, then the other, bringing them to hardness. A quick pinch elicited a sound Booth recognized. Zack was definitely turned on by this. Another pinch and then he was using both hands, one on each nipple to alternately rub and tug at his nipples. Each tug
brought a squeak of pleasure that made Booth smile.

"Wet your fingers and pinch your nipples again," Booth instructed. "Roll them between your finger and thumb until you think you can't stand it any longer. Then do it just a little bit more."

Booth watched with rapt attention as Zack continued to torment himself. Zack's eyes were still closed, but they popped open the moment he heard Booth's zipper. He paused and watched as Booth let his aching cock free from its fabric confines and began stroking. Zack looked like a starving man eyeing a cheeseburger; he couldn't tear his eyes away.

"You can take off your pants now." Zack almost tore the denim in his haste to comply. "Don't touch your cock, but you can do anything else that feels good."

Once he was bare for Booth's pleasure, Zack's first instinct was to reach for Booth's exposed cock. "You can't touch me either," Booth scolded. Zack nodded and reached below his cock to fondle his sac with one hand while his other hand went back to torturing his nipples. Zack's breathing was fast and Booth knew the young man wanted to come, but without touching his cock, he would never be able to come like this.

Booth kept up a steady but slow rhythm on his own cock as he watched Zack continue to writhe and moan. When he pinched the skin on his sac and let out a low groan, Booth had to fight himself not to reach out for his lover. This was about control over Zack and over his own body. He watched as Zack put two fingers into his mouth and sucked on them for a while. When they were good and wet, Zack trailed them down his chest for a moment before reaching behind himself. Booth couldn't see Zack's right hand, but he knew the moment his fingers breached his ass. Zack let out a keening cry and began quickening his pace, finger fucking himself while he continued to fondle and pinch his balls and nipples alternately with his other hand.

"Oh, oh, please…"

"Tell me what you want," Booth said.

"Please… fuck me," Zack panted, totally lost to his body's need for completion.

"Be more specific," Booth said with a wicked grin.

Zack almost cried. "Please! I want your cock in me. I want you to pound into me and make me scream. Oh god, please! I want to feel you deep inside me. I want it fast and hard. Please!"

"Get the lube and a condom, prepare yourself and then come back here," Booth instructed. When Zack was properly lubed he returned and handed Booth the condom. Booth stood up and positioned Zack over the chair. He had his arms resting on the seat of the chair so that his forehead was almost touching as well and his ass was up in the air for Booth's easy access. "You sure you want it fast and hard?"

"Please!" came the muffled plea from the chair. Still fully clothed, only his cock exposed from his open fly, Booth smirked and placed his hands on Zack's hips. He lined up his cock with Zack's ass and carefully breached him in one long hard thrust. "Ah! Haaah hah!"

Booth didn't give his boy time to recover, he just began thrusting fast and hard in a way he was sure would bruise the prostate and make Zack ache for days. His fingers on Zack's hips were tight enough to leave bruises. He could feel Zack start to tremble with the intensity of their coupling.

"Don't come," Booth commanded. "Don't you fucking come until I say."
Zack's moans became whimpers and Booth was sure that if he could see Zack's face right now there would be tears of frustration. It was the thought of those tears and what they represented, Zack's complete surrender to his control, that sent Booth over the edge. He kept fucking Zack through his orgasm and even for a few strokes after it became almost too much stimulation.

When he pulled out, Zack was still whimpering. "Please. Please, Seeley. Please let me come."

Booth straightened his boy up and retook his seat, putting Zack back between his legs. He smiled up at Zack's tear stained face and gently wiped his tears away. Then he took Zack's cock in his mouth and sucked. Zack was shaking again and almost screaming with his pleasure and when Booth looked up to give him permission, Zack knew exactly what he meant and almost immediately Booth's mouth was filled with the salty bitter flavor of Zack's come. Booth swallowed some, but saved a good wad of it on his tongue. When Zack could no longer hold himself up and collapsed onto Booth's lap, Booth kissed him fiercely and shared his come with him. Zack swallowed it down and then pulled away to breathe.

