

WATER | AIR | EARTH | FIRE

Close your eyes.

make me
Sneak Preview

Jonah and Gray's
story continues

RILEY NASH

Can't get enough of Gray and Jonah? Curious about their life and adventures in Iowa? Their story isn't quite over! Enjoy this preview excerpt of their journey as fathers and lovers—to be continued in the novella [And All Their Stars!](#)

Chapter I

JONAH

Then

Our house doesn't have half its roof the first time we see it. Or all of its walls. Or most of the floor on the second story.

"Just use your imagination." I squint up at the midafternoon sun from the middle of what I think is supposed to be—based on the rusting, teal '70s refrigerator—a kitchen.

Gray doesn't answer, because he's holding his breath like one speck of dust in his precious lungs is going to kill him. He crosses the room with exaggerated caution, trying to protect the suit he insisted on wearing even after the realtor heavily hinted we were going to visit a cross between a construction zone and a bomb detonation site.

“You have a big basement. The water softener’s down there, and plenty of storage space.” Brian, an old friend of my parents’ and our realtor, points at a sagging door. When Gray tries to push it open, we all jump as the last hinge gives way and the whole thing tips over and slides down the concrete steps like a sled on a snowy hillside. All three of us peer into the dark, musty-smelling hole. Something clatters like an animal just knocked it over.

“It’s perfect,” I announce.

Gray gives me a *look*.

So this place hasn’t been loved in God knows how long. It has waited, forgotten, slowly falling apart piece by piece. It doesn’t have a single fucking thing going for it. That’s why it couldn’t be more right for us; we know a thing or two about second chances.

Unfortunately, I don’t think Gray’s going to be impressed by *Look at this poor baby. It followed me home. Can I keep it?* In the few months we’ve been adjusting to life together in Iowa, I’ve learned that he needs logic and facts. And blowjobs, but fortunately for realtor Brian I won’t need the ultimate weapon because I have a fact not even my lawyer boyfriend can argue.

When I offer Gray my hand, he eyes me suspiciously. Wrinkling his nose, he wipes the dust from the cellar door on the ass of my jeans, then tangles his fingers with mine. Testing each step with my boot to avoid needing a trip to the emergency room, I lead him carefully onto the back porch.

The hazy warmth of a spring afternoon wraps around us as we step onto the damp, green grass behind the house. We could rip the whole place down and erect a new one with the kind of money Gray has been stashing away for his whole career; a beautiful piece of land, on the other hand, takes

hundreds of years of wind and earth and water to become what we're seeing in front of us.

The lawn slopes down and gives way to thicker, wilder stuff, unkempt, with deer trails trampled through it. We'd have room back here for chickens or goats or horses or a pool or a workshop or the mother of all playscapes. Or nothing but a couple of deck chairs and a beer cooler. A whole life to build any way we want it. Beyond the fields, huge oaks trace the path of the same wide, sluggish river that runs near my parents' house.

"How far does the property go?" I ask Brian.

"All the way to the far bank of the river."

I nudge Gray's ribs, trying not to bounce with excitement. He sighs.

Resting my cheek against his shoulder and closing my eyes, I breathe in the thick scent of wild grasses mixed with Gray's spicy cologne. "Look. This is going to be your home, too. If you really hate it, baby, we won't take it." I nuzzle deeper into his shoulder, my forehead against his neck, and press close enough for him to feel how much I mean every word. How happy I am just to share this moment with him, to be looking for fucking houses with the person I love most in the entire world. A place for us to be together.

Brian's footsteps retreat through the creaking house, giving us space. As soon as they fade away, I feel Gray's nose in my hair. He's supposed to be smelling the flora and fauna, not my fucking Axe shampoo, but he does whatever he wants. His finger slides under my chin, tipping my face up until my eyes meet his, tinted honey-green in the sun and clouded with uncertainty. Moments like this are the hardest for him, unfamiliar people and places, outcomes he can't control, questions that don't have one right answer.

“Will it be quiet?” he asks very softly, his eyes so serious on mine.

Instead of answering, I nod toward the field and let the chirp of insects and birds wash over us. It’s so silent you can hear the wind touching each blade of grass, the breath and life of the earth itself.

After a few minutes just listening, hand in hand, something in his face relaxes a little. “And...” Clearing his throat, he frowns, and tries again. “And kids.” He touches the word lightly, like part of him is terrified I’ve changed my mind. “Would kids enjoy playing here?”

I can’t help but smile. “They’ll love climbing around in the exposed joists, swinging from the old electrical wires... and when they’re bad, we can throw them in the cellar, but we’ll have to get a new door since you broke—” I yelp, struggling, but he already has his arm around my chest, his other hand up in my armpit, tickling until I’m on my knees in the grass, gulping for air, trying not to holler loud enough for Brian to hear. It was hard enough to find a realtor who wouldn’t be an ass to a gay couple; no reason to make him think we’re fucking in the yard.

