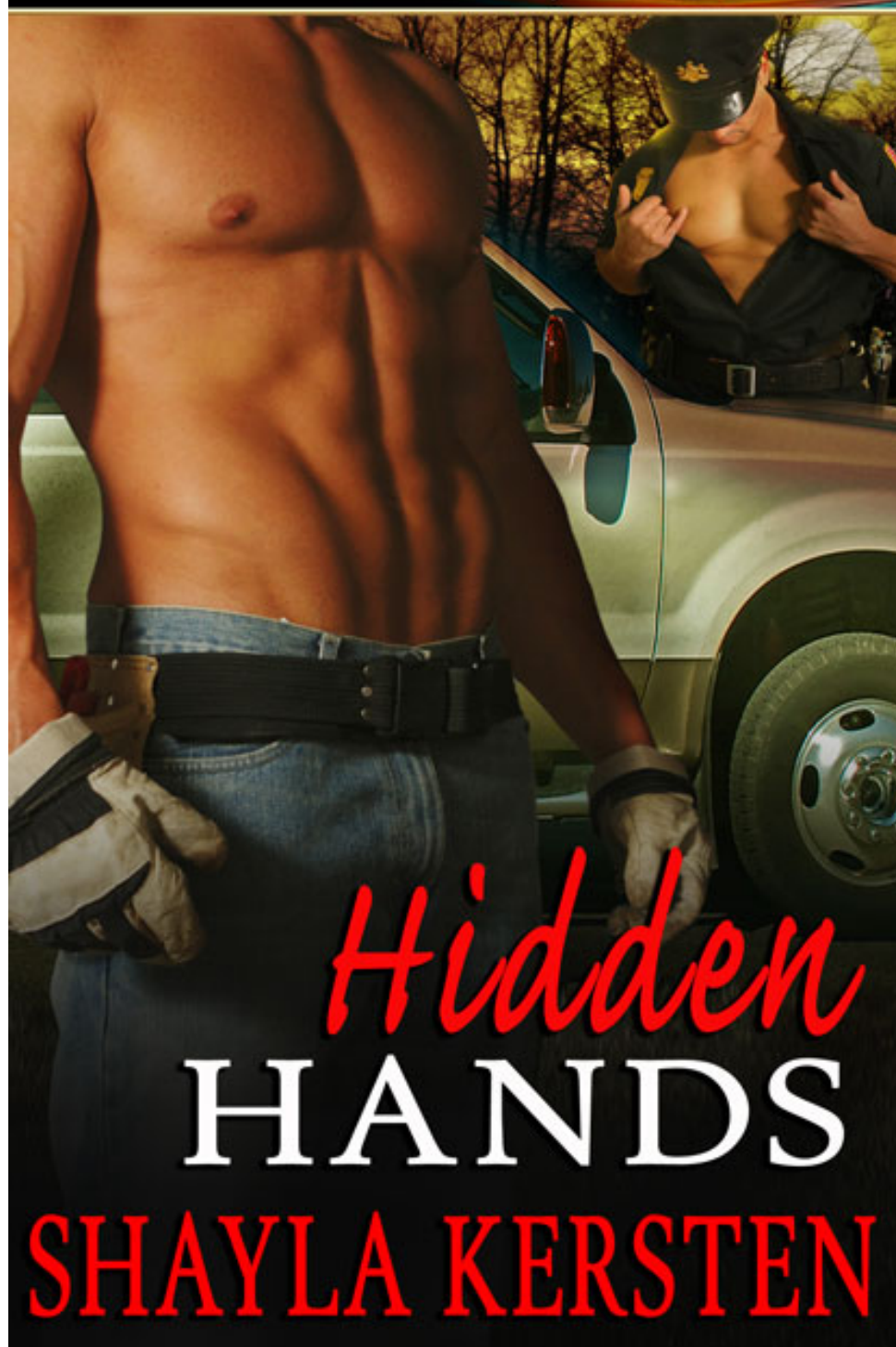


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Hidden Hands

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HIDDEN HANDS

Shayla Kersten

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Chapter One

Jeremy Lawson glanced around the packed club. He had no idea it would be so crowded this early. The weak spring sun had barely set when he arrived a few minutes before.

Releasing a long sigh with a pop of pursed lips, he returned his attention to the full bottle of beer in front of him. He hated the club scene. Once upon a time, he enjoyed the sweaty masses of men clamoring for attention, backroom hookups and one-night stands. Maybe he was just getting too old.

A few months before, he'd been ready to settle down for life with someone. Unfortunately, his "someone" had someone else. Jeremy had known for years that Rich had a thing for Dan. He just didn't know Dan was waiting for someone to show him the closet door. As happy as Jeremy was for his friend, he was also lonely.

A body jostled Jeremy's elbow as a deep voice barked an order at the bartender. "Whiskey, straight up." Strong-looking fingers dropped a twenty on the bar then tapped an impatient staccato.

Jeremy eased to one side, allowing the newcomer more space at the crowded bar.

"Sorry, man." Dim lights from behind the bar reflected in dark blond hair.

The unmistakable musk of male sweat distracted Jeremy with a shiver of desire. His reluctance eased at the idea of something other than his right hand around his cock. "No problem." Jeremy looked up at the tall man. "You been dancing?" Inwardly, Jeremy rolled his eyes. He'd been out of the scene way too long if that was the best he could do.

"Nah...just got off work." His gaze flickered around the room and up and down the bar. Anywhere except at Jeremy.

The bartender set a tumbler of caramel-colored liquid in front of him. The man snatched up the liquor and tossed it back. His forehead creased in a deep frown and his lips set in a grimace.

"Bad day, huh?" Jeremy flicked his gaze between the man and the now-empty glass.

"More of the same." His attention finally came to rest on Jeremy. A spark of interest clicked in his dark eyes. "Name's David."

"Jeremy." Wrapping his fingers around the long-neck bottle of beer, Jeremy slid his hand up and down the damp glass in long, slow strokes. His cock twitched and began to fill. "With someone?"

"Not yet." David's gaze locked on Jeremy's suggestive motions. "You?"

Jeremy shook his head slightly. Hesitation played across his tightening nerves. What was he doing? The club scene wasn't really to meet men but to pick them up. One-night stands were something Jeremy thought he'd given up. But then masturbating to fantasies that would never come true was pathetic. "You want to go..." Jeremy tilted his head toward the club's back room.

David's gaze narrowed as he glanced in the indicated direction. "Let's go outside instead. My truck." Snagging his change from the bar, he turned then headed for the exit without another word.

Jeremy nodded as he plucked his change, leaving behind a generous tip. Weaving through the sea of people, he kept his gaze locked on the tall figure. His broad shoulders were a match for Jeremy's stocky build, but David was at least four or five inches taller. The bulky muscles looked like he lifted weights, often and a lot.

The idea of being wrapped in those arms... Jeremy hurried toward the exit. Even if it was only one time, the urgency to feel a hot body against him instead of cold sheets drove his cock into anxious hardness.

As soon as Jeremy pushed through the heavy door of the club, his gaze darted around, looking for David. The cool spring air had a bit of a nip to it but not enough to cool off Jeremy's growing need.

A sense of danger crept along his spine, mixing with increasingly urgent sexual desire. Picking up guys could be dangerous. Staying in the back room of a club was actually the safer option.

Jeremy caught the tall figure of David near the back corner of the cramped parking lot, well away from other cars and the lights. Standing next to a big white extended-cab pickup, David motioned Jeremy toward him. As he got closer, Jeremy could make out words stenciled on the door of the truck, but it was too dark to read them. The light didn't come on when David opened the door.

Jeremy took a deep breath then hurried the remaining distance. The passenger side door popped open as he approached. "This is a really stupid idea..." he mumbled as he climbed up into the big truck. Residual heat in the oversized cab confirmed David's story of having just arrived.

As soon as the door closed, a strong hand grabbed Jeremy's crotch. "Shit." The pressure was both painful and erotic. "Give a guy a warning."

David's hand eased off a little. "What do you want?"

"Want?"

"You know...what's on the menu for tonight?"

Jeremy wrapped his hand around David's thick wrist then lifted his hand away from his cock. "Are we talking money here?" The last thing Jeremy needed was a prostitution bust.

"No!" David's hand jerked away. "I'm not paying you."

"Sorry. I just thought... Well, the way you said menu and... Never mind." As much as Jeremy wanted human contact, this was a bad idea. "I should go."

"No. I mean. Stay. I..." David released a long sigh. "I'm not very good at this."

Jeremy chuckled. "Me either. Me either." With a long sigh, Jeremy leaned back in the big comfortable seat. "So why do you do it?"

A soft snort sounded from the driver's side. "Can't have the one I want. Don't know how to look for someone else." A deep breath filled the cab of the truck. "You?"

"Same boat." Jeremy glanced over at David. Little light reached the darkened corner of the parking lot. What did was banished by the shadows in the truck. Only David's dark outline against the grayish night was visible. "And tired of my own hand."

"Yeah. I understand that." David's hand slithered across the bench seat until his heat rested on Jeremy's thigh. "So you wanna try this again?"

The heavy sense of loneliness eased around Jeremy's soul. Being reminded he wasn't the only broken heart out there helped to dispel some of his gloomy outlook on life. Sliding his hand over David's, he nodded. "Yeah." He tugged the large hand over until David's palm pressed against his groin.

The heavy conversation had put a damper on Jeremy's desire. The warmth of David's touch renewed his flagging cock.

A soft groan escaped from David as he pulled away from Jeremy's groin. Disappointment shot through Jeremy but didn't last long. David twisted in the wide seat then stretched his body toward Jeremy.

Jeremy's lips itched for a hard kiss. He wondered if David would still taste like whiskey. His anticipation faltered then skyrocketed as David's head dipped into Jeremy's lap.

Teeth raked against Jeremy's denim-covered cock. A shiver of heat whipped through him. Fingers fumbled with Jeremy's button and zipper. Hot breath teased through the cloth.

Jeremy slipped his hands between David's head and his groin then made quick work of opening his jeans.

David rose up, one hand supporting him while the other tugged at Jeremy's jeans.

Again Jeremy helped, pushing his jeans and briefs down, freeing his cock.

Devouring him like a starving man, David's mouth swallowed Jeremy's flesh. Deep, long strokes of wet heat. Fingers rolled his balls, pressed against his perineum. Flashes of pleasure stoked Jeremy's need higher with each fast swallow.

Jeremy clenched the armrest with one hand while his other tightened around the short locks of David's hair. "Fuck!" At this rate, Jeremy wouldn't last long. "Slow down..." As good as it felt, he'd like the encounter to last longer than a couple of minutes.

As if he were programmed to obey, David's greedy mouth slowed.

"Oh yeah." Jeremy caressed the gently bobbing head. His fingers combed through the short hair, nails scratching David's scalp.

A soft moan vibrated around Jeremy's dick, revving up the intensity again. With each touch of Jeremy's hands, David groaned and hummed.

Need curled through Jeremy's stomach, a slow, aching path tingling through his balls. "David..." Jeremy whispered, his fingers tightening on David's hair. "Gonna come..."

Instead of backing away, David's head dipped lower. The strands of hair caught in Jeremy's grip pulled tight. David's throat tightened around the crown of Jeremy's cock.

With a short shout of surprise, Jeremy pumped his hips into the amazing feeling and let go. Need pulsed through him, shooting deep into David's throat. "Damn..." Jeremy's breath caught as he whispered the word over and over again. "Damn...damn...damn..."

David's head eased up into Jeremy's hands. With a long, easy glide of lips and tongue, his mouth caressed the length of Jeremy's flesh. A small suckling kiss teased the oversensitive tip. "Was it good?" The low whisper held a hint of need for approval.

"Fuck yeah." Jeremy sighed as his body relaxed into the seat. "Amazing." His fingers combed the thick curls.

"Good..." David's cheek rasped against Jeremy's lower stomach. "Good..."

David leaned into the warmth of Jeremy's stomach. Shock shivered through him as much as desire. He'd never taken anyone so deep. Something about the sympathetic wistfulness of Jeremy's words set David off like nothing had before. Now his cock ached for the stranger's touch, but his boldness got up and went without him. He wasn't sure where he had gotten the nerve to ask Jeremy out to his truck.

After the incident with his wife, David wasn't sure he'd ever manage the nerve to get out again. Much less hit the clubs.

Gentle fingers combed through his hair. David could almost curl up right where he was and stay there—cramped as he was—fall asleep and forget his crappy existence. Maybe he could sleep without nightmares for a change.

"So damn good." Jeremy's breathless words tickled David's almost-forgotten sense of humor. The fingers tightened in David's hair, tugging him up from his awkward position. Strong, calloused hands framed his face.

As Jeremy's face tilted toward him, David pulled back. Not hard but enough. Jeremy hesitated.

Instead, Jeremy's thumb teased across David's lower lip then back across the upper. "I want to kiss you."

David's throat clenched at Jeremy's soft words. Kissing wasn't something David did. Not often. Kissing was too close, too personal. Kissing meant something. Sex didn't. David ran his tongue across his lips, following the path of Jeremy's thumb. Instead of shaking his head, David surprised himself and nodded.

Too dark to see much more than the outline of features, David tried to focus on where Jeremy's lips would be.

One hand slid down David's face then curled around his neck. A little pressure, not enough to qualify as a tug, eased David forward until their lips met.

Softer than David would have thought. Sweeter than he wanted. Warm lips met and caressed. A wet tongue did a silken slide across the seam of David's mouth.

He opened his mouth slightly, just to test the texture. Then a little more. His tongue chased the feeling of heat and wet. The back of his throat tickled with the memory of Jeremy's flavor. The residual taste of come mixed with the tang of Jeremy's beer and David's whiskey.

Need welled up and pushed David closer. His arm looped around Jeremy's neck, sealing their chests together. His other hand gripped the dark hair, pressing it tight to Jeremy's scalp.

"Oh..." A small moan slipped out from where David hid his emotions. *Too much. Too much.*

Breaking away, David scooted back to his side of the truck. His fingers gripped the steering wheel in a tight clench. He was surprised his knuckles weren't glowing white in the darkness.

"What's wrong?" Jeremy leaned across the open space between them.

"I...ah..." David's mind sought an answer, one that wouldn't appear too stupid, like he didn't kiss. "Thought I saw someone coming."