"You okay?" Booth asked.

Zack nodded. "I think so."

"Did I hurt you?" Booth asked. He made a mental note to check Zack for tears when he helped him clean up.

"No," Zack said listlessly. "It was good. Sooo good. It was perfect."

"Okay, let's get you into bed," Booth said with a small chuckle. "I'm going to get a washcloth and the salve and make sure you really are okay."

Zack crawled onto the bed and collapsed into a heap. By the time Booth returned, he was already asleep. Booth smiled fondly and went about cleaning and checking Zack for tears. He didn't find any, but used the ointment just in case. Zack didn't even stir when Booth used a finger to spread the ointment inside his anus.

"Guess I really fucked it out of you," Booth said smugly to his sleeping lover.

He put the supplies and washcloth away, got undressed, got Zack under the covers, and finally climbed into bed himself. Once he was lying with Zack curled up against his side, Booth was able to finally join his lover in sleep.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**Part 7: Family**

Friday went as predicted and Saturday arrived much faster than either Booth or Zack had anticipated. Rebecca dropped Parker off and stayed for a few minutes to meet Zack, the man who had turned her ultra-butch ex onto men. Booth was glad that she was a rather open-minded person, or else telling her would have been a lot riskier. As it was, she was a lot like Cam: she was more interested in how this change affected her and Parker. She didn't care who Booth slept with; she'd have been just as concerned if Booth was moving in with a woman who would be spending a lot of time with her son. Booth was just glad she wasn't holding a grudge after the stink he made when she got serious with someone.

Zack was Zack, and certainly made an impression on Rebecca. Before leaving, she had turned to Booth and asked if Zack was for real. Booth had chuckled and said that he was. Rebecca just smiled, shook her head and wished him luck.

After that, Booth loaded Zack and Parker into the SUV and they headed to the Jeffersonian, this time to the Museum of Natural History. Parker was excited to be able to see all the dinosaur bones and Zack was nonplussed by the fact that Parker kept turning to him to answer his questions. At one point, when Parker was climbing through display set up for children, Zack turned to Booth.

"Why does he ask me all the questions?"

Booth smiled, "Because I told him you work here. I think he just assumes that means you work with the dinosaurs, since that's all he cares about."

"You should correct him," Zack said.

"Why?" Booth asked. "You've known all the answers to his questions so far. You certainly know more about this stuff than I do."

"I think Parker needs to know that the Jeffersonian has a lot more than dinosaurs," Zack said. "The history of just about anything can be found here."

"He doesn't care about anything else," Booth said. "Right now all he cares about is dinosaurs. He'll grow out of this and then maybe he'll be into spaceships and want to visit the Space and Aviation Museum. Maybe he'll be into trains and we can take him to the Museum of Transportation. He's 6 years old and he's pretty obsessed."

"I see," Zack said thoughtfully. "I recall being focused on pirates when I was 6."

"See there," Booth said. "And you outgrew that and found other interests. Although the symbol for pirates is a skull and bones."

"Zack! Come look at this!" Parker yelled as he ran up to them and grabbed Zack's hand. Parker dragged Zack off to look at some bones that were older than god and Booth followed behind with a smile.

**BZBZBZBZBZ**
After the museum, they went to dinner at a restaurant that catered to kids and had numerous video and arcade games. Zack and Parker played against each other on some of the video games while Booth stuck to the pinball machines, but they all had a good time. By the time they headed for home, Parker was fighting to stay awake and Zack looked to be almost as tired. Booth carried Parker into the apartment and Zack followed behind and locked up. Parker slept on a small futon in the living room, so there wasn't much the two men could do out there without waking him up, so it was just as well they went to bed as well.

Booth was so pleased that the day had gone so well that he wanted to play a bit once they were alone in his bedroom. Zack had other ideas. Not only was he tired, but he didn't feel comfortable having sex with Parker in the next room—especially since he wasn't sure he could be quiet. For the first time since they had gotten together, Zack denied Booth something he wanted. Booth, unsure if he liked that or not, lay awake long after Zack had drifted off to sleep.