“I was being serious.” Gray says reproachfully, running his fingers through my hair as I cross my legs and cuddle up against him.

I kiss his thigh. “I know. Sorry. You’re just too easy to fuck with.”

“Say that again in bed, little cocksucker.” He smiles when he feels me shiver.

Humming reassuringly, I squeeze the back of his calf. “Kids would love it out here. Places like this...” I wave my stump toward the field, the river, everything. “This was my fucking childhood. And look how I turned out. Or maybe don’t.”

He knows I’m kidding, but he immediately crouches down so we’re on eye level. “Don’t. We’re starting fresh; I don’t want to hear this self-

deprecating shit anymore.” His hands wrap around either side of my head. “I can think of nothing that would make me happier in the world than to have children who turn out just like you, Jonah Scott.”

My chest tries its best to explode, to tear me into pieces of warmth and light and things that don’t have names, even in Gray’s poems. I lean up on my knees and kiss him, once then again and again, murmuring *thank you* in between strokes of my tongue.

This is the day we come home.

Now

“Oh, thank fu-uuuudge.” Eyeing McKenzie playing a few feet away in a patch of shade, I correct myself awkwardly as Gray walks down the lawn from the house with an ice-cold, dripping bottle of Coke. An afternoon working on Kenzie’s treehouse has me drenched in so much sweat I look like I just jumped into a pool.

“Papa!” Kenzie yells, waving a little plastic saw at him, too occupied to get up and say hello properly.

“You need to keep working on that language, Dada,” Gray mocks, using Kenzie’s name for me. Mr. Perfect didn’t have any trouble curbing his swearing once we brought an impressionable child home, and he takes sadistic pleasure in my struggles and near-misses.

Unscrewing the cap of the Coke, he hands me the bottle and I gulp it down with an orgasmic groan. We’ve been partners for two and a half years and it still makes me all giddy and fuzzy whenever he finds simple ways to make my life easier, as basic as taking the lid off something before he

passes it to me. I try to hide my sappiness, but Gray sees all, like a business-casual Eye of Sauron.

Sitting on the bench of the picnic table next to me, Gray takes off his jacket and loosens his tie. Of course *he's* not sweating. I'm not sure anyone in Hollow Creek appreciates the fact that their local lawyer dresses better than our governor at a press conference, but it makes him happy. On non-work days, I've managed to wrangle him into casual button-downs and chinos. When he takes Kenzie to the river or really wants me to jump his bones at every opportunity, he pulls out some shorts and one of the Hawkeyes tees my family gifted him.

"Thanks for the reminder. Your opinion is always so f-u-c-k-i-n-g appreciated." I arch my back, grunting at the ache in every single muscle from a full week spent on this damn treehouse. Other dads, ones with all their limbs, would probably finish twice as fast. But mine will be twice as fucking awesome because I have a lot of extra time while I work to use my brain.

Gray leans in to steal a kiss, fingers brushing along the neck of my t-shirt. While he's there, he drags his hot tongue up through the sweat along my jaw and bites my earlobe, dragging a choked whimper out of me as I bat him away. "You're being a horndog in front of our innocent child and you think my swearing is the problem?"

He grins, his bright eyes promising plenty of ways to get me hard and begging and fucked up later. For now, we both stop to watch Kenzie in the grass, smashing a plastic hammer against one of my spare boards with great concentration. "Why don't I help you build?" Gray asks. "I could take some days off and you wouldn't have to do it by yourself. Surely I'm a better helper than Kenzie."

“I hate to break it to you, babe.” I untuck his shirt and slide my hand underneath to rub his cool back. “Kenzie doesn’t nail anything together backwards that it takes me an hour to get apart again.”

When I look up, I immediately regret my words. The giant of a man looks genuinely disappointed, an uneasy quirk to his mouth.

“Hey, look at me.”

I find that old apology in his eyes, the one I hate. *Sorry I can’t be fun and cool like other people, that I can’t do anything right.* The scars and tears in our hearts have healed so much in the past two years, but sometimes the scabs break off and leave us suddenly raw. “You can build the railing pieces tomorrow. None of the boards have a direction, and it’s a very important part of the house. Yeah?”

He hesitates. “You don’t have to humor me.”

“Hey, Kenzie?” I raise my voice and our tornado with blonde curls looks up. “Papa’s going to help us all day tomorrow. How about that?”

“Really?” Just like I predicted, her whole body lights up and she sprints over, almost tripping and smashing her face on the picnic table before Gray scoops her up just in time, all the shadows in his face instantly gone. He’s her entire world, her entire fucking universe; I’m just someone she kindly allows to hang out. I could never be jealous, if it had even crossed my mind, because the pure, utter joy they give each other is my reason for living.