"Oh." Jeremy's fingers tucked and zipped as he glanced around. "So, you want to take this somewhere else?" His hand drifted across the pale seat until it rested on David's thigh. "We aren't exactly finished." Sliding across David's crotch, Jeremy palmed David's aching cock.

"Where?" David's mind flew to different choices—his office, a hotel. His apartment wasn't an option. Or just somewhere away from here. Or nowhere at all. He should tell Jeremy not to worry about it. It's been fun and all... Walk away.

Pressure from Jeremy's hand changed his mind. "We could go to my place," Jeremy interrupted David's desperate thoughts.

"Your place?" David's voice cracked.

"Unless you prefer yours. Or a hotel?" Jeremy's hand kept rubbing, fingers tracing the outline of David's cock through tight denim.

"Your place. Good." David took a deep breath and exhaled hard. "Which way?"

Jeremy kept his hand in David's lap as his other motioned toward the street. "Take a left out of the parking lot."

Chapter Two

David followed Jeremy through the apartment door with his heart beating ninety to nothing. His breath caught in his chest. Could he have a heart attack at twenty-six?

Until now all his previous experience, other than Ryan, had been in back rooms and vehicles. Even once against a wall outside a club.

Ryan had been different but so long ago. Teenagers looting David's dad's liquor, home alone and horny. David had wanted Ryan. But when his dad found out, David denied being gay and turned his back on the only person he'd ever really loved.

He didn't deserve better than a quick grope in a back room or alley.

"Take your jacket off." Jeremy tossed his keys on a table. "Want a beer?"

David shook his head. A beer sounded too much like a date. This wasn't a date. It was just sex.

A smile crooked the corner of Jeremy's mouth. "How old are you?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

Lines crinkled around Jeremy's almost black eyes. His dark coloring was almost the opposite of Ryan's blondness.

Jeremy leaned against the kitchen doorframe. "You look younger in this light than you did in the bar. I don't need trouble with someone underage."

"I'm not underage. I'm twenty-six."

"Damn." Jeremy turned into the kitchen. Pulling open the refrigerator, he pulled out a beer.

David followed. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I'm a lot..." Jeremy took a long swig of his beer. "Let's just say you're a little younger than I'm used to."

"How old are you?"

Jeremy's mouth contorted in a grimace. "Thirty-seven."

"You don't look that old."

Jeremy laughed aloud, a low rumbling sound David could get to like. "Thanks. Now that makes me feel real old."

"I didn't mean it that way." David moved farther into the kitchen. The tension in his neck and back eased a little. "You look good." And he did.

Although several inches shorter than David, Jeremy was almost as broad. His dark hair wasn't long but the short curls were unruly and mussed. And it looked good on Jeremy. His dark five o'clock shadow emphasized the hollows of his cheeks under high cheekbones.

"Thanks." Jeremy leaned against the counter. "But eleven years is a pretty big difference."

David frowned as he walked closer. "But it doesn't matter. This is just about sex. I won't see you again after tonight."

"Oh." Jeremy took another long drink of his beer. His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed.

The urge to run his lips over Jeremy's throat surprised David. Then again, being here in a stranger's apartment was completely out of character for David.

"Just sex. Okay." Jeremy nodded and set his beer bottle on the counter. "Then come here."

David moved closer, obeying in spite of doubts pounding his brain and the vicious whispering echo of his father's condemnation.

Jeremy's smile was so gentle and the twinkle of mischief in his eyes so appealing. David banished his darker thoughts then leaned into Jeremy's muscled body.

Arms snaked around David's neck, pulling his head lower. Hot breath teased his neck. A warm tongue curled around the shell of David's ear.

“So what kind of sex? Since I got off once already, seems only fair you get to choose.”

David’s fists clenched at his sides. “Can you...” He exhaled hard then caught a short breath. “Can you...again?”

Jeremy ran a hand down David’s chest then reached for his hand. Holding it against his crotch, Jeremy whispered, “Yep. Already getting hard again.”

Jerking his hand away, David closed his eyes then buried his face in Jeremy’s neck. “Fuck me,” he whispered. Fear and loathing ran through his body, but desire overwhelmed both.

Jeremy’s hand slid around David’s waist, fingers dug into the flesh of David’s ass. “Oh yeah. I can do that.” With his arms tight around David, Jeremy turned their bodies around then led David backward out of the kitchen.

David was blind to his surroundings as Jeremy pulled him through the darkened apartment. Fear threatened to crowd out the desire pulsing through his body. He’d never taken this final step.

The one time with Ryan, David had been on top. But the intensity of Ryan’s reactions haunted him.

Being in such intimate surroundings—Jeremy’s home—eased barriers David had painstakingly built over the last eight years.

Jeremy hit a light switch and a lamp illuminated the bedroom. A queen-size bed took up most of the room—seemed to take over the small area. Or was that only in David’s mind?

Strong hands kneaded David’s back. Soft whispers drifted past his ears, but David couldn’t focus on the words.

Jeremy’s fingers tugged at the bottom of David’s sweatshirt. His hands, warm and rough, slid up David’s bare skin, rucking the material up under his arms.

A warm mouth captured a nipple. Heat, almost electrical, shot through David's body, twisting a path from his chest to his dick. "Damn—" Goose bumps rose around his nipple, marched across his chest then down his arm. His hands flailed in the air behind Jeremy's back, finally settling on the soft curls on Jeremy's head.

David's fingers twisted through the strands of hair as he pulled Jeremy's mouth tighter against his chest. Sharp pain startled David as teeth pulled the peaked nipple. Quickly, a soft, warm tongue laved the pain away.

David's cock, tight in the confines of his jeans, hardened into throbbing need. "Fuck—"

"We will soon," Jeremy whispered. His face tilted up until David spied his grin. "Real soon." He tugged David's shirt over his head, forcing David to release his hold on Jeremy.

Almost bereft from the loss of his hold on Jeremy's sturdy body, David swayed in the chilly room. Crossing his hands over his naked chest, he waited for Jeremy to decide his fate.

Jeremy narrowed his gaze and one eyebrow almost arched. "Are you okay?"

Nodding, David dropped his hands to his side. "It's a little cold in here." The excuse sounded lame but he felt the need to say something.

"Come here. I'll warm things up." Jeremy held out his hand and tilted his head toward the bed.

Taking a deep breath, David took Jeremy's hand and moved closer. As if enacting a dance, he turned as Jeremy turned until the back of David's legs pressed against the bed.

"You're beautiful." Jeremy's gaze trailed over David's chest with such fierce intensity David could almost feel it. Jeremy's fingers followed the same path, pausing to tease first one nipple then the other.

David gasped at the gentle touches. He expected hard, rough. Punishing. Not gentle.

"Such sensitive nipples too." Jeremy leaned forward. His tongue twisted around the tiny nub of flesh. His lips encased David's nipple in warm heat.

A shiver of need combined with the room's chill and fought as they traveled down David's spine. "Just do it..." David didn't need tenderness. Didn't deserve it.

"We will. Soon." Jeremy's hands ran up and down David's back then circled his waist. Thick fingers popped the button on David's jeans. Gentle teasing accompanied the glide of his zipper. His hands pulled the fly open then tugged David's briefs down. Jeremy's gaze crawled down David's body. "Good thing I got off once already." His hand wrapped around David's aching cock. "Don't know if I could hold back for long otherwise."

David clasped his hands on Jeremy's waist and held on. Jeremy's strong squeeze and pull nearly undid him. "God..." David's half moan was left unfinished as Jeremy caught his lips in a hard kiss.

Losing himself in the moment, David returned Jeremy's passion lick for lick, kiss for kiss. Twisting tongues battled for space—checking each tooth, skittering across the roof of his mouth. Nips, licks matched hands groping, grasping, holding.

The long slip and slide of Jeremy's strokes kept a steady rhythm on David's cock. Each sensation, from mouth and hands, combined, strengthened the steady rise of desire until David's body screamed for release.

But Jeremy's pace wasn't enough. David needed more. "Faster," he murmured between kisses. "Faster," he demanded louder.

"Bit pushy, eh?" Jeremy drew back, but his hand kept the maddening tempo.

David's face flushed with heat. "Sorry..." He'd forgotten this wasn't about him. Not about his pleasure.

"I like pushy bottoms." Jeremy's smile teased as he winked. "Speaking of..." Jeremy yanked the top of David's jeans, kneeling as he went. David steadied himself with his hands on Jeremy's shoulders.

As the material bunched around David's knees, Jeremy stopped, his mouth level with David's cock. The crown, red with need, glistened with pre-come. A darting glance up warned David of Jeremy's intentions but didn't prepare him for the jolt of heat when Jeremy's mouth closed around the head.

"Fuck!" The air blasted out of David's lungs. Dizziness set him swaying back and forth. Jeremy's hands clutched his ass, encouraging his motions. "Too much."

Jeremy released him with an audible pop. "Why don't you get on the bed?" Jeremy's hands caressed bare skin all the way up as he stood. "I'll be right back."

Nodding, David stood still, jeans around his ankles and dick waving in the air, while Jeremy left the room. For several seconds his mind wouldn't focus then Jeremy's last words trickled into his brain.

He kicked off his shoes then his jeans and underwear. Crawling up on the bed, he reclined with his back against the headboard. Doubt plagued him before long. Maybe he wasn't supposed to be comfortable. If Jeremy was going to fuck him, maybe he should...

David rolled over on his stomach. The cold, soft comforter eased some of the heat of his skin. His hips pushed his cock into the material before he thought about it. "Damn." He was leaking come all over the place.

Scrambling to his hands and knees, he peered down at the wet spot on the comforter. Not much. Maybe Jeremy wouldn't notice—

"Wow. Talk about a tempting sight." The bed dipped behind David. "But we can lose these too."

Fingers hooked into the top of David's socks. David lowered his head until he could see Jeremy behind him. Already naked, Jeremy's thick cock jutted down between his legs.

“Unless your feet are cold?”

David shook his head and tried not to think about the double meaning in Jeremy’s words. “No. No cold feet.” The socks came off with a few tugs.

“You look good enough to eat like this.” Jeremy’s hands ran across the globes of David’s ass then up to his lower back.

Light kisses fluttered across David’s skin. A teasing tongue swiped the top of the crack of his ass. Fingers slipped between his cheeks then teased his anus.

A shudder swept through David but his earlier fears seemed to fade as desire welled through his body. “Oh yeah...” He bit his lip against encouraging words. This was punishment. Not pleasure.

His mantra didn’t work anymore. Even earlier, when he tried to gag himself, he couldn’t find the well of disgust. Not with Jeremy’s whispered words of pleasure teasing him.

“Roll over.” Jeremy’s hands pushed him over on the bed. “Scoot up in the middle.”

David obeyed as he crab-walked to the middle of the bed.

“Nice.”

Jeremy’s hands rubbed David’s calves, teasing the hair on his legs. Then higher, massaging thighs with strong fingers. Jeremy leaned forward, moving up as his hands crawled over David’s body. His palms splayed on either side of David’s cock, framing him with his thumbs and forefingers. The thumbs teased David’s balls.

Try as he might, David couldn’t stay still. His hips rolled up, seeking some kind of pressure, but only met air.

“Patience.” Jeremy dropped his head then ran his tongue up the length of David’s dick. “Such a great cock. Long, thick...but not too much.” Jeremy suckled the tip then pulled away. “I’d like to see what you feel like...deep in my ass.”

David closed his eyes as he heaved a gasp of surprise and arousal.

Jeremy's hand wrapped vise-tight around his dick. "Been awhile. I would be tight." The warm mouth covered the crown again then pulled away. "How long has it been for you?"

"Never," David moaned. His eyes flew open as he realized his admission. "I mean..." His mind couldn't form an answer.

Jeremy crawled up beside David. His hand rubbed across David's chest, back and forth, teasing his nipples. "I figured as much. How long have you been out?"

"A couple of years." A strange sense of relief and calm spread over David. "Though I haven't done much about it."

"Blowjobs in backrooms and alleys?"

"More or less."

Kisses teased David's shoulder. "Look at me." Jeremy's voice held a tone of command and David couldn't disobey. "Are you sure you want to do this? I could finish you off with a few strokes at this point and you could go on your way."

"I..." David wasn't sure how to answer. He did want this but... "I didn't want you to know."

"Why? It's kind of a big deal. Much more than a blow or hand job."

David turned his head away from Jeremy's probing gaze. "It doesn't matter."

"Talk to me, David."

Staring at a spot on the wall near the door, David mumbled, "Can't you just fuck me without the questions?"

"I could. But I don't want to."

"I don't want it to be gentle." The strange turn in the conversation took the edge off David's desire.

Jeremy kissed his shoulder again. This time, his lips stayed on David's skin, not moving. His hand roamed down David's stomach to his flagging cock.

Curiosity finally won. David turned his head to face Jeremy's unreadable gaze. "What?"

"I don't know what to make of that statement. Why would you want someone to hurt you? Maybe seriously?"

"Just...never mind." David started to sit up but Jeremy's arm pulled him back down.

"I don't think I'm finished with you. I'm just not sure what to do with you."

"Fuck me and get it over with." David closed his eyes. How had things gotten so out of control? Normally, David got what he wanted – whether it was a blowjob, hand job, whatever – everyone got off then left. No questions, no kisses, no gentle words or caresses. Sex was just sex.

Jeremy's breath sighed hot against David's skin. "I'm going to fuck you. But on my terms." Jeremy rolled off the bed, leaving a cold spot on David's skin. "Don't move."

Again, that tone of command. David kept still in the middle of the bed, arms splayed at his sides.

The clinking of metal on metal startled David. Jerking his head in the direction of the noise, he caught Jeremy walking back into the bedroom with two sets of handcuffs dangling from his fingers.

"My terms?"

The shiny silver cuffs hypnotized David. His cock, on the other hand, had an immediate and visceral reaction. His wilting flesh hardened into iron within seconds. Without realizing it, David nodded his consent.

Jeremy's grin seemed hungry and knowing at the same time. He crawled the length of the bed until he straddled David's chest. His cock jutted out hard and leaking, almost touching David's face. With the cuffs clutched in one hand, Jeremy wrapped his other around his cock. Brushing the silken head over David's lips, he left a trail of pre-come.

David's tongue darted out for a taste but wasn't fast enough. Instead, he had to be satisfied with the salty fluid left behind.