Everything was going better than great between them, but suddenly Booth wasn't sure if that was because they were great together or because Zack just always went along with everything. And if that was the reason their relationship worked, was that really fair to Zack? Booth knew that he could never defer to someone the way Zack seemed to do with him. But Zack never seemed to mind that Booth took charge. So if they both were happy with the way things were, that was fine but now he was worried because Zack had said no to him.

Booth had to work this out. Was it the fact that he said no, or the fact that Booth disagreed with his reasons that bothered him? If Booth had asked Zack to do something and he'd said he was totally uncomfortable with the request, how would Booth have reacted? Booth pictured it in his mind the way Gordon, Gordon had told him to do. He asks. Zack declines. He asks why. Zack explains. He lets it go. Okay so it wasn't about him declining.

Did he really disagree with Zack's reasons? He'd never even tried to have sex with one of his girlfriends in the past if Parker was spending the night. So it really wasn't about the reasons either. So why was he dwelling on this?

At some point, Booth must have drifted to sleep, because he woke up to the sun streaming through the bedroom window. Zack was in his usual place, curled up against Booth's side and with his head on Booth's shoulder. Booth could tell from his breathing that he was awake, but neither of them attempted to move or get up. Instead they just laid there in silence.

"Are you still sulking?" Zack eventually asked in a dozy voice.

"Why do you think I was sulking?" Booth asked. He was being defensive, but he was also interested in the answer.

Zack finally sat up and looked down at Booth. "Because you were high on adrenaline and serotonin. Your plan to get Parker to like me worked and your body and brain reacted accordingly. Those hormones can easily lead to sexual arousal—similar to surviving a crisis or winning a sporting event—and when your expected sexual outlet was blocked, those same hormones created a temporary dissatisfaction with me and with our arrangement. Now that those hormones have had time to return to their normal states, you should be fine. Are you?"

Booth laughed. Not just a chuckle, but a full blown laugh that encompassed his relief and his happiness that he had Zack in his life. He pulled Zack back down on top of him and kissed him.

"Yeah, I'm done sulking."

"Good," Zack said. "Then can you go make breakfast? I'm hungry."
"You are going to help me," Booth declared as he got up and dragged Zack out of bed with him. They each pulled on sweat pants and made their way out to the living room. "If I can teach Parker how to make French toast, I can teach you."

Soon Parker was up, showing Zack how much vanilla and sugar to add to the eggs while Booth cooked the bacon and watched them with a wide smile on his face.

**BZBZBZBZ**

The move happened the weekend after they went back to work. Hodgins’ crew had done a great job with the space. Where the hall had ended before, it now opened up to another open space to the left. The hall wall continued the length down the right side, separating out the other two bedrooms and bathroom. Booth could see how this had once been a separate apartment. In the open space, there was a small wet bar where Booth was sure a kitchenette had once been. There was another gas fireplace in this room and the crew had built in more shelves on either side. Booth had decided to make the space into a more casual family room area where he and Parker could play games, where he could watch sports, whatever, without disturbing Zack in the main room. He moved his living room furniture in there and bought a pool table soon after the move.

They moved Zack's exercise equipment into the furthest bedroom and added Booth's equipment to it to make a proper exercise room. The guest room was moved to the other new room so that Parker's room could be across the hall from the master suite.

It took a few weeks to get everything unpacked and then to buy furniture and decorate Parker's dinosaur themed room—which he adored since Zack had called in a couple favors and gotten real casts of dinosaur bones that were no longer being used by the museum. But eventually they were completely settled, and Booth's old apartment had been sold. Before they could get too comfortable there, however, Easter rolled around and it was time to head off to Michigan.

"I still can't believe you agreed to come with me," Zack said as he sat nervously in the window seat and waited for the plane to take off. "I'm glad though. I really hate flying. And flying alone is even worse."