“How was work?” I ask, collecting the tools I scattered across the lawn and dropping them back into my toolbox.

Gray tucks Kenzie into her spot against his hip, her head resting under his chin, and sways gently as he watches me, the breeze stirring in his hair. “Mrs. Wilkins is getting paid handsomely for those mature oaks her neighbor cut down on the property line.”

Jesus Christ, the day my man discovered *tree law*. He's made a name for himself as the lawyer to visit from across the state for all your arboreal woes. Apparently, a single felled hemlock tree can be just about as dramatic as the damn O. J. Simpson trial.

"She wanted to give me something from her garden, so I asked for strawberries and rhubarb so you can bake that strawberry rhubarb pie for this weekend. They're in a box on the kitchen counter."

"That's perfect, baby. Thank you." I stretch up on my toes and he bends down so I can kiss him over Kenzie's head. "Now I have to make your favorite dessert. How convenient." Wagging my eyebrows at him, I put away the last box of screws.

"I never said it was my favorite."

"You ate *three quarters* of a pie in *one evening* when I went to the tractor show." It was the biggest lapse of self-control I've ever seen from the man. I wish I could have witnessed him, stretched out on the couch with a book and the pie tin in his lap, scooping up bites with a spoon until he realizes it's empty. Then he put the fucking tin back in the fridge with foil over it, as if I might not notice, because Kenzie is not the biggest child in this house.

"I don't think I'm going to get any pie this time." He squints at the sun starting to go down behind the river. "These people turn into carrion crows when there's a potluck involved."

Still balancing Kenzie on his hip, he helps me pull a tarp across the pieces of half-constructed treehouse scattered on the lawn before we head back to our two-story craftsman, its light blue siding blending into the sky beyond. We can't hold hands because I'm carrying the toolbox, but he shifts Kenzie to one arm and puts his free hand on the back of my neck as we hike up the slope.

He lets go to pull the screen door to the kitchen open, then sets our daughter down on her feet. “Go play until dinner, baby girl.” Kissing her hair, he watches her run into the living room. We both flinch at the sound of her upending the entire toy box in the middle of the floor.

Before I can stop her from making an even bigger mess, Gray puts his arm across the doorway, trapping me in the little mud room littered with jackets and muddy boots as his eyes pick me apart. “You’re nervous as hell about your dad’s retirement picnic,” he murmurs, not really a question because he’s always right, and pulls me against his chest until he feels me relax.

“I’m shitting myself, Gray,” I mumble into the front of his shirt.

His brow furrows. “But you’ve been running the business for the last year; your father hardly comes in anymore.”

“That’s not how things work here. As long as it’s his name over the door, everything’s good. When it’s my name? I’m basically starting over, and I can tell you that being a one-armed, bi mechanic isn’t the strongest start. ”

“Your dad’s always going to be proud of you,” he offers, after a pause.

I lean back and squint up at him. “Thanks, but you can’t know that.” Both of my parents have embraced Gray and Kenzie, but my father has never looked at me quite the same since the day I announced I was bi. I’m not sure he’s even aware of it himself. And this weekend he’s handing me a business he’s been building for longer than I’ve been alive. No pressure.

Gray offers me a gentle, crooked smile. “I believe in you, Jonah. No matter what happens, Kenzie and I are here. You have us. Even if you go out to the shop tomorrow and trip on something and burn the place to the ground.”

I raise an eyebrow. “Do you think we keep barrels of napalm out there or something?” But I can’t help smiling, which I know was his plan all along.

He wraps one big hand lightly around my throat, his thumb pushing my chin up as his mouth crashes into mine. Not one of the quick kisses we’ve had lately, one of us running out the door and the other rushing Kenzie to the toilet for her potty training. This one’s deep and getting deeper by the second, alternating hard and soft until he feels me whimper into his mouth. He pulls back just slightly, his breath caressing my damp lips. “I love you.”

“Took you long enough.”

He chuckles. A few months after he showed up at my family’s door that fateful Thanksgiving, I told him that I wished I’d used a cool movie line when he declared his love to me, instead of crying like an idiot. Now he lets me say it sometimes, so I can pretend I’m way more suave and awesome than I actually am.

“Okay.” I reach around and slap his ass. “It’s Big Daddy’s turn to sing the cleanup song. Small Daddy has a pie to make.”

Thank you so much for all your support!

This is an excerpt from an upcoming project that will continue Gray and Jonah's story, to be announced soon!

Follow me on Instagram @rileynashbooks for the most frequent updates on future projects, including Gray and Jonah's new story and the next book in the series, [*Show Me Wonders*](#), coming in November!