Jeremy grabbed one of David's wrists then snapped the cuff on with professional efficiency. Evidently, this wasn't the first time Jeremy cuffed someone. He used the second set on David's other wrist.

Scrambling off David's chest, Jeremy pulled David's arm out until it extended at an angle from his body to one of the black metal bars that slatted the headboard. Stalking around the bed, his gaze glued to David's body, Jeremy did the same on the other side.

With a half smile, Jeremy leaned near David's ear. "Your legs are free because it's easier to fuck you that way."

"God, yes..." David rolled his eyes back and tested the handcuffs. Jeremy didn't mess around with his toys. Pain lanced through David's wrists. The cold steel wouldn't give.

Jeremy moved away. David opened his eyes to follow the movements. From the drawer next to the bed, Jeremy retrieved a bottle of lube and a couple of condoms then tossed them on the bed next to David's hip. Next, he pulled a small black vibrator from the back of the drawer. He leaned over the bed, holding it up for David to see. "This will help open you," he whispered near David's ear. "Nice and wide so when I'm ready to fuck you, you'll get it hard and deep on the first stroke."

David's cock jerked. A fresh gush of pre-come dripped to his stomach, leaving a sticky strand glinting in the dim light.

"You ready?" Jeremy's words echoed in David's ears.

Bound, David had no choice, right? This wasn't his fault. He was helpless. Nodding, David closed his eyes. Whatever happened now, he was just along for the ride.

Jeremy had taken control out of David's hands. Relief replaced fear in David's eyes. Jeremy was probably playing with fire.

Sweat beaded David's brow in spite of the chilly room. His thick cock didn't have any problems with the situation. Pre-come leaked almost continuously.

Jeremy climbed on the bed then straddled David's calves. His gaze rested on David's rigid flesh. "Looks painful." He leaned forward, bracing his hands on David's thighs. "I think I'll take care of that first. You'll be more relaxed for what comes later."

David shook his head. "Just fuck me."

"Hmmm... Nope." Jeremy ran his tongue around the head. "My terms, remember."

With a half-whimpered moan, David nodded. His fingers caught on the metal slats of the headboard in a white-knuckled grip. His jaw clenched shut but ticked near the joint. His abs tightened as he strained to remain still, but his hips jerked anyway.

Suckling the crown rewarded Jeremy with a fresh burst of pre-come. The younger man was so on edge, Jeremy was surprised he hadn't shot off before now. "Maybe..."

Rolling off David's legs, Jeremy reached for one of the pillows. After tugging it free of David's arms, he kneed David's legs apart. "Raise your hips."

David responded immediately.

Jeremy knew he was a bit of a control freak in bed. And he loved a little bondage play, but he'd never been seriously into any kind of scene. His partners had been willing but not completely obedient. Mouthy, taunting, begging for it—yes. But not completely subservient. Not like David so far.

If he said do it, David did. Some internal struggle was there but he still obeyed. And the idea was a major turn-on for Jeremy.

This young, built-like-a-brick-house man—someone who could have any man, or woman for that matter—was willing to take whatever Jeremy wanted to dish out.

What he remembered from psychology classes warned him to go easy. David's conflict was almost written across his forehead. He hated himself for being gay. He wanted sex to hurt instead of being pleasure.

Well, not tonight. Jeremy was going to do everything in his power to make his helpless guest understand sex was about the pleasure. In the meantime, Jeremy was going to make the most of the little bondage scenario he had going.

With the pillow stuffed under David's tight butt, Jeremy grabbed the lube and the dildo. While a small one, maybe five inches long and not even two inches around, the vibrator was strong enough to rev up the prostate. The perfect thing to loosen David's ass and send him into orbit at the same time.

"Spread your legs wide." The lube was cold enough to make Jeremy gasp a little when he squirted it on his fingers. "This'll be cold and a bit of a shock."

David gasped as Jeremy's finger teased the crack of his ass.

"Don't say I didn't warn you." Jeremy chuckled but didn't stop his motions.

David's puckered hole contracted as Jeremy's fingers slid near.

"You have to relax. Trust me." Jeremy glanced at David.

The pale face beaded with sweat. Dampness darkened the light fur on David's underarms. His eyes fluttered under closed lids. The thick cock, head almost purple with need, leaked constantly. His hands still gripped the headboard.

Jeremy wondered if the strong metal slats would hold under David's intensity.

"Just do it," David moaned.

"Soon," Jeremy said again. He didn't miss David's wince at the word.

After circling David's anus with his forefinger a couple of times, Jeremy pushed the tip past the tight muscle. He stopped at the first knuckle then pulled out. Again, twice, three times... Just quick, tiny strokes to loosen initial resistance.

David's eyes stayed closed but he unclenched his teeth. His mouth hung open, slack-jawed. His breath was rapid, short gasps barely moving his chest.

"Breathe deep for me," Jeremy whispered. When David obeyed, Jeremy slipped his finger deeper.

David exhaled hard. His fingers clenched but his body accepted the intrusion.

Twisting in a gentle arc, first one way then the other, Jeremy rotated his finger until the tight velvet heat slacked a little. He began pumping his hand. His single finger fucked David's ass in fast strokes.

David responded with half-whimpered cries punctuated with short, breathy moans.

"Breathe in again, deep." This time, Jeremy slid a second slippery finger in with the first.

A loud cry. "Naa..." The word wasn't complete.

Jeremy stilled his hand, two fingers still buried in David's ass. "Did you say no?"

Eyes screwed tightly shut and lips sealed in a tight line, David didn't respond.

"David, answer me. Do you want me to stop? Yes or no. No games, no safe words, no bullshit. Do you want me to stop?"

All the muscles in David's body were beautifully sculpted with tension. His ass tightened around Jeremy's fingers.

"You have to answer me. One way or the other or I'll stop anyway. Do. You. Want. Me. To stop?"

"Noooo..." David dragged the word out with a hard exhale. His chest heaved with gasping breaths. "Don't stop."

"See." Jeremy moved his hand in a slow, drawn-out motion. "That wasn't so hard, now was it?" He kept his voice conversational as if they were discussing the weather. "You are gorgeous. And like this, your body covered with sweat, each muscle outlined with a sheen of moisture." Jeremy sighed with real regret. "I could keep you like this forever. But I'll probably never see you again after tonight. Will I?"

David didn't answer but his hips rocked to meet Jeremy's steady strokes.

"You'll go to a different bar, different part of town, anything to avoid me." Jeremy picked up the small vibrator from where he'd set it between David's legs. "Too bad. You can't imagine how turned-on I am by watching you." He pulled his fingers free.

Ripping a condom open, Jeremy held up the toy so David could watch him roll the rubber over it. "Been awhile since I had someone to use this on." He flipped the vibe on then off again. His mouth widened into a grin, eyebrows arched comically. "Of course I've used it on myself, but it's so much more fun having someone to share my toys." Grabbing the lube, he slicked the condom with the glistening gel.

David groaned as his gaze fixed on the vibrator. His chest almost bounced with rapid, short breaths. His tongue flickered along his low lip.

"Now let's see how you like playing with toys." Jeremy tossed the lube on the bed. Reaching between David's thighs, he slipped the small vibrator between David's cheeks.

"Ah..." David's body clenched at the cold toy but he didn't pull away.

"Sorry. Should have warned you." Jeremy laughed as he leaned over David's groin. "Or not." His lips suckled David's leaking cock until his mouth wrapped around the silken crown. With a hum of a laugh, Jeremy hit the switch.

David's hips jumped as he yelled his surprise. The vibrations buzzed through David's flesh and teased Jeremy's lips.

Angling the toy up, Jeremy dipped his head lower, capturing more of David's shaft before...

"Fuck!" David's body writhed against his bonds. His hips bucked hard against Jeremy's chest as the vibrator pummeled his prostate with humming sensations.

Warm come shot hard down Jeremy's throat, filling his mouth. Too much, Jeremy had to let the overflow leak from the side of his mouth or choke.

David's hips ground against Jeremy's hand and the vibrator. His body shivered and shuddered until David's sobs forced Jeremy to let go of his prize.

Releasing David's cock, Jeremy flipped the vibe off. After easing the slender toy out of David's body, Jeremy climbed over David until he curled up against his side.

"It's okay." Holding the trembling body, Jeremy wondered if he'd done the wrong thing. Maybe he should have just blown the poor guy in his truck and been done with it. Jeremy leaned his forehead against David's. "Shush. You're okay. I'm sorry it was too much."

Jeremy's kisses started gentle, reassuring, but David returned them hard and hungry. Twisting his body, David pushed against Jeremy as if he needed more contact, skin on skin. His legs wrapped around Jeremy's. His arms pulled against the handcuffs, clanking metal on metal.

Glancing up, Jeremy saw hints of raw skin. "Shit." He pulled away so he could remove the cuffs.

"No, don't leave."

"Oh, not going anywhere." Jeremy ran his hand down a damp cheek. "But I am taking the cuffs off. You're hurting yourself."

"Doesn't matter. Just fuck me. Please."

The haunted look in the dark eyes had Jeremy wondering which response would be best.

"Please."

"Yeah. As soon as the cuffs are off." Reaching over David's prone body, Jeremy grabbed the key from the nightstand. With a quick twist on each cuff, David was free.

Jeremy examined the raw skin. One spot was bleeding but not bad. He'd hurt tomorrow for sure though.

"Please. You promised." David yanked his hands away then ran them down Jeremy's chest.

After snagging the lube and a condom, Jeremy scooted down next to David. Jeremy kissed the damp, salty skin of David's shoulder. "Turn on your side. Back to me."

David's forehead creased in a frown but he obeyed.

"Tilt your hip over some, with your leg a little in front of the bottom one." Jeremy pushed until David molded his body where he wanted it. Jeremy didn't think this would take long. In spite of the phenomenal blowjob in David's truck, Jeremy was more than ready to shoot again.

David's entire demeanor had Jeremy on edge. If only... But David wasn't a good match for Jeremy. He wanted a stable relationship of equals not a submissive partner. And definitely not someone with more baggage than Jeremy.

But for tonight, the sweet body curled next to him was just what the doctor ordered.

Jeremy ripped open the condom and rolled the cold latex over his overheated flesh. The chilly sheath helped tone down his desire but not by much. With a squirt of lube, liberally smeared, Jeremy snuggled closer to David.

David held his breath as Jeremy moved closer. He'd completely lost control. Sobbing like a baby in front of a stranger—another man. He didn't understand why Jeremy didn't just walk away, why he held him and kissed...

Damn. Talk about losing it. Jeremy's mouth was unbelievable. David couldn't get enough. Even now he wanted to turn his head to the side and try to capture Jeremy's lips again. Pushing the thoughts aside, he resisted.

A strong hand, still slick from lube, caught his upper arm and distracted his need for Jeremy's kisses. The blunt tip of Jeremy's cock pressed against David's ass. The lube wasn't as cold as before, but Jeremy's dick was definitely bigger than the vibrator.

"Keep breathing. Steady and deep," Jeremy whispered.

His hot breath teased David's ear and renewed the desire for kisses. David did as he was told. Counting breaths, he concentrated on the rush and pull of air in his lungs. Like after a long run. Keep the oxygen flowing. Fill the lungs.

David gasped a long, deep breath as the crown of Jeremy's cock slipped inside him. A dick...in his body...his ass. Excitement twitched through him. Electrical sparks of need, desire, desperation. This was what he wanted. His punishment.

"God, you're tight," Jeremy's lips mumbled against David's shoulder. "Maybe I should —"

"No. Please. Don't pull out." David's ass clenched around the intruding flesh.

"Okay, but go easy there. You can hurt both of us if you're not careful."

David relaxed immediately. He didn't want to hurt Jeremy, only himself. His mind flew in different directions. He always assumed he'd be the one hurt when someone fucked him. Not that anything Jeremy had done so far hurt. His hands had a way of making everything good. "You okay?" David murmured, almost afraid of the answer.

"Yes. That's good. I'm going to push a little more. Tell me if it hurts too much."

David waited, his breathing returned to the long, measured rhythm from before. A little burn but nothing hurt.

Slowly, Jeremy inched into David's body. The full feeling was weird but the pressure on his prostate was phenomenal. David grabbed a pillow and stuffed it against his face. Biting the pillow, he tried to soften his moans.

"Are you hurting?"

"No." David yanked the pillow free long enough to grunt his answer.

"So tight. So good." Jeremy chanted in David's ear. "Damn..."

David followed the hot breath until he'd canted his head back enough to meet the corner of Jeremy's mouth. Jeremy twisted the rest of the way until their mouths met completely.

His body moved against David, easy strokes, each teasing sweet pleasure from his prostate. Brushing, bumping or gliding past the gland, each touch sent vibrations of ecstasy flowing through David's body.

This was not how it was supposed to be, but David couldn't resist falling into the rapture of Jeremy's making.

David reveled in the lazy kisses, the stronger strokes and the heat of Jeremy's body lining his back. "Oh yeah... More..."

Arms tightened around David, pulling him closer. The measured bump and grind of Jeremy's hips sped up, a faster push and pull, but not enough.

"More!" David tossed aside the pillow and groaned. "Please. Harder." Thoughts of pain, punishment and his dad's vicious words fled as pleasure flooded his body.

Jeremy's body rolled David over onto his stomach. Knees bumped his legs apart and hands tugged his hips up. With David on all fours, Jeremy dug his fingers into the flesh of David's hips and gave David what he wanted.

Hard. Harder. Pounding heat, hard strokes, punishing and joyous, Jeremy fucked him into oblivion. His mind closed down to all thoughts except the thick flesh filling him over and over. His cock filled to hardness in seconds. His body welcomed Jeremy's brutal pillage.

"God, yes..." David canted his torso down, burying his face in the bedding. His fingers fisted the covers into balls as he held on. Gnashing teeth into the blankets, David lost it again. More than the vibrator-induced orgasm, more than the anonymous against-the-wall blowjobs, more than even his cherished painful memories of his high school love, David lost it and rode a wave of incredible joy he'd never dreamed of before.

Jeremy's body jerked into erratic spasms, fingers drilling into David's hips as he rode David's ass. "Damn. Damn. Damn."

A hot, sweaty body pushed David into the mattress. Jeremy's fur-covered chest itched against David's back, but he couldn't move even if the world were on fire.