Booth took Zack's hand and rubbed his thumb back and forth across the back in a soothing way. "Nothing bad is going to happen. You took the Dramamine I gave you and I'm here to take care of you, right?"

"Right," Zack nodded and relaxed slightly as he leaned his head against Booth's shoulder. "You do realize that if this airplane was struck by lightning and the engines damaged, there would be nothing you could do to save either of us."

Booth smiled. "I could hold your hand. I could kiss you until we forgot the danger."

"You could placate me until we died in a fiery crater of steel and debris," Zack said as he talked himself tense again. "I have worked plane crashes. I know what the victims look like. They would need Dr. Brennan to identify our remains."

"I think you're scaring the little girl in the row ahead of us," Booth said. "Why don't you tell me how your dissertation thingy went instead."

"Thingy? You mean my dissertation defense?" Zack asked. He sat up and looked over at Booth. "How did you know about that?"

"Bones told me," Booth said. "You should have told me about it."
"I did not think it would matter to you," Zack said diffidently, his eyes on their still joined hands. Booth turned Zack’s face to look at him. "Of course it matters to me. I may not understand a tenth of the stuff you wrote, but I care about how it was received. I care about how well you did presenting your ideas to the panel. I care about you, so I care about your accomplishments and your struggles. You should have told me."

"I apologize," Zack said. "The defense went much better this time than it did with the last. I knew what to expect, and Hodgins helped me prepare so I wouldn't insult the panel again."

"You insulted the panel last time?" Booth asked.

Zack nodded. "They were wrong and I told them so. I am not sure how that is an insult, but Hodgins assures me it is. This time, I was careful to show them how they were wrong without actually saying it outright. They were smiling at me when it was over so I assume I did well."

"How long before you know?" Booth asked.

"I should get a letter in a few days," Zack said. "Possibly while we're at my parents'."

Zack had not even noticed that they had taken off while he was talking, so Booth didn't bother to point it out. Getting him to concentrate on something besides the flight was working. "Well, your mom will be thrilled when she finds out."

"She will," Zack agreed. "Why are you not nervous about meeting my family? When I met Parker and Hank I was extremely nervous."

Booth shrugged. "Probably because I've already talked to half of them on the phone during your mother's weekly calls. Could also be because I'm good with people."

"You are very good with people," Zack agreed. He sat back and closed his eyes and let the soothing caress of Booth's thumb lull him to sleep.

Booth let Zack sleep, glad that the anti-nausea medication he had gotten was also a powerful soporific as well. He watched the in-flight movie and did the crossword puzzle in the in-flight magazine and before long they were making the final approach into Detroit. Booth looked over at Zack, who was still sleeping rather peacefully and decided not to wake him until they were on the ground. In fact, he waited until most of the passengers were already off before shaking Zack awake.

The younger man was sleepy dazed by the medicine as Booth led him through the airport to pick up their luggage and then to the car rental counter. Booth thought it was a good thing he had gotten directions online because Zack was asleep again almost as soon as they got in the car. He took I275 north until they reached I96 and then headed west. They passed around Lansing, and after about two and a half hours they pulled into a small rest area outside Grand Rapids and Booth shook his sleepy lover awake.

"Zack, come on," Booth said. "Rise and shine sleepyhead."

"Mmm," Zack groaned. "Don' wanna."

"We're almost to you folks house," Booth said. "Come on. I stopped so you could get cleaned up. You have drool on your chin and your hair is messier than usual."

Zack glared at Booth for teasing him, but he did sit up and look around him. "We're only a couple exits from their's."
"Yeah," Booth agreed.

"I slept through the whole trip?" Zack asked.

"Dramamine is a wonder drug," Booth told him. "But you aren't allowed to take it unless you have someone to watch out for you. You sleep like the dead on that stuff."

"Apparently," Zack said through a yawn.

