“Staring,” Andrew said. His steady, steady hands held the sharp knife. He cut the vegetables into small, even pieces. His every movement was precise, careful.

“Yeah.” Neil’s hands ran over and over the contract in his hands, without looking at it. He had already read it twice over, there was no need to read it again.

“Look away. You’ve seen it all already.” Andrew set the knife down, looking at him from across the kitchen counter.

Neil didn’t. Andrew was too beautiful, too strong, and careful. He was a wonder, someone for Neil and Neil alone. He was everything.

“Neil.” Andrew’s eyes slowly raked over his face. His face changed slightly, his throat bobbing. It was a moment of rare vulnerability and if Neil messed up, Andrew would shut him out. “Why do you stare at me so often?”

Neil slipped off his stool and walked over to him. He reached out, not touching, and hovered his hand over Andrew’s shoulder. Today was neither a momentous good day or a worrisome bad day. He didn’t know what was okay.

Andrew’s jaw set. “Go ahead.”

Neil dropped his hand lightly on his shoulder, feeling Andrew’s muscles tense under his palm. He waited a moment after they relaxed before he started speaking.

“You’re beautiful, but it’s not only that. You’re the man who looked at me when I was at my lowest and told me to stay. Who promised to protect me.” Neil stared at him, searching those guarded hazel eyes. “You’re so strong, in every sense of the word. You’re solid, and unwavering, and stubborn, and protective, and violent. You’re an immovable force.

“Andrew, you taught me how to love. You taught me how to feel it. You gave me everything, a key, so many kisses, your trust. A home.” Neil leaned in, just slightly. “You gave me everything I never realized I wanted or needed. You’re amazing. Looking away from you…I just can’t.”

“I hate you,” Andrew’s voice was hard, his words sharp. Most people would think he really means it. Neil knew that — when he said it like that — he meant the exact opposite and a thousand butterflies took flight within him.

“I love you.” The words were still foreign, even if Neil had repeated them a thousand times by now.

“Yes or no?”

“Do you really think my answer is going to change?”

Andrew kissed him. He kissed him and kissed him. Neil was happy, life was good. Andrew was amazing.