Chapter Three

David snuggled into the heat in front of him as his hand flailed for covers for his freezing backside. As wakeful clarity hit, his eyes popped open.

Sprawled on his back, a low, rumbling snore issuing from his parted lips, was Jeremy.

Morning light grayed the day outside the window, but the lamp on the nightstand still illuminated the room. With a sharp inhale, David glanced around for a clock.

Almost six-thirty.

“Damn.” He’d stayed the entire night. In bed with Jeremy.

A small half-buried voice whispered for him to shut up and go back to sleep. The company would run without him for a day. Hell, most of the time these days it ran without him anyway. His company. His father’s company.

His father would be spinning in his grave if he could see his son curled up naked with another man. After a night of... David sighed and shook his head. A night of fucking amazing sex.

He should get up. Instead, his gaze turned to the man sleeping next to him. He hadn’t looked much last night. Didn’t want to see.

Jeremy’s dark hair extended to most of his body. Dark curls covered his well-developed pecs then made a wide trail down his stomach to his groin. A thick, dark bush surrounded Jeremy’s half-erect cock.

Morning wood or good dreams? A smile cracked David’s kiss-chapped lips. Maybe dreams about last night? His smile wilted as he realized where his thoughts were going.

He wasn't supposed to wake up in bed with a man. And definitely not all sappy and tender about the night before. Or to feel arousal curling through his balls from watching a man sleep. Time to go.

David eased away from Jeremy and out from under the little bit of covers over him. The cool morning air shivered down his spine. Teetering on the edge of the bed, he tried to lower his leg to the floor but flailed, off balance.

He hit the floor with a loud thud. "Damn!" The wood was freezing on his naked ass.

"What?" Jeremy sat straight up in the bed with a dazed scowl darkening his face. His hand scrambled for the nightstand then stopped as his darting gaze reached David. "Oh. It's you." Toppling over on the bed, Jeremy pulled the covers up around his neck. "The alarm goes off in half an hour. You might as well come back to bed." With a snuffling half cough, the lower half of his face disappeared under the edge of the blanket. "If you have to stay up, punch the button on the coffee pot. It's not set to go off for another fifteen minutes."

David crawled off the floor then stood naked and freezing, staring at Jeremy. His mind buzzed through the choices Jeremy gave him. The man assumed he was here because he wanted to be and not because he'd passed out.

His bladder made a decision for him. "Bathroom?"

"Down the hall, first door on the left." Jeremy rolled over onto his stomach. "Leave me some hot water. I have to work today."

Snatching his clothes from the floor, David made a hasty escape. Before he hit the bathroom, he darted down the hall to the kitchen and turned on the coffee.

* * * * *

Jeremy waited until the shower started before he stopped feigning sleep. He was pretty sure David had been trying to sneak out. As he was certain David would have never stayed the night if he hadn't been exhausted.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Jeremy glanced around at his normally neat room. Only his clothes remained on the floor. The lube managed to stay on the foot of the bed. The vibrator? Who knew where it was.

The evening had been amazing. Excitement trilled through his veins, brushing off the morning chill. His dick followed his thoughts down the hall to the wet, naked man in his shower. "Why not?"

Snagging the lube and a couple of condoms, Jeremy hurried down the hall. As his hand hit the doorknob, he hesitated. Would David have locked the door? Probably. He tried it anyway. Jeremy grinned as the knob turned under his hand.

The steamy bathroom warmed Jeremy immediately, but the view didn't hurt his temperature. Even clouded with steam and water drops, the clear shower curtain gave a nice view of David's wet body. The soap splattering on the plastic led Jeremy's mind to a different kind of white cream.

"Yeah," he mumbled before raising his voice over the shower. "Gotta pee." He set the lube and condoms on the edge of a shelf over the toilet, within easy reach of the shower.

David's murmur didn't make it over the running water.

"I'll just be a sec." Jeremy took care of morning business as fast as his aroused cock would let him. Now for other morning issues...

Pulling the curtain back a little, Jeremy slipped in behind David. He didn't think the other man realized he had company as he rinsed soap from his hair. Mindful of a possible startle response, Jeremy ran his finger down David's spine.

David jumped as he turned, slipping in the tub.

"Whoa." Jeremy braced his feet then wrapped his arms around the slippery bundle of muscles. Arms caught around Jeremy and held tight. "Can't have you becoming a bathroom injury statistic." As Jeremy held David's weight, he was almost nose to nose with the taller man.

"Uh. Thanks." David caught his feet under him then pulled his weight off Jeremy. His arms stayed wrapped around Jeremy's neck. "Sorry about that."

"My fault. Didn't mean to startle you." Jeremy pecked a kiss on David's nose then released him. "You know the old saying, save water, shower with a friend."

David's cheeks paled then reddened with color. "Yeah. I'm about done anyway."

"Hang on a minute. There's another saying I like." Jeremy ran his hand down David's stomach.

"Yeah?" David's weight shifted back on his feet.

"All work and no play..." Jeremy's fingers wrapped around David's flaccid cock. The flesh began to fill at his touch. "Ah, the joys of youth...empty to full in one point two seconds..."

David took a half step back. "I should get going. Got to work."

"Oh." Disappointment didn't flag Jeremy's interest. "Won't take long. Promise."

David's hips rolled back and forward, following Jeremy's strokes. "I...should..." This time, he moved toward Jeremy instead of back. His hands lighted on Jeremy's shoulders. The tiniest hint of pressure kneaded Jeremy's muscles. "Maybe..."

"Yeah. I can be quick." Jeremy slid his free hand around David's neck, tugging his face lower until their lips met. His tongue pushed past David's hesitance, slipping between closed lips. He teased against the blockade of David's teeth then tugged the lower lip with a tiny bite.

David opened enough for Jeremy to charge forward. His fingers dug into Jeremy's back and his lips nipped at Jeremy's attack.

Milking David's heavy cock, Jeremy's tongue stormed his mouth. Bodies pressed closer together. Jeremy's head tilted back as the taller man stood straighter. A hand cradled the back of Jeremy's neck. Fingers tightened on his nape.

"Oh yeah..." As much as Jeremy loved bondage play, he didn't mind being overwhelmed by superior force once in a while. And right now, he could deal with David's thick dick plundering his ass. "Fuck me."

David stepped back into the stream of water with a sharp exhale of air.

"You don't like to top?" Jeremy asked with a little more irritation than he meant to show. The whole on-again, off-again thing with David's sexuality could get real old.

"Uh, I, uh, only did it once." David blurted the last few words in a rush of breath.

"Didn't you like it?" As Jeremy reached around David for the supplies on the shelf, the younger man flinched.

"Yeah. I guess so."

Jeremy wrapped his arm around David's waist. Rubbing the lube bottle against the crack of David's butt, he nuzzled David's neck. "I loved it last night. Deep in your ass." Inhaling fast through his mouth, Jeremy made a soft whistle. "And you were fucking tight."

"So do it again." David's hands rested on Jeremy's shoulders.

"We could do that." Jeremy reached between them. "Too bad though..." His hand wrapped around David's cock. "You have such a gorgeous cock. Be nice to feel it inside me before you disappear."

"Maybe..."

"Maybe what?" Jeremy met David's gaze. They locked for a few seconds then David lowered his.

Too bad...then again, Jeremy didn't need a fucked-up youngster in his life. Seeing him again was a bad idea.

"Turn around." Jeremy scooted around in a tight circle while his arms guided David toward the end of the tub opposite the spray. "Lean against the wall. Spread-eagle like you see on cop shows."

David was a fantastic sight. Palms against the tile wall, feet spread apart. His ass jutted out as if he really wanted to be fucked.

Better body language than before. Jeremy dealt with the condom first. He didn't have a lot of time to play this morning. He needed to get to work. But no way he was leaving David unfucked. Not with that spread in front of him. A quick fuck and he'd have David drop him back at his car.

A couple of fingers, dripping with lube, pushed the slippery gel deep in David's ass. He quickly stroked lube on his cock. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." David's fingers flexed against the wall as if he needed something to grip.

Not as relaxed as last night, David's body resisted the intrusion.

"Chill out. You need to relax your body." Jeremy pulled away then substituted his fingers." His other hand rubbed the long lines of muscles in David's back. "Calm down. It'll feel as good today as it did last night. Just relax."

The tight muscles clenched around Jeremy's fingers. "Damn, David. I'm not trying to hurt you. Relax!" Jeremy's patience was rapidly drying up. He didn't expect David to be so tense this morning. Hell, he'd practically passed out from orgasm. He had to know Jeremy wouldn't hurt him.

Jeremy sighed as he stilled his fingers. Of course, David wanted to be hurt. "Relax, damn it!" His tone was harsh but David had responded to commands last night.

With a long sigh, the tension in David's back eased. Suddenly, Jeremy's fingers could move without meeting clenching resistance. "Good," Jeremy grunted, keeping his tone gruff and demanding.

When he switched his fingers for his cock, Jeremy slid halfway without a problem. A couple of short strokes and he hit home. His body clamored for more. The tight heat seemed to beckon for a fast, hard fuck. Breathing heavy, he leaned forward, resting the side of his face on David's back. "You okay?"

"Yes."

"Good. 'Cause now I have to fuck you." Jeremy slid back until the edge of his glans tugged at the tight ring of muscle. A long, leisurely stroke back in. Each stroke a little faster, a little harder with Jeremy's grunts accompanying.

"Yes." David's groan was so low Jeremy almost missed it. "Yes." A little louder. His hips pushed back then pulled away.

As Jeremy approached the apex, David met him, stroke for stroke, in brutal blows. Reaching around David, Jeremy wrapped his hand around David's cock. "Go for it. I want to feel you come with my dick in your ass." Pushing and pulling David's flesh through his fist, it didn't take long for Jeremy to get his wish.

A wild howl of agony filled the bathroom. Hot semen spilled over Jeremy's hand. The orgasmic spasms spiraled through David's body then set off Jeremy's climax.

"Oh fuck." David's ass held Jeremy in a vise grip as his dick filled the condom. "Fuck!"

* * * * *

Jeremy smiled at David as the big truck pulled into the club parking lot. At least Jeremy had an idea where to find David if he wanted. Darkness had obscured the logo on the truck last night. This morning, the red *March Construction* was easy enough to see. A testosterone-laden business for a gay man to be in. Maybe one of the reasons David was so jumpy. Then again, the truck would stand out like a sore thumb at a gay club.

"That one." He pointed to the dark sedan he used for work. Jeremy's car was one of four still there. He shouldn't have left the car there all night. His boss would not be happy if it was reported.

Not that Jeremy cared at the moment. He hadn't been so sated in a long time. Too bad he wouldn't get another chance with David.

Already a glaze had fallen over David's brown eyes. His body tensed at the slightest move from Jeremy, even when he pointed out the car.

"Thanks for the lift. Maybe I'll see you again sometime."

David gripped the wheel with both hands. His knuckles whitened.

Shaking his head, Jeremy climbed out of the truck without so much as a handshake. He slammed the heavy door then turned to his car. "Oh well. It was a great night."

The heavy diesel engine clattered toward the exit as Jeremy climbed in his car. Before he pulled the door closed, a sharp, familiar ping rang out in the early morning.

David's truck swerved then gunned forward into a signpost with a loud crash and the screech of broken metal.

Jeremy grabbed his gun out of his back holster. His gaze scanned the area for the source of the gunshot as his heart jumped over David's possible condition. He couldn't see anyone. Snagging his Blackberry from his belt, he called in the incident, requesting backup and an ambulance.

Resisting the urge to run across fifty feet of open space, he started his car. Punching the accelerator, Jeremy screeched across the parking lot then came to rest next to David's truck. With his car blocking the driver's side of the truck, Jeremy scrambled across his passenger seat then climbed out.

Staying low, he reached up for David's door latch. With a quick yank, he twisted up and around until the door protected his back. What a day to wait to put on his vest until he got to the precinct. How was he supposed to know the guy he picked up would be shot at?

"David?"

Blood glazed the side of David's face. Tiny fragments of glass sparkled all over his head and chest. A chest that rose and fell. Jeremy released his breath as his professional side took over.

A single hole in the windshield confirmed the earlier sound. In the pale leather of the backseat, another hole showed where the bullet went. But how much of David did it pass through?

Jeremy's fingers trembled as he tilted David's face toward him. Lots of blood, but it looked as if it all came from a long, grazing wound on the side of David's scalp, about an inch above his temple.

"You were lucky, my young friend." The screaming of police units and the ambulance converged on the club. Jeremy clasped David's hand to his lips for a quick kiss. "But you'll be okay."

* * * * *

Jeremy stood outside the emergency room, waiting for information on David. Good thing he was the cop at the scene, otherwise all the privacy crap would prevent him from knowing anything about David's condition.

"I didn't see anyone, Tony." Jeremy shook his head. "All I know is one minute he's driving away from me, the next his truck is careening into a pole."

Tony Costa from homicide didn't seem to like the answer. "I don't know why anyone would be targeting *him*."

"You know something about David March?"

"I don't think he's too stable." Tony's frown didn't hide a little bit of a flush. "If you're involved with him, maybe you'd be better backing away."

"Well, I'm not involved other than we spent the night together." Jeremy couldn't hide that part so why bother trying.

"I'm just saying..."

"Spill. 'Cause I'm not backing off until I know what happened and why."

Tony took a deep breath. "Okay fine. Do you remember the serial killer targeting young gay men? About a year ago?"

"Yeah, I remember. Turned out to be a woman." Jeremy's brain strained for the name. "March, wasn't it?" As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Jeremy rolled his eyes closed. "Virginia March, wife of David March—March Construction." *No wonder the poor bastard was so fucked-up.* "Wait a minute. Wasn't he involved with..."

This time, Jeremy rolled his eyes to the heavens. "Shit. In a town the size of Memphis, I managed to pick up... Shit!" David's ex-lover was Tony's current. *Lovely. A fuckin' soap opera.*

"I'm just saying be careful. David had issues then. He's bound to be a headcase after his wife was killed and labeled a serial killer because of him." Tony shook his head. "And now somebody's taking potshots at him."

"So are you leading the investigation?" Jeremy had doubts about Tony's impartiality.

"No. Not a homicide. Until someone comes up with proof he's a target, this is labeled a drive-by. All yours." Tony held out his hand. "Just be careful."