They both got out of the car and went to use the facilities and clean up inside the rest area and soon were back on the road. Fifteen minutes later, Booth was pulling up in front of an upper-middle class suburban house. They hadn't even gotten the suitcases out of the trunk before Zack's mom was running down the walk and clutching her boy in her arms.

"Hi mom," Zack choked out. "You're strangling me."

Carol Addy loosened her grip on Zack and leaned back to look him in the eyes. "You look good. Better than I've seen you look in years. It must be love."

"Mom!" Zack said with an embarrassed frown.

"And you must be the young man who has made my little Zack so happy," Carol said as she turned to Booth.

"Seeley Booth, Ma'am," Booth said as he held out his hand.

"Oh none of that," Carol said. She waved Booth's hand away and wrapped him in a hug. Booth was startled, but recovered his wits enough to hug back until she released him. "And the name's Carol."

"Pleasure to finally meet you face to face Carol," Seeley said with a smile.

"Well, come on in," Carol said. "Jim and the rest of the family are all inside. We waited for you boys to start dinner."

The next few hours were rather relaxed and easy as far as Booth was concerned. They had dinner with Zack's seven siblings, five in-laws, and eight nieces and nephews. After that, they all played various board games. Booth was paired up with Zack for Trivial Pursuit, playing against his parents, John and his wife, and Kelly and her husband. Booth would have felt more comfortable playing cards with the other adults, or even monopoly or life with the kids, but he did have fun, and he and Zack did end up winning. Booth was able to answer the sports and popular culture questions that Zack didn't know and Zack pretty much covered everything else with his photographic memory.

The Addy family was smart and fun and completely normal. Booth liked them, but he liked Zack's quirkiness better than their normalcy. He was sure to let Zack know as soon as they retired to Zack's room for the night... once Booth got over the fact that Zack's childhood bedroom looked like it hadn't changed at all since he was six and still into pirates. At least there was a double bed.

"I like your family," Booth said once they were snuggled up together under sheets covered with parrots and pirate gold.

"They seem to like you too," Zack said. "Better than they like me."

"Why do you say that?" Booth asked

"They think I'm weird because I work with dead bodies all day," Zack said. "They all do normal
things. John's a doctor, Kyle's a dentist, Kelly's a lawyer, Michelle owns a books store, Sue is in school to become a teacher, and Erin's a social worker. They can't understand why I would want to do what I do when I could do just about anything."

"Then they don't know what you do," Booth said.

"What do you mean?" Zack asked.

"I mean, you help solve mysteries," Booth said. "Whether it's solving murders for the FBI or figuring out how a two thousand year old corpse frozen in an ice floe died, you decipher the past. Your work is important. And Bones once told me that there aren't very many of you forensic anthropologists out there. Not many people can do what you do. That makes you special, not weird. Besides, normal is boring."

"I would rather not be boring," Zack said and got that secret smile that Booth absolutely loved. He pressed his body closer to Booth's and it became patently obvious that Zack wasn't ready to just roll over and go to sleep.

"You can't have sex with me when Parker is in the next room, but you're okay with it when your parents are right down the hall?" Booth rolled on top of Zack and growled into his ear. "Believe me Zack, you could never be boring."

BZBZBZBZBZBZBZB

"I want to see your high school," Booth said to Zack the next afternoon as they drove back from the park where the Addys had a family picnic.

"Why would you want to go there?" Zack asked. "I was not well liked in school. In fact it was not a pleasant experience at all. I would rather not go there."

"Just thought it would be interesting to see what sort of school you went to," Booth shrugged. "It was a private school, right?"

"Yes," Zack said. "My parents sent me there because the public schools would not allow me to work ahead of my age group. St. Joseph's pretty much allowed me to work at my own pace. I attended from the time I was six until I graduated. It was very similar to independent study. I never attended classes with my peers, nor did they wish to socialize with me outside of school. In fact they were quite cruel at times."

"Sounds tough… and pretty lonely," Booth said. "I guess I can see why you wouldn't want to go back."

Zack shrugged. "I do not think about it or the people who were malicious to me anymore. They are unimportant and probably stupid. And St. Joseph's is simply a place I went to school now."

"What about your undergraduate work?" Booth asked. "Where did you go to school for that?"

"The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor," Zack said. "My mother wanted me close to home since I was still pretty young. They had a great engineering program, in the top ten in the country, and I thought that was what I wanted to pursue. I didn't become interested in anthropology until I got there and took a couple courses."

"How many degrees did you get?" Booth asked.

"Four," Zack said bluntly. "Anthropology and Engineering, obviously. Also Mathematics and
Biophysics. Many of my courses overlapped for more than one major."

"So you got four degrees in four years?" Booth asked.

"Five years," Zack corrected. "Then I went to American University because I wanted to study under Dr. Brennan. My father convinced me that I should continue pursuing the engineering degree."

"Don't you still enjoy the engineering?" Booth asked. "That robot you made was pretty cool. Seems like that's a fun subject to study."

"I do still enjoy it," Zack said. "But it is not what I wish to do every day. It is more of a hobby. Like building model airplanes or you playing hockey on the weekends. What about you? Did you go to college? Or did you go straight into the Army after high school?"

"I went to college," Booth said. "The Army paid for it and I served after I graduated."

"Really?" Zack asked with some surprise. "Where did you go? What did you study?"

"I got a BA in Criminology," Booth said. "I always intended to go into law enforcement after I left the military. And I went to Indiana University of Pennsylvania."

"Wow."

They pulled up outside of the Addy house and Booth turned to Zack. "Is it really so hard to believe I graduated from college?"

"Not at all," Zack said. "It just seems like you did a lot in such a short period of time. I mean, you went to college, were trained to be a sniper, served in… a lot of places I don't think you'll tell me about… then went through FBI training and have been working as an agent long enough to get a pretty good position on the Major Crimes unit responsible for interacting with us 'squints.' And you just turned 35."

Booth smiled. "So we're both impressive in our own ways." Booth leaned over and gave Zack a lingering kiss. "You glad we came?"

"I am," Zack said. "I believe you have made a good impression on my family. I'll be even happier to go home."

"Church in the morning and then we leave for Detroit after dinner," Booth said and rubbed Zack's cheek with his thumb. "Even an empiricist like you can make it through one Sunday a year."

"Two," Zack corrected. "I am usually coerced into attending Christmas Eve services as well. But you do not share my reluctance."

"I'm not sure how a Lutheran service will compare to Easter Mass," Booth said. "Other than that, I figure it's all the same religion underneath. Now come on. Let's get in the house. Your mom promised me that she would make pie."

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Okay, so there is only one more chapter to go on this fluffy story. Then we'll move on to the next story in the Rainbow Inn Universe (not so fluffy). I hope that if you have
enjoyed this story that you will join us for the next installment! Jules
Part 8: Graduating

When Booth and Zack returned from their trip to Michigan, there was a letter waiting for Zack. His dissertation had been accepted. There was only three weeks until graduation, and he was already set to receive his PhD in Anthropology. Now he would receive the second PhD as well. Booth had asked Angela to help organize a party to celebrate. Zack's family had thrown a small party while he was home, and his brother's high school graduation was the same weekend, so his folks wouldn't be able to be there. It would just be their friends—their chosen family—along with a number of colleagues from the Jeffersonian.

Booth had promised to take loads of pictures and send them back to Carol and Jim and, much to Zack's embarrassment, he did just that. The ceremony was long and boring and Booth was fidgeting almost as much as Parker by the end of it, but when they called Zack up to receive his two stoles, signifying the two degrees he was receiving, their whole section of the auditorium cheered with gusto and Zack smiled down at them from the dais.

Afterward, after many pictures—Zack with Booth, with Booth and Parker, with Dr. Brennan, with Hodgins, with Angela, with Hodgins and Angela, with Dr. Saroyan, with the Jeffersonian team, with everyone—they climbed into their respective cars and headed to the party Angela, Hodgins and Booth had arranged. Zack was surprised when they headed for the Alexandria marina.