Jeremy shook hands with a firm grasp. "I will." His gaze followed Tony through the automatic doors.

"Detective Lawson?"

"Yep. Me." Jeremy twirled around to see a tall young man dressed in scrubs. Why did they all seem so young these days?

"Mr. March is fine. He'll have a pretty bad headache for a while. We bagged the swabs from the injury but I don't think there's anything useful." The doctor flipped a page on his clipboard then back again. "Does he have someone to take him home? I have some aftercare instructions and he should probably have someone stay with him for at least twenty-four hours."

"I'll take them. The instructions." Jeremy didn't know why the words were forming but they just blurted out. "I'm taking him home."

Chapter Four

Keys jangling, David's hand shook as he unlocked his door. The tiny apartment was a total wreck. He hadn't felt like cleaning and his paranoia kept him from hiring another cleaning woman.

Then again, someone had taken a shot at him. Another one. Except he couldn't prove the first. He had been positive he'd heard the pop of gunfire and the thud of it hitting something. But he hadn't stuck around to find where the bullet landed.

All because of the notes.

"You should get some rest. It'll help with the headache." Jeremy's footsteps followed him into the apartment.

"Place is a mess." David's head hurt too much to give a damn if Jeremy saw the pathetic state of his apartment. Or about Jeremy.

How the hell did he manage to pick up a fucking cop? The universe had a strange sense of humor.

"Don't worry about it. I've seen worse. Kitchen?"

David pointed toward the tiny excuse for a kitchen as he turned toward the couch. His bed was piled high with dirty clothes after an aborted attempt to clean a week ago.

A little wince of embarrassment teased through the pain. The kitchen wasn't exactly in great shape either. Beer bottles and pizza boxes along with a sink full of dirty coffee cups would greet Jeremy.

What the fuck...the man's had his dick up my ass. How embarrassing can a dirty house be?

The thought renewed the memory. David's body shivered in spite of his headache. Sinking onto the couch, he blocked the need with another memory. The notes.

The first few just read *fag*. Next came *fudge packer, sodomite, abomination, pedophile...* That one hurt. David would never hurt a child.

The words weren't anything he hadn't been called before. Just not since his father died.

His pounding head reminded him of the last note two weeks ago. *Die!* Then the first shot and now this one. This time, he had to tell the cops—Jeremy—what he knew. "Damn."

"What's wrong?" Jeremy walked around the couch with a glass of water in his hand.

"Hurt. Tired. Guess you have questions." David just wanted to close his eyes and forget everything—his life, his fucked-up marriage and crazy ex-wife, his father, Ryan...and Jeremy. His heart raced a little, pounding blood through his skull and his dick. Forgetting Jeremy would be hard.

David took the water and pills Jeremy offered. Tossing the meds back, he gulped a large swallow of water.

Jeremy reached for the glass as David looked for a spot to set it. "Why don't you go to bed, sleep for a little while? My questions can wait." His fingers lingered on David's when he took the glass.

Relief swept through him at the reprieve. David didn't want to open his life to examination just yet. "I'll crash here." After toeing off his shoes, David twisted around until his body stretched out on the too-short couch, feet propped on the armrest.

"Wouldn't you be more comfortable in bed?"

David shook his head as his eyes closed. "Mess in there too. I'm good here." Sleep tugged the edges of his consciousness toward black. Gentle fingers combed his scalp. "Good..."

* * * * *

The clatter of dishes and the smell of coffee woke David. The dream of a warm body, tender caresses left his cock almost hard, but pounding blood infused pain through his head.

Grabbing the back of the couch, David pulled up until he could see over the couch. The kitchen door revealed only light and noise. He'd have to get up to confirm his suspicions.

"Fuck." Pain ripped through his skull the higher he sat. Jeremy had to be the culprit, so why bother moving?

Because the sounds were suspiciously that of someone cleaning and the noise was threatening to rip his scalp off.

Clawing his way upright, he then twisted around until his feet found the floor.

"What are you doing?" Jeremy asked from behind him.

David let out a long sigh. "Trying to get up."

"To do what?" Jeremy walked into view.

"To see what you're doing."

"You could have just asked. I'm cleaning the kitchen."

David closed his eyes. "Head hurts."

"I'll help you to the bedroom."

"Can't—you already cleaned in there, didn't you?" David rolled his eyes. Even the small action made his head ache.

"Uh-huh." Jeremy held out his hand. "Come on. Get out of those clothes and into clean sheets. You'll rest a lot better."

"Clean sheets?" David accepted Jeremy's help. Strong fingers clasped around his hand then pulled. "Did laundry too? How long was I out?"

"About four hours. Not all the laundry is done but I'm getting there."

"You don't have to do that. Or anything. I know you're only here because you need to ask me some questions. I don't think 'housekeeper' is part of a cop's job description."

"Ah, but you're a little different." Jeremy's arm looped around David's waist. "You're more than just a shooting victim."

A tiny thrill ran through David. *How much more?* "You don't have to clean my house because I...slept with you either."

"I needed something to keep busy. Seemed like the thing to do at the time."

David leaned into the heat of Jeremy's embrace. The room was a little chilly. Or he had a fever. The hospital said to watch for a fever. It could indicate an infection.

Or his body recognized Jeremy as the source of intense pleasure. Even with his head screaming pain on several levels, his dick filled with each step they made toward the bed.

"Here you go."

The covers were pulled back already. His pillows stacked on one side with a towel draped across them. As he sat on the edge of the bed, David ran his hand across the terrycloth material.

When David glanced at him, Jeremy shrugged. "Your bandage could still be leaking. Easier to clean a towel than a pillow. Now let's get you out of these clothes."

Tender hands tugged his sweatshirt over his head, leaving the T-shirt. A quick smile quirked Jeremy's lips as his fingers tugged at the button of David's jeans.

David flushed warm again. His dick bulged behind the zipper.

Carefully, Jeremy opened the fly then proceeded to rid him of everything but his briefs. "Get comfortable then we'll talk."

With a long sigh, David crawled into bed. The smell of clean sheets mixed with the sour mix of stale sweat and something more. Probably blood. Maybe fear. He wished he could take a hot shower but he didn't think he could stand long enough.

"So," Jeremy started as he pulled the covers over David, "know anyone who wants to kill you?"

"Not now. But I guess you already know about my ex-wife."

Jeremy nodded. "I talked to Tony Costa at the hospital."

"How's — he doing?"

"Good, and so is Ryan. I see them once in a while. But Tony was there to give me the rundown on your ex-wife's case. There might be something to tie the two together. Or not." Jeremy eased down on the edge of the bed. "We need to cover all angles. Unless you have some information for us to help things along."

David drew a deep breath then exhaled. "Look on top." He pointed to the dresser across the room. "There should be a yellow envelope there. Notes someone has been leaving me."

With a frown, Jeremy pulled a handkerchief from his back pocket. Using the cloth, he picked up the envelope. "What do the notes say?"

"Each just one word. All...not nice about gays. Or me being gay."

Jeremy squeezed the outside edges of the envelope until the top popped open. "Post-Its?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been getting them? And how? Where?"

"About two months now. They show up everywhere—the office, job sites, my truck, my mailbox downstairs, and one time inside the apartment—on the refrigerator."

"Inside your apartment? Who has access?" Jeremy set the envelope back on the dresser.

"At the time, the building manager and my housekeeper."

Jeremy's face split with a grin. "I'm guessing you don't have a housekeeper anymore."

"No." David's chuckle created ripples of pain in his head. Closing his eyes, he tried to avoid frowning. The gunshot wound snagged the edge of his frown lines. Moving his forehead like that hurt.

"Okay. No more questions. I'll have forensics look at the notes. They'll need to eliminate your fingerprints. Will you let them take them? Or are they on file somewhere?"

David kept his eyes closed, concentrating on relaxing his face. "They can take them."

Gentle fingers caressed the uninjured side of David's face. "Sleep. I'll wake you when they get here. Could be awhile."

"Kay." David couldn't help but obey the low rumble of Jeremy's voice. "I'll be here..."

* * * * *

Jeremy's thoughts couldn't stay away from David's situation. Poor guy was a mess. The file Tony emailed to his Blackberry covered a lot of David's background—a homophobic abusive father and distant mother, both deceased, plus a freaking psycho ex-wife. Now some kind of gay-hating stalker might have taken a potshot at him. The Post-It stalker. Jeremy could just see the newspaper headlines with this one. The rags couldn't make up stuff this weird.

And now Jeremy had a forensic investigator waiting in David's kitchen.

David's eyes twitched under pale lids. His right hand clenched the top of the blanket while his feet shuffled as if he were trying to walk—or run. Probably trying to escape his life, poor bastard.

Jeremy eased down on the edge of the bed. Tapping his fingers on the back of David's fisted hand, he whispered, "David, wake up."

David's hand flipped over. Strong fingers wrapped around Jeremy's wrist. Sharp pain stabbed through Jeremy's arm.

"David!" Reflex made him grab David's hand, fingers pinching into David's wrist, straining to relieve the viselike hold.

"Shit!" David released Jeremy as he bolted up in the bed. "Sorry. I was...dreaming."

"Okay. No harm done." At least he didn't think so. Jeremy rubbed his wrist. "Strong grip."

"Sorry." David cradled his face in his hands. "God, my head hurts."

"Well, I need you awake for a few minutes so we can take your prints."

David nodded with his face still buried. "Fine," he mumbled through his hands. "Whatever."

"It'll be okay." Jeremy ran his fingers through David's hair. "We'll figure this out."

"Yeah. Okay." With a long sigh, David pulled his hands away from his face. "What do I do?" He ducked his head away from Jeremy's hand.

"The technician is waiting in the kitchen."

"Okay. Gotta piss first. Need clothes."

Jeremy stepped away from the bed. Once David was on his feet, Jeremy left him to dress and take care of business. Using a latex glove, Jeremy snagged the envelope full of Post-Its then left the room.

David's body language, hell, even his verbal comments proved he didn't welcome Jeremy here. He knew David tolerated his interference because Jeremy was a cop. Maybe he was too close to the man to handle the case. A one-night stand shouldn't bring on the feelings of tenderness that made Jeremy want to touch and caress. He'd already decided David was too tied up in his own issues to make an equal partner in any relationship.

The short trip to the kitchen didn't leave much time for introspection. Steven White leaned against the counter, staring at the kitchen sink. He'd already laid out the fingerprint kit and a swab, still in its plastic cover, on the table.

"Here's the envelope I mentioned." Jeremy held the evidence up. "I haven't looked inside. As far as I know, Da—Mr. March is the only one who has handled the notes besides the perpetrator."

"Thanks," Steven said. "In here." He pulled out a plastic evidence bag. "We'll check for fingerprints, DNA, any trace substances, but other than the fingerprints, it could be weeks, even months before we have any results."

"I understand."

David shuffled through the door dressed in sweats. His bare feet made Jeremy shudder. The tile floor had to be freezing. "What do you need me to do?"

"Mr. March, I'm Steven White. I'm going to take your fingerprints and a sample of your DNA then I'll be out of your hair." White pulled a chair away from the kitchen table. "You can sit if you'll be more comfortable."

"I'm fine. Just get it over with."

"Yes, sir."

Jeremy stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame. David let White manipulate his fingers for the prints without any resistance. He showed brief hesitation only when White asked him to open his mouth for the DNA swab.

Within a few minutes, White packed his kit, including David's envelope, and made his goodbyes.

After escorting White out, Jeremy returned to the kitchen door. "You should eat something."

"Not hungry." In spite of his words, David opened the refrigerator door. "Damn." He slammed the door then turned to a cabinet. Retrieving a half-empty bottle of whiskey, David didn't bother with a glass. He downed a large swig before Jeremy could stop him.

"You don't need that." Jeremy snatched the bottle. "You're on painkillers and you have a head injury. Are you trying to kill yourself?"

A flush of red tinted David's pale cheek. "Of course not. I wasn't thinking."

"Now you really need food." The kitchen was bare of anything to cook, but Jeremy had found a dozen takeout menus when he cleaned up earlier. Opening the drawer he'd stuffed them in, he continued. "Something to buffer the alcohol as well as the meds."

"I told you I'm not hungry." David stormed out of the kitchen then down the hall. "I also don't need a fucking babysitter. Just get out of here!"

"Not a babysitter. I'm a cop and we still have stuff to talk about." Jeremy followed him down the hall only to have the bedroom door slammed in his face. No sound of a lock clicking though.

The doorknob gave and the door opened. "I'm sorry. I want to find out who is shooting at you, stalking you. How can you live like this? Aren't you afraid of dying?"

"Being dead can't be any worse." David yanked the covers over his head.

Jeremy knew the guy had a fucked-up life, but he couldn't understand David's attitude. "Worse than what?"

"Everything is so fucked-up," David mumbled from under the blankets.

"So fix it. Life's what you make it."

The covers popped off. "I can't. It's not...fixable."

"Then you learn to live with it." Jeremy sat on the bed.

"What if you don't want to?" David's brown eyes glazed with a hint of moisture.

"You just do."

"Well, Officer Know-It-All, you know my story, how do I fix my life? How do I live with the deaths of those men, the ones Virginia killed because of me?"

Jeremy shook his head. "Not your fault. Your wife was unstable."

"Yeah, she snapped when I told her I was gay. She wasn't violent before then."

"The records show she hit you. That was after you told her?"

"Yes." David's fingers tightened around the blanket. "She wasn't like that before."

“Well, I think you’re wrong. People don’t just start killing because of a shock like that. Maybe a heat-of-the-moment killing—if she’d stabbed you during an argument when you first told her. I could see that kind of one-time violence.” Jeremy ran his hand down David’s arm. His hand covered the clenched fist. “But not the serial killings—the signature was textbook mental disorder. Telling her you were gay may have been the trigger, but if it hadn’t been that, it would have been something else at a different time.”

David’s fingers relaxed under Jeremy’s hand. “But those men...they all looked like Ryan. Was Ryan in the end.”

“You stopped her from killing him.”

“And she died.”

“Because she was trying to finish off Ryan.”

David’s gaze darted up then met Jeremy’s. “But if I hadn’t told her—”

“If frogs had wings, they wouldn’t bump their asses when they hop.”

A hint of a smile curved David’s lips.