"Why are we going to the marina?" Zack asked.

"We're going on a boat ride," Parker told him excitedly.

"That was supposed to be a surprise, buddy," Booth told his son and then he glanced at Zack to gauge his reaction. "But yeah, Angela arranged for us all to take a river cruise. We'll have dinner on the boat and then there'll be music and dancing later. And supposedly the view of some of the monuments from the water is spectacular. I've never actually done one of these cruises before, though."

"Sounds fun," Zack said. "You do know I can't really dance, right?"

"We'll stick to the slow stuff," Booth said with a grin. "That's like hugging and swaying at the same time. Anyone can do that."

"Are two boys allowed to dance together?" Parker asked.

Booth pulled the SUV into a parking spot and then turned around to face Parker. "Two boys are definitely allowed to dance together. Some people don't like it, but those people are wrong."

"Okay," Parker said easily and unbuckled himself from his booster seat. "Come on Dad, Zack, let's go see the boat!"

BZBZBZBZBZ

Angela had planned a great party. The food was catered, but not that frilly stuff that left Booth hungry again an hour later. They served pulled pork sandwiches, fried chicken, beef brisket,
macaroni and cheese—specially ordered for Zack—potato salad, baked beans, salad and corn bread. For dessert, there were four different kinds of pie, cookies, brownies, and a double chocolate cake that said "congratulations Zack" in white icing. There were drinks flowing freely and Booth was glad that most of their party had carpooled so that at least one person in each bunch was sober. Even Zack had a celebratory glass of champagne which went directly to his head. Booth had to laugh at how one drink could turn the younger man into a giggler.

Parker was wired on sugar and caffeine for a while, but fell asleep on a sofa in the salon some time around ten. Booth covered him with his suit jacket and then led Zack to the upper deck, where several couples were already dancing to the music being played over the sound system. Booth pulled the younger man into his arms and, as promised, they swayed together as their bodies pressed tightly to each other.

"It's been a great day," Zack said.

"That's good," Booth said. "But the celebration isn't over yet. Tomorrow, you, me and Parker are going to play laser tag and then we'll go to the arcade for video games. I let Parker decide on our activities and he seemed to think that was an awesome way to celebrate."

"Sounds like I'm going to get my ass kicked at laser tag by a six year old," Zack sighed.

"Yeah, probably," Booth agreed. "But then you can beat him at Warlords, or whatever that game is you two like to play. Parker says they have a machine in the arcade."

Zack brightened a bit, but still said, "I'd rather celebrate with just us and a whole day in bed."

"What do you think is on the agenda for Sunday?" Booth asked. Zack smiled up at him and he had to capture those lips in a sweetly gentle kiss. "Congratulations, Zack."

"Thank you, Seeley."

BZBZBZBZBZ

Booth noticed the letters for the first time at the end of June when he went into the study to borrow a pen and paper so he could leave Zack a note. Instead, he found those letters sitting in a stack in Zack's in box. Booth couldn't believe that Zack would keep something important from him, but as he flipped through the stack he noted that they had begun coming both to the Jeffersonian and to the apartment within days of Zack's graduation. They were all very similar and went something like:

Dear Dr. Zachary Addy,

So and So University/Research Center/Organization would like to hire you to teach/research/study for us for some astronomical salary.

Sincerely,

Dr. Somebody Important

The worst part wasn't the offers, or the fact that they were from all over the world. No the worst part was the fact that Zack hadn't told him, hadn't discussed the offers with him. Was he considering leaving DC? Where would that leave their relationship if Zack did move? Booth knew that Zack was great at what he did, he was a fucking genius for God's sake, but he had never considered the fact that the world beyond the Jeffersonian would know how great he is.

So, when Zack got home from work a couple hours later, instead of a note telling him that Booth had
gone out for drinks with Bones, he found his lover staring at the fire from the sofa and clutching a stack of papers.