“Did you ever talk to anyone about all this? A therapist?”

David shook his head as the smile disappeared.

“You need to. The killings weren’t your fault. You couldn’t have known about your ex’s problems.”

“But I could have tried not to be gay.” David tugged his hand away from Jeremy’s touch and turned his face away.

Jeremy couldn’t help his laugh. “Yeah. Right. Like you chose to be gay? It’s not that simple. You’re born that way or you aren’t. You can’t change it any more than those frogs can fly.” Slipping his fingers under David’s chin, he forced David to face him. “And I’m glad you’re gay. Last night was incredible.” Jeremy knew he shouldn’t push the issue but he couldn’t help it. He’d always had a soft spot for strays.

David’s scowl lightened. His breathing slowed to almost nothing. The pulse point in his neck thumped at a rapid pace.

Jeremy locked gazes with David. His slow descent toward David's lips gave David more than enough time to object. Instead, a small flash of pink tongue slipped between David's lips, urging Jeremy to action.

A gentle, sweet press of lips accompanied a light caress of David's cheek. Desire welled up in Jeremy but without the intense urgency of last night—more tenderness than need. A selfish part of Jeremy wanted David to admit he enjoyed what they'd done—the taboo gay sex his upbringing and experience taught him to fear. But it wouldn't be so easy. Jeremy figured nothing would be easy with David and he was a fool to get further involved.

The teasing sweetness deepened as David opened for Jeremy's questing tongue. Soft nips, gentle tongues and almost-not-there caresses kept things at a low simmer.

A gentle feather of fingers teased through Jeremy's sleeve. The touch skittered up his arm to his shoulder. Lightly resting on Jeremy's collarbone, David's nails barely scratched at the material of his shirt.

Jeremy kept his touch light as he ran his hand from David's cheek to his neck. Sliding under the nape, Jeremy's fingers massaged the tense muscles. "You feel good."

A soft moan was David's reply. Fingers tightened on Jeremy's shoulder. A slight tug, real or imagined, pulled Jeremy lower.

Easing onto the bed, Jeremy kept his contact light. His elbow propped him up so his chest caused only a hint of pressure on David's. His other hand kept a grip on David's neck. Massaging hid Jeremy's easy control as he tilted David's face for better access.

"Please..." David breathed the word.

Or Jeremy heard what he wanted to hear. But he wasn't above taking advantage.

Chest to chest, Jeremy's body still angled across the bed, his feet dangled off the side. Putting his weight on both elbows, Jeremy pulled his legs up without rocking the bed. Next, he wiggled his lower half until he sprawled next to David, still maintaining the easy kiss and the light contact.

Jeremy couldn't resist a smile when David's hand moved from Jeremy's shoulder to the back of his neck. Letting David take the lead, Jeremy leaned into the kiss as David pressured him closer.

David's other hand slid along Jeremy's arm from his shoulder to his elbow. Fingers plucked at his sleeve.

Lowering himself, Jeremy let his weight rest on David's chest. Thick clothes didn't obscure the rapid thumping of David's heart. Heat roiled through Jeremy, starting in the pit of his stomach then curling through tightening balls to his cock. His body's angle left his rising interest rubbing against the bed instead of David.

Timid touches fluttered down Jeremy's back, but David's kisses grew hungrier with each nip and lick. "Need—" David's mouth hesitated long enough for the single word. His lips returned with a vengeance and his embrace tightened.

Jeremy took advantage of David's rolling hips and scooted closer. Slipping his leg between David's. With a groan, David clasped his legs around Jeremy's thigh. Frantic rubbing joined the melee of hands and lips.

"Oh God..." David bucked against Jeremy as if convulsing. No rhythm, no finesse. Pure blind passion with nowhere to go.

"Easy, babe. Easy." Jeremy ran his hand down David's side then slipped between their bodies. The loose sweatpants accommodated Jeremy's hand and, much to his surprise, Jeremy didn't have to deal with the barrier of underwear.

Wrapping his fingers around David's length, Jeremy pulled an unhurried stroke from base to tip. "Slow down a little. I want to make it last."

"But I need—"

"I want to suck you." Jeremy should have run when David first yelled at him to leave. A one-night stand Jeremy could handle—not his favorite type of relationship, true—but acceptable. Now he knew too much, felt too much and needed way more than he should.

Guess his momma did raise a fool.

Jeremy slid down David's body. At first, David tugged Jeremy's shirt, pulling him back up, then his hands pushed at Jeremy's shoulders and neck in the age-old signal for "blow me".

Gladly. Jeremy resisted the gentle pressure long enough to stop at David's tight abs. Rucking the shirt up, Jeremy licked and kissed a trail up to the nearest nipple. Sucking alternated with toothy nips.

David rocked into each action with equal enthusiasm. His hands clenched and unclenched on the back of Jeremy's shirt. His hips bounced against Jeremy's stomach, the thick ridge of his cock seeking pressure.

"Nice sensitive nipples. Sweet." Jeremy gave the peaked flesh one last nip. Kissing his way down the thin treasure trail of dark blond fur, Jeremy used his fingers to keep the pressure on David's nipple.

The crown of David's length peeked out of the waist of his sweatpants. Glistening with moisture, Jeremy couldn't resist a quick lick.

David's body jolted upward. His stomach tightened as he gasped for air.

"Oh yeah." Straddling David's knees, Jeremy pulled David's pants down over the thick erection. Jeremy scooted down until he could bury his face between David's thighs. Starting with his balls, tight and high in his scrotum, Jeremy licked until the wrinkled skin was bathed in spit and David's moans filled the room. "Do you have any lube?"

David's body went still, his fists dug into the bedding. "No."

Ah yes, lube might mean he's gay. "No problem." Jeremy rose on all fours. "I won't fuck you without lube. At least not with my cock. Spit will work with my finger."

Almost involuntary against the still-clenched posture, David's hips flexed up.

"You liked being fucked, didn't you?" Jeremy licked his palm then wrapped his hand around David's cock. "Can't say as I blame you. I told you I like a nice thick dick

up my ass.” The heat of David’s cock combined with the friction of Jeremy’s strokes dried out the inadequate lube.

Jeremy slid down until his body trapped one of David’s legs. “Maybe after the investigation is over, I’ll be able to convince you of how much I like it.” He brushed his chin over the leaking tip.

“Awww —” David’s free leg kicked up then wrapped around David’s back.

“Sorry about that. I forget how fast my beard grows.” Jeremy kissed the sensitive skin. “Does that make it all better?”

David’s leg tightened as he used it for leverage. Pressing upward, his dick bounced against Jeremy’s lips.

“Oh, you want me to suck you, eh?”

David’s hips pumped but his teeth clenched over his bottom lip.

“Come on. Just tell me you want me.” Jeremy ran his hand up and down David’s stomach. “Even men like to hear someone say they’re wanted.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

David’s internal battle played across his face in frowns and grimaces. “Yes. I. Want. You.” The words ground out between clenched teeth.

“Good enough.” *For now.* Jeremy couldn’t stop to berate himself for thinking of a future with David. He had cock to suck.

A simple plan. A fast glide down, touch the tip of David’s cock to the back of his throat then back up again. Repeat until David screamed for more. Again. Once more.

David’s fingers tightened on Jeremy’s head. His hands pushed and pulled. Jeremy let him set the pace. Hips flailed, thrust, parry, forward, retreat.

A bitter gush of pre-come followed by another. David wouldn’t last long at this rate.

Jeremy regained control of his head for a few seconds. Long enough to wet his finger with spit.

David's hands and his frustrated grunts voiced disapproval of the timeout. As soon as Jeremy quit resisting, David's body resumed the frantic pace.

Fighting against his gag reflex, Jeremy eased up enough to slip his hand under David's ass. Without warning or preparation, he pushed his finger past the anal muscle then deep into David. With a quick curl and poke, Jeremy nudged David's prostate and it was over.

David's hands cupped Jeremy's skull with almost painful abandon. His body arched, hips jolting up toward the sky. A long cry ripped from his throat. And hot cream gushed down Jeremy's throat. Strong, hard spurts of liquid matched each shake and shiver rampaging through David's body.

Jeremy held fast, taking everything David could give and relishing in the pleasure he brought the sad young man. His own need ached in the tight confines of his jeans. A couple of strokes would be all he needed but David's leg pinned him to the bed.

"Fuck me...please." David's harsh, gasping words nearly sent Jeremy over the edge, no stroking necessary.

"No lube, David. Too painful. Especially as tight as you are."

"I don't care."

Jeremy shouldered free of David's hold. As he climbed up David's body, Jeremy found himself locked in a vise grip of a hug. Arms and legs wrapped around him. Slamming pressure from shoulder to hip almost had Jeremy coming in his jeans. "Not going to happen. I'm not hurting you no matter how much you think you deserve it."

David's hands and body stilled. His legs stopped mid-clench. Breath so shallow. Jeremy wondered if David'd had some kind of stroke. "I don't want you to hurt me."

"Sometimes body language says more than all the words in the English language." Jeremy lifted his head as David's grip eased. "And everything about you reads *punish*

me." Jerking away from David, Jeremy scrambled off the bed. "And now you've found someone willing to put you out of your misery."

David flushed hard, his skin turning dark red under pale skin. His Adam's apple bobbed up and down as he swallowed hard. "I don't want to die."

"Then don't. Live. Act like you want a life. One that someone could—" Jeremy stormed to the window.

"Someone could what?" David whispered.

The hope and desperation were almost too much for Jeremy. David needed help Jeremy couldn't give him. His conscience argued he could give him support while he got that help. Jeremy turned to face his pain-in-the-ass one-night stand. How could he go from trying to get laid to needing someone so impossibly inappropriate? Too young, too needy and with too much fucking baggage.

Jeremy gave in with a sigh. "Someone could share... A life someone could share..."

"With you?" His hope brightened his dark brown eyes to a milk chocolate.

"Maybe. I don't know if it'll work out." Jeremy laughed. "We haven't known each other twenty-four hours yet. You'd think we should know each other at least that long before making long-term plans."

"So we wait a few more hours?" A smile ticked the corner of David's mouth. "I'll find someone to talk to...about...stuff. I promise."

"Yeah, I think we need to agree you have issues to work out and it should be with a professional."

"Agreed." David's smile finally won out. The first full one Jeremy had seen and it was a beautiful sight. As gorgeous as David was, the smile lit up his features, remolding and softening them.

"Damn." Jeremy returned his infectious smile. Taking a long step forward, Jeremy leapt toward the bed. "This is going to be—"

Glass shattered behind him. A cold draft of damp spring wind blew through the broken window.

Jeremy's gaze darted toward the wall. A small hole opposite the window explained the chaos. Jeremy scrambled across the bed away from the window then over the side, dragging his lover with him. "Fuck."

Chapter Five

David shivered against Jeremy's warmth. Even with his bedroom door closed, cold air seeped down the hall and into the kitchen. Or was this the shock everyone expected when shot at? This morning he wouldn't have given a rat's ass for his life. Now only one thing surpassed his desire to live. Jeremy's safety.

Whoever put a bullet through the bedroom window had to think David was standing there. If Jeremy hadn't moved when he did...

His arms tightened around Jeremy's waist. "Are you sure you're okay?" he whispered. David needed to take inventory, check body parts, limbs, skin. Touch everywhere to reassure himself of Jeremy's health.

"Yes. I'm fine, babe." Jeremy wrapped both arms around him. In spite of Jeremy's shorter stature, his arms made David feel safe. "Didn't even get any glass fragments."

Jeremy's Blackberry buzzed on his belt. "Lawson here."

David strained to catch the conversation on the other end but couldn't hear anything.

"Okay. Send them up. I'll answer the door." Jeremy disconnected then hooked the device on his belt. "Forensics is here. Police are canvassing in the direction the shot came from. We should be safe enough for now."

Clinging for a few seconds longer, David released his hold on Jeremy. After all, he couldn't think of a way to stay permanently attached. Yet.

Jeremy pecked a quick kiss on David's lips. "And tonight, we stay at my place. Be back in a few." Then he left the kitchen.

Straddling one of the tall-backed chairs, David crossed his arms over the curved arch then rested his forehead on top. Although he'd slept a good part of the day, his head hurt like hell. Worry added to the wound.

His brain needed to focus. He had to think of who could want him dead. Or even who would say all the hateful things on the Post-Its.

"David?"

He lifted his head. Jeremy's concern creased his forehead and set up a tiny web of lines around his eyes. Then those same lines crinkled when he smiled. "I'm okay. Just tired."

"Tony Costa's here. He wants to question you. Are you up to it?"

"Yeah." Nerves gnawed at his stomach. The idea of facing Ryan's lover wasn't a pleasant one.

"Hello, Mr. March." Tony's tall frame filled the doorway. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired but I'll make it." David held out his hand to shake the detective's but he didn't have the strength to stand.

"We need to find out who has it in for you before he succeeds in killing someone."

David nodded his agreement. "But I don't know who."

"Okay. Let's start at the beginning. Family?"

"Don't have any. My parents are dead. No brothers or sisters. Only cousins live out of state. My wife was an only child. I can't think of anyone who would...because of what happened..." David gave up with the uncomfortable topic. If Tony didn't understand his problem...

"Would your cousins inherit if something happened to you?"

"No." David shook his head. "My partner would get my share of the business."

"In March Construction?"

"Yeah. I ended up cash-strapped a couple of years ago." David lowered his gaze. "Stupid of me. Virginia was putting the heat on about kids. Our...sex life wasn't...well,

I'm gay. Let's just say it was next to impossible. Although I hadn't told her yet, I think she suspected." He drew a deep breath. "She kept demanding more things. Expensive things. Remodeling the house, a boat on the river, a house in the country. I kept giving her what she wanted to shut her up. Things only got worse after I told her."

"Where does the partner come in?"

"After Virginia...died, I realized I was in serious financial trouble. I found a venture capitalist, Sam Tillery, interested in investing money and sold some shares of the company to get out of hock. Of course, neither of us banked on the economy slowing down."

Tony jotted in his notebook. "Is the company in trouble?"

"A little." Embarrassment forced David into nervous motion. Standing, he started pacing the small kitchen. "I've let things go where I shouldn't have. Haven't been keeping up with finding new business. The company isn't failing but it's not doing as well as it should."

"So if you die, Tillery gets the company."

"Yes."

"Do you have any life insurance?"

"A policy attached to my will with stipulations for my burial, payment of my personal debt and the rest of the proceeds going to several charities. Also a business policy. The business itself is the beneficiary. If something happened to me, it replaces my worth with the company."

"How much money are we talking here?" Tony's fingers scribbled fast and furious.

"The personal policy is a million two. The business policy is five million. The amount of Sam's investment."

"And the charities on your personal policy?"

"Uh, the Red Cross, the University of Tennessee Alumni Association and," David's gaze darted between Jeremy and Tony, "the Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center."

Jeremy smiled at the last one but Tony didn't react.

"So right now your business partner is in the running for prime suspect."

"Why would Sam want me dead?"

"He has five million reasons. Do you have his address?" Tony jotted the information down then snapped his book shut. "Thank you for your help."

"Oh wait." David ran his hand through his hair. "I forgot. I think someone took a shot at me a couple of weeks ago."

"What?" Jeremy and Tony echoed each other.

"Why didn't you report it?" Tony continued.

"I...I wasn't sure." David caught Jeremy's raised eyebrows. He couldn't fool his lover, but he didn't have to tell Tony how close he was to suicidal. "At a job site near I-240. The foreman had reported problems with deliveries and I wanted to talk to him. By the time I got there, everyone had gone."

"I-240 and where?" Tony jotted down the address. "And why do you think someone shot at you?"

"The popping noise of the gun and the sound of something hitting somewhere behind me. I didn't stay to look around."

"Why'd you get there so late?"

"The foreman said he'd still be there. The next day, when I asked, he told me something came up and he had to leave. Just forgot to call me."

"And what's his name?"

"Edgar Mason. I don't know his address but I have it at the office if you need it."

"I'll contact you if necessary. Thank you for the information." Shouldering his way past Jeremy, Tony suddenly stopped. Turning around, he paused then said, "Ryan says hi."

David smiled. "Tell him I said hi back." The gnawing pain of eight years seemed to dull a little with the words.

With a curt nod, first to David then Jeremy, Tony did an about-face then left.

Ryan had gotten on with his life and now it was time David did too. David turned his gaze to Jeremy. Maybe with Jeremy, he could.

"We need to get you some clothes." Jeremy returned his smile. "Pack a few changes at least. Forensics can lock up after we've gone."

"What about the window?"

"I have someone on the way over to board it up until we can get it fixed."

"We can get it fixed?"

"Yeah." Jeremy snaked an arm around David's waist then tugged him close. "No promises except *we* will see how this works."

"Sounds good."

* * * * *

David followed Jeremy into the apartment building. Tension vibrated through every nerve in his body. The trip from his place to here had taken an hour longer than it should. To make sure no one followed them, Jeremy traveled back alleys and through streets David hadn't realized existed.

As they stepped into the elevator, David exhaled his first deep breath since his bedroom window shattered. David slipped his arms around Jeremy's waist. Leaning his head on Jeremy's shoulder, he soaked up his lover's warmth.

"How do you feel?" Jeremy's hands gripped David's wrists, pulling his arms tighter.

"Tired."

"I mean your head."

"Hurts." David kept forgetting his headache was the result of a bullet wound. His life was so fucked-up in general, headaches were a normal occurrence.

"You need to rest some. I'll bring you something to drink and your pain meds."

"Lie down with me?" David kissed Jeremy's temple.

Jeremy turned his head until his lips caught David's in a soft, short kiss. "Yeah. Sounds good."

"And we can finish what we started earlier." Circling the shell of Jeremy's ear with his tongue, David paused to whisper, "You have lube."

The elevator doors rattled open. Reluctantly, David released his hold on Jeremy then turned. He caught a shadow moving outside the elevator then a man appeared. A ski mask obscured his face.

"So they were right about you. You are a fucking fag."

"What do you want?" For a split second David focused on the words until his gaze caught the gun. His heart raced as he spread his arms wide and took a step back.

The man gripped the weapon in his right hand while his left held the elevator door open. "You dead. I didn't believe them, you know. Didn't want to do it."

"Then don't." David kept his body between the gunman and Jeremy.

Jeremy whispered behind him, "Keep him talking."

The man's voice was familiar but David's brain couldn't come up with a name.

"But I have to. Your daddy would be so ashamed of you. He'd be spinning in his grave." The gun motioned David out of the elevator.

"But he wouldn't. My dad knew about me. Always did. And he didn't try to hurt me." David wished the lie were true but he couldn't think of anything else to say. "You know he would have if he'd disapproved."

"No." His hand wavered a little. The gun barrel shifted to the side then back. "He couldn't have known. You were married." The man seemed to know a lot more about David than he should. David wasn't very open with people. Too much to hide.

With the door open too long, the elevator buzzer sounded. The gunman jumped at the noise then motioned again. "Get out of there. And your sissy boyfriend too."

David eased forward, his hands in the air. Because of Jeremy, David knew he wasn't ready to die, but he refused to let anything happen to his lover. "I'm coming. It's me you want, not him. So let him go."

"Two fags for the price of one? Hell, if I do it right, I can kill you both with one bullet."

As David approached the door, Jeremy shoved him hard, slamming him against the opposite wall containing the row of floor buttons. The panel gave David some cover as gunshots rang through the tiny space. "Jeremy!"

"I'm okay." Jeremy stood just outside the elevator over the unconscious body of his assailant. The other man's gun dangled from Jeremy's left hand. "You did great." Jeremy winked at David. Holstering his own weapon, Jeremy pulled his Blackberry off his belt. "Now we'll find out what this is all about."

A long sigh eased the trembling threatening to consume David. "Good." His throat was raw, as if he'd yelled. A serious case of dry mouth set in.

Jeremy leaned over then yanked the ski mask off the gunman's face.

"Edgar?"

"You know him?" Jeremy tossed the ski mask aside.

"Edgar Mason. He's one of my job site foremen. The one I went to meet a couple of weeks ago when I thought someone shot at me. He worked for my father. I've known him since I was a kid. I can't believe he'd want to kill me."

"We should know the entire story soon enough."

* * * * *

Jeremy kept a close eye on David. Mason was gone, transported to the hospital without regaining consciousness but expected to recover.

David held a coffee mug tight but Jeremy saw his hands tremble several times. Once he almost dropped the cup. Several times, David had grasped the hard edge of the counter or the table until he forced the shaking to stop.

"Jeremy?" Tony's voice rang through the tiny apartment.

"In here. Kitchen."

The tall dark-haired detective strode into the room. "You okay? Everyone okay?"

"Yep." Jeremy reached out to David, rubbing his hand on his shoulder. "David handled the situation like a pro. He kept Mason talking until I had a chance to disable him."

"Good job," Tony said. "I talked to Sam Tillery. Seemed to be clueless, but when I received the call about Mason, he looked a little green around the gills. As soon as Mason is awake, we'll get some answers. I'd bet half my pension Tillery put Mason up to the shootings. Seems Mason had issues with gays before. Probably wouldn't have taken much to goad him into something rash. We'll be keeping an eye on Tillery until Mason is awake and able to answer questions."

A shiver ran through David, transmitting through Jeremy's hand.

Jeremy caught his gaze then smiled. "Things will be okay now."

With a sharp gasp of breath, David nodded, although his frown made him appear doubtful.

"It will be okay." Jeremy wrapped his arms around David's waist. "You'll see."

David's trembling increased with a hint of rattling teeth. He nodded then buried his face in Jeremy's neck.

"Maybe he should go to the hospital."

Tony's suggestion wrought a mumbled "No" out of David. "I'll be okay." His arms tightened around Jeremy.

"It's okay. We'll be fine here." Jeremy ran his hand up and down David's back. "Why don't you go take a hot bath? It'll help calm you."

"I'm fine."

"Hey," Jeremy pulled away then tilted David's face up with a tug of his chin, "you've been through a traumatic experience. More than one. Sometimes there's a delayed reaction. If you won't go to the hospital, then at least do as I ask." He pecked a quick kiss on David's set lips. "I do have some experience with this. Trust me."

David nodded and his frown eased. "Hot bath?"

"Yeah."

With a half-stumbling gait, David left the kitchen.

"You sure he'll be okay?" Tony's doubt bled through his tone. "I mean the guy's been shot and then nearly shot again all in one day, plus stalked for months. And he's not exactly stable to begin with."

"He's stronger than you think. Just needed a little redirection. And maybe someone to believe in him."

Tony chuckled. "And that would be you."

"Why not?"

"He's a little young, isn't he?"

"Excuse me?" Jeremy propped his fists on his hips. "And what's the age difference between you and Ryan?"

"That's different." Tony winked, a grin lighting his face. "Ryan *acts* older than I am."

"We'll be okay." Jeremy slapped Tony on the shoulder. "Do you need anything else?"

"Not tonight. I'll need him to come down to the station for a formal statement but that can wait until tomorrow."

"Thanks for everything. Tell Ryan hi."

Tony shook his hand with a firm, lingering grip. "I will. He'll be happy to know David's in your capable hands."

* * * * *

David sank as far as he could into the hot water. Bathtubs weren't made for grown men. His knees popped out of the water. The steam-heated air didn't stave off a shiver of goose bumps on his skin. His chest rose and fell above the waterline with each breath. But he had to admit the water felt good. His trembling finally faded and his racing heart had slowed to a more normal beat.

With a long, deep sigh, David forced his aching muscles to relax. Of course, not all his aches and pains came from the tension of his encounter with Mason. A smile crept across his mouth.

Jeremy was a big reason for some of his well-stretched muscles. Some more than others.

A flush of shame pushed into his thoughts but he shoved them away. His father was wrong. "Get out of my mind, you miserable old bastard," he whispered. "Leave me to my life."

His father was dead. The hateful old man died three years ago, reluctantly leaving David the business. In spite of David's marriage and his model-son behavior for years, his old man never acted as if he bought the farce. Maybe Dad was smarter than David. Maybe he knew what Jeremy claimed—being gay was something a person was, not something chosen.

Even then, his dad couldn't accept him for what he was. Life would have been so different. Shaking his head, he refused to live in the past anymore. Different might have

meant Ryan in his life, or not. And, for now at least, he had Jeremy. Maybe this was the way things were supposed to work out.

A soft tap on the door announced Jeremy before the door creaked open. Cool air rushed in, teasing David's exposed skin into more goose bumps.

"Feeling better?"

David nodded and returned Jeremy's smile. "Except you're letting the cold air in."

Darting around the door, Jeremy then closed it behind him. "Sorry."

"Tony gone?" David dipped lower in the tub, letting the water's heat warm his chest and nipples. The water sloshed close to the top of the bathtub.

"Yeah. Everyone's gone for now. We'll need to go down to the precinct and give a formal statement tomorrow."

The idea renewed his nervousness. "What will I have to say?"

"Just the truth about all the incidents."

"Even about you?" The idea of outing his lover startled him.

Jeremy nodded. "I'm not hiding anything."

"People you work with know you're gay?"

"I don't broadcast but I don't hide either."

David sat up straighter in the bath. "How do you do that? Go around knowing people are thinking about...about what you do?"

"Who says people even think twice about my sex life?" Jeremy ran his fingers through David's damp hair. "Do you go around looking at straight people and think about their sex lives?"

"Well, no."

"So why should they worry about what—or who—I do in my bed?"

David chuckled as he leaned into Jeremy's hand. "I guess it makes sense."

"Why don't we go try some stuff in my bed?" Jeremy leaned over David.

Light kisses fluttered along David's forehead then trailed down the bridge of his nose. After a quick peck on the tip, Jeremy planted a hard kiss on David's mouth.

David slid his hand around Jeremy's neck, tugging him closer for a fuller kiss.

A yelp from Jeremy ended with a splash as he landed in the bath on top of David. Water flooded over the side of the tub as his body settled between David's open thighs.

Fear jolted through David for a split second. He'd fucked-up again. His father's nagging voice replayed in his head—*loser, good for nothing*. Then Jeremy's laughter drove away the fear and the memory.

Hard kisses chased away residual doubt. Chuckles and giggles kept the kisses from delving too deep. Strong hands held David's head between them.

"I could get real accustomed to having you around." Jeremy's thumb ran across David's lower lip.

"I think I'd like that." David suckled the tip of Jeremy's thumb. "A lot."

"But we need to get out of the bathtub. The water's getting a little cold and I definitely don't want any shrinkage involved right now."

* * * * *

David dried off quickly then tossed the towel on the floor. Running it under his feet, he mopped up more water.

Jeremy's clothes and several already-drenched towels occupied the now-empty tub.

The door swung open a crack then Jeremy handed in a bathrobe. "Here put this on. I just turned the thermostat up but the apartment's still a little chilly."

After donning the thick robe, David leaned over, snagging the wet towel before tossing it in with the rest.

Jeremy opened the door wider. He grabbed several clean towels from a shelf then spread them over the floor. "That'll do for now. Most of it's up." Winking at David, he continued. "Besides, I have some interesting ideas on how to warm up."

The warmth of his look sent heat flowing through David. "Sounds fascinating."

"Come on." Jeremy held out his hand.

With his fingers twined with Jeremy's, David braved the colder temperature of the apartment. Following Jeremy's lead, he ran to the bedroom. The covers were already turned down.

Jeremy shook David's hand free then shed his robe almost at a dead run. Laughing, Jeremy leapt onto the bed. He scrambled under the covers but held up one side, waiting for David.

Dropping his robe on the floor next to Jeremy's, David followed his lover into the bed. The chill of the room against David's damp skin did little damage to the rising heat of desire. Cold sheets drove him against Jeremy's warm body.

Jeremy tossed the covers over their heads.

Strong arms enveloped David, one under his neck, the other over his waist. The body heat and warm breath cocooned them in a dimly lit hidden world. Just the two of them armed against the real world.

David flushed a little at the fanciful train of thought. But there was a kernel of truth there. Twenty-four hours ago, David would never have dreamed of curling next to a naked man. Wouldn't have let himself enjoy the gentle kisses fluttering against his mouth.

"I..." David didn't know what he wanted to say. One day was far too soon for declarations of love. He chuckled at the clichéd idea of flowers and hearts and fireworks.

"What?" Jeremy slid his leg over David's, tangling them together. His full erection pushing against David's stomach.

"I don't know what I want to say." David ran his fingers down Jeremy's face. "Thank you?" He shrugged a little.