"Were you going to tell me about the job offers?" Booth asked without ever looking away from the fire.

Zack frowned and walked around to see what had Booth so upset. When he saw the letters, he realized. "No. I wasn't."


"I was not going to tell you about them because I have no intention of accepting any of them," Zack said.

"But… why not?" Booth asked. He knew he should shut up, because Zack had just told him he wasn't leaving, but a part of him knew that it wasn't right to hold Zack back from being everything he can be.

"Because I have a job," Zack said simply. "And I like my job."

"Did you see how much money they're offering in some of these letters?" Booth asked incredulously.

"I know exactly how much they are offering," Zack said and sat down beside Booth. "I have discussed my future plans with Dr. Brennan and Dr. Saroyan today. I told them I do not wish to leave the Jeffersonian. Dr. Brennan believes I will get bored being her assistant indefinitely. They have suggested that if I wish to stay, that I should take on a personal research project besides my work with Dr. Brennan, perhaps something that would require both of my degrees. Also, they think I should take the lead on more projects, since Dr. Brennan has been stretched thin between teaching, doing her own research and doing work for the FBI. As a full-time researcher, my salary will not be the same as it was when I was merely Dr. Brennan's assistant."

"And you have no interest in considering any of these other offers?" Booth asked. "I mean, you could go anywhere, do anything you wanted. You aren't just staying for me are you?"

"Not at all," Zack said. "I am staying because I am comfortable here. For you, the idea of starting over some place new must seem inconsequential, but for me… I do not adjust to change well, Seeley. I like it here. And for the first time in my life I have real friends, a lover, and a job I love. I am happy here. Why would I want to leave for any amount of money?"

"I guess you wouldn't," Seeley admitted with more relief than he was comfortable acknowledging.

Instead of dwelling on his insecurities, Seeley kissed his lover and pulled him down onto the sofa with him. They ended up with Zack sprawled over Seeley's chest, the younger man's legs straddling his thigh. One kiss became two became twenty and soon the heat between them was scorching. Zack pressed his hips firmly against Seeley and began to rub sensually against his lover, but Seeley wasn't going to have that. He grabbed Zack tight in his arms and stopped him from moving at all.

Seeley's breath was hot in Zack's ear. "I want to fuck you so bad. I want to spread you open and thrust so deep inside your tight heat that you don't know where I stop and you begin. I want to hold you down and make you come on just my cock." Zack's whimper was the only response. Seeley grinned wickedly and pushed Zack up and to his feet. "Bedroom. Now."

Zack didn't have to be told twice. He was moving before Seeley had even finished his command. And he was stripping before he'd even reached the hall. Seeley followed behind at a leisurely stroll.
He felt good. He felt alive and loved. He felt needed and adored. Zack was his and would always be his. There would be no need to guard his heart, because Zack would never intentionally hurt him.

Seeley reached the door to the master bedroom and found Zack lying on his back. His hands were above his head, gripping the bars of the headboard tightly in anticipation of what was to come. His legs were bent at the knees and spread wide, giving Seeley complete access to his body. Such absolute trust was both rare and precious and Seeley vowed to cherish Zack's submission, to cherish Zack, for the rest of his days.

"You ready for me?" Seeley asked as he pulled his shirt over his head.

"Always," Zack promised with ingenuous certainty. "I'm yours and I will always ready for you. I love you, Seeley."

Seeley gave Zack another smile as he pulled off his jeans and finally joined his lover in their bed. "I love you, Zack. And I'll always be right here to take care of you and give you everything that you need."

After that, they didn't need any more words, because their bodies made their promises for them.

The End

Chapter End Notes

A/N: This is the end of this story, but you can read more about Zack and Seeley in The Rainbow Inn and the other stories in the Rainbow Inn Universe. Spring at the Inn will be posted tomorrow, and Skull and Crossbones will begin the day after that.

I want to thank all of you who have read and reviewed throughout the story. I may not be very good at writing to each and every one of you, but I really do appreciate the support. It fuels the creative fire. Jules

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