"No need for thanks. The police part is my job. The other part, my pleasure."

"But we could end it now." David held his breath as soon as the words left his mouth.

Jeremy nodded. "We could. If you want to. I know I don't."

Releasing a sigh, David leaned his forehead against Jeremy's. "I don't want to."

"Look." Jeremy tugged David's chin until their gazes met. "I don't believe in love at first sight. Or even love at first fuck. But I do feel something for you. Maybe something that can grow into more."

"I feel something too."

"Gratitude? Lust? Relief? All of the above?"

"Maybe." David pulled away from Jeremy's penetrating gaze.

"Whatever it is, we'll figure it out. But whatever you do, don't ever let gratitude keep you in my bed. You'll find yourself resenting me real fast that way and that's not what I want."

"What do you want?" David's heart jumped into his throat.

"I want to see what we can make of this strange beginning." Jeremy pressed a soft kiss on David's temple. "If things work out, great. If they don't, I want to walk away friends."

"Friends. That would be nice. More...would be better."

"Then we're agreed. We'll take it a day at a time and see where we go."

David's throat closed with an emotion he had trouble identifying. Instead of trying to speak, he nodded then leaned in for a kiss.

The gentle melding of lips eased into deeper probing by tongues. Arms tightened and legs clenched, fusing bodies together. Jeremy's thigh pushed higher until hard muscle pressed against David's balls.

Gasping, David pushed his cock into the warmth of Jeremy's lower stomach. Jeremy's flesh bumped against David's. The fleeting sensation wasn't enough. A hard push sent Jeremy rolling over, David's body followed.

Once on top, David rolled his hips. A jolt of desire shocked David as his body took control. Hard thrusts against taut muscle and a rigid erection. More. He needed more.

His arm wrapped under Jeremy's back then up to cradle his neck. Chests tight and mouths fused, David gasped into the warmth of Jeremy's kisses. More urgent and frantic, David undulated against his lover's skin.

Jeremy's words from this morning whispered in his mind. *Fuck me*. Between the idea and the current reality of Jeremy's body against his, David lost what little control he had left.

"Fuck..." Warm come spurted between them. Slick, sliding flesh eased the amazing friction. David's body jerked with pulses of bliss.

"Oh babe...so close..." Jeremy's whisper spurred David into action.

Sliding his hand between them, David wrapped his fingers around Jeremy's cock. Lubed by come, the hard flesh slid through his fist with easy strokes.

"Oh yeah..." Jeremy's breathless words encouraged David.

Faster, tighter strokes.

Jeremy's hands captured David's face then pulled him down until lips met. Hard kisses accompanied the splash of warm come.

"Oh yeah..." Jeremy's legs wrapped around David's, tangling their bodies in a hard embrace. "Damn, you feel good, babe."

David's throat tightened at Jeremy's endearment. The whispers of his father's voice wouldn't go away overnight, but Jeremy's words helped wash away the shame.

A whole new life to replace the pathetic state he'd lived in for so long. The future suddenly seemed like a journey David could handle.

* * * * *

David followed Jeremy into the small dimly lit room next to the interrogation room. Visible through a two-way mirror, Tony paced the tiny area between the mirror and a table. David's business partner Sam Tillery sat on the opposite side of the table. Sam's

face was pale. His hands rested on the table with fingers laced together. His white-knuckled grip gave evidence to the man's nervousness. A file folder with corners of papers sticking out along the edge sat on the opposite side of the table.

"What are we doing here?" David whispered to Jeremy.

"No need to whisper. He can't hear you. Can't see you either." Jeremy glared at Sam, his forehead creased with a deep frown. "When I called earlier, Tony told me Mason was awake and pointing fingers at Tillery. I want to hear what he has to say."

David's brain had trouble with the idea of Sam trying to kill him. The man had been nothing but friendly and helpful when David approached him about investing in March Construction. He couldn't process the reason why Sam would have turned on him.

Curiosity brushed away his thoughts as he concentrated on Tony's words.

Tony stopped pacing, coming to a stop in front of Sam. "Mason said you paid him to kill David March."

"I had nothing to do with it." Sam's throat worked hard around a swallow.

"Why would he lie?" Tony rested his fisted hands on the table, knuckles down.

"I don't know...because you promised him a deal? I had nothing to do with any of this."

Straightening, Tony took a deep breath. "See, I believe Mason. You want to know why?"

Sam's jaw ticked with clenched teeth but he didn't answer. He stared at the mirror in a way that made David think he could see him. In spite of feeling foolish, David inched over until he stood behind Jeremy.

Tossing a knowing smile over his shoulder, Jeremy reached back for David's hand. His fingers laced through David's then Jeremy pulled David's arm around his waist.

Moving a little closer, David took comfort in Jeremy's presence.

Tony flipped open the file folder. "Know what this is?"

Without looking at the paper, Sam shook his head.

"Your financial records. Seems you have a bit of a financial crisis of your own." Tony dropped the piece of paper in front of Sam. "I'm guessing all the ATM withdrawals at the casinos in Tunica have something to do with your money difficulties. Not to mention all the bank withdrawals for cash you made in the last year at four and five thousand a pop. Killing March would fix a lot of your problems."

Sam's face flushed bright red. "You have no right—"

"Oh but I do. Once your friend Mason spilled his guts, it was easy to get a search warrant for your house, office and finances." Tony turned the empty chair around then straddled it with his arms folded across the chair back. "I also talked to March's former housekeeper. She picked you out of a photo array as the man who paid her two thousand dollars to put a Post-It note on March's refrigerator."

Tony pulled the envelope David had given Jeremy out of the folder. Holding it upside down, the Post-Its fell onto the table.

"And you know what else? The sticky stuff on these things holds fingerprints really well. For the most part, you were pretty careful but one of these had a partial print on it that matches yours. So now do you have anything you'd like to say?"

Sam let out a long breath. "I didn't want to do it. He was so close to suicidal I thought the notes would send him over the edge. No one would have questioned it. But it was taking too long. I had loans coming due. I had no choice." Leaning over the table, Sam rested his forehead on his hands. "You don't understand. I was going to be ruined."

"So that justifies taking March's life?"

Sam's head popped up. "I would lose my business—my reputation!"

"I think going to jail is going to take care of that quite nicely."

With a loud groan, Sam cradled his face in his hands.

Tony stood then faced the mirror. After a quick wink, he walked over to the interrogation room door. A uniformed police officer waited on the other side.

"Take him down for booking."

David leaned against Jeremy's back. His cheek rested against Jeremy's head. "So that's it?"

"Yep. The confession was recorded and the evidence is ironclad. If he pleads guilty at his arraignment, we won't even have to have a trial."

"Why would he plead anything else after confessing?" David allowed a sense of relief to unwind the knots in his stomach.

"If his lawyer thinks the interview or evidence is tainted, he could try to get the case thrown out. Or he might try some kind of mental defense."

"You mean like he's crazy." David snorted a short laugh. "That one might work. He has to be nuts to have hired such a bad shot as Mason. You'd think he would have at least found someone who could shoot straight."

Jeremy bellowed a long laugh as he turned around. "Don't give the defense any ideas. Tillery hasn't got any money for his own lawyer. With all the evidence against him, I don't think a public defender would be interested in dragging everything out. Probably will be looking for a deal on sentencing."

Wrapped in Jeremy's tight hug, David couldn't see who opened the door behind him. Panic made him push Jeremy away. Jeremy's slight frown and confused look sent a thread of guilt through him. Jeremy had done so much for him. But the idea of someone seeing them hug... David wasn't ready for the world to know his business.

"Well, that's that," Tony said from behind David.

"So what do I have to do?" David turned around to face him.

Tony shrugged. "Not much if it doesn't go to trial. Your statement will be enough. Of course, if it does go to court, you'll have to testify."

"I'll have to talk about being gay, won't I?" A chill of fear rushed through him.

"Probably. Because of the notes he sent." Tony reached out, resting his hand on David's shoulder. "But it's really not that hard to live with. Especially when there's

someone worth coming out for." Tony's gaze darted to Jeremy then back. With a saucy wink, he withdrew his hand. "I'll be in touch."

"Thank you." David kept his gaze locked on the man as he left the room. Tony hadn't been out when his lover Ryan had been abducted last year. David guessed from his words that had changed.

Was Jeremy worth people knowing about him? David glanced over his shoulder.

Jeremy leaned against the mirror, his arms folded across his chest.

"I'm sorry." David moved closer. "I guess it'll take some getting used to—being completely out and all."

"Babe, I don't expect you to skip down Main Street hand in hand with me. Being out is more about being comfortable with yourself. I know you have a ways to go on that."

"I looked up some shrinks this morning in the phone book." David ran his fingers down Jeremy's jaw. "Not sure how to pick one."

"You want me to check with the department psychiatrist? He might have some recommendations."

"Yes. That would be good." David couldn't resist looking over his shoulder at the open door. With a sheepish grin, he leaned in for a fast kiss. "Thank you for everything."

"You're welcome." Jeremy wrapped him in a fast hug. "Let's get out of here."

"Yeah."

Chapter Six

After three months of therapy and with Jeremy's help, David was coming to terms with being gay. Life had been different since Sam's arrest. His breath caught in his chest but more from anticipation of the outcome of today's proceedings.

David sat in the far back of the courtroom as he watched Tillery's sentencing. Jeremy had been right—as he was about so many things—Tillery's attorney went for a deal instead of a trial.

Embezzlement and theft were added to the charge of attempted murder. The additional investigation was the reason three months had passed since Sam's arrest. Sam had dipped into other client funds to feed his gambling habit. His attorney managed to get everything under the same umbrella so Sam's sentence was one term of ten to fifteen years.

As part of the plea agreement, Sam had to tell the court everything he had done. His voice was a droning monotone as he listed his crimes, most of which had nothing to do with David's case.

David's presence wasn't required but he needed to be here to put this chapter of his life to rest.

"As to the charge of attempted murder?" the judge asked.

"I tried to drive David March, one of my business partners, to suicide with a series of notes bashing him as gay. He was so ashamed of being gay, it should have worked but it was taking too long. Because of the severity of my financial situation, I couldn't wait any longer. I hired Edgar Mason to take care of him."

"Take care of him?" The judge's eyebrows lifted as he tilted his head.

"Kill him." Sam's voice was tight. His words leapt out as if all his anger were behind them. "Okay. To kill him."

"Thank you. Why Edgar Mason?"

"The man was as homophobic as they come. I didn't think it would take much to incite him to murder. Promising him money was almost an afterthought."

David shook his head. He thought he'd weaned the company of all the bigots. He didn't care what their prejudices were, David didn't allow it in his company. To think he had a foreman who managed to hide his hate for so long scared David. Who else was waiting to be the next time bomb?

"How much money did you promise him?" The judge was making notes.

"Five thousand once the job was done and the news had died down. I told him as the sole owner of March Construction, I'd give him the money as a bonus. No one would be the wiser."

"Very well. I think we've covered all the terms of the plea bargain. While I find this to be bordering on a hate crime—inciting someone to kill because of the man's sexual preference—the state of Tennessee doesn't recognize it as such. I'd very much like to throw the maximum sentence at you plus a few more. Since I can't, Mr. Tillery, as per the agreement between you and the district attorney's office, I sentence you to a term of no less than ten years and no more than fifteen to begin immediately. Court is adjourned for lunch. Next case meet back here at one-thirty." The judge rapped his wooden gavel before he rose.

David jumped to his feet as everyone else did. The whole proceeding seemed so anti-climactic. That part of his life was over. And so was the hiding.

Darting into the aisle before the crowd rushed out, David slipped out of the courthouse. Early summer had bloomed. The air was fresh and clean from rain last night. David dodged around a shallow puddle as he headed toward the parking lot.

The weight of the world seemed to have slid off his shoulders. For the first time in his life, David was happy. And right now he was almost giddy. The urge to laugh kept bursting through. If he weren't afraid of people staring...

"Fuck what people think," he mumbled under his breath. The laugh started low in his belly, rising through his chest. Insane chuckles mixed with low guffaws.

Picking up his pace, David raced to his truck. As soon as he climbed inside, he dialed Jeremy's cell phone. He continued to laugh—almost giggle—as he waited through four rings and then the voice mail kicked in.

"Damn..." Again he waited until the mailbox beeped. "Jeremy, Tillery's gone. I went to the sentencing." A slight laugh escaped. David gulped back more. "I wanted to know if you'd meet me at my place for lunch. I have some interesting ideas about what to feed you."

Between his psychiatrist and Jeremy, and now with Tillery gone for good, David's life was so different. He still had issues about being gay. Not exactly standing on rooftops shouting about his sexuality. But he also wasn't shrinking from Jeremy's touch in public. Well, not all the time.

David drove toward home with a much lighter view of the world. Jeremy was responsible for everything good in his life. A frown interrupted David's good mood. Several times lately David questioned his feelings for Jeremy. His lover had told him from the beginning to not let gratitude keep him in Jeremy's bed. David was pretty sure he wasn't still with Jeremy out of misguided emotions. Except one emotion kept rearing its head and David wasn't sure what to do with it.

As he rounded the corner onto the street he lived on, David saw Jeremy's dark sedan parked near the apartment building.

"Yes!" David hadn't seen him in a couple of days because of Jeremy's schedule. A series of burglaries had kept Jeremy busy. David's body ached for the familiar touch, but he also missed just having him around. Which led him back to his emotional attachment. His shrink said he needed to talk to Jeremy, wade through the baggage still weighing David down.

David pulled into an open parking spot. He barely had the truck shut off before he jumped out of the cab. Jeremy's car door opened as David approached and Jeremy climbed out.

"So what's the interesting lunch you plan to feed me?" Jeremy's wide grin made David feel as if he were coming home.

"You'll have to come upstairs and see." Without thinking, David wrapped his arms around his lover. A hard kiss of welcome was returned with matching ferocity.

"Well, if this is what a couple of days' abstinence does to you, I'd hate to see what would happen if we were apart longer." Jeremy's eyes crinkled as he grinned up at David.

"Oh!" David released his hold on Jeremy. "Sorry. I forgot." He glanced around to see if anyone noticed.

A woman walked down the sidewalk toward them but she just smiled. A couple across the street walked arm in arm at a lazy pace. They didn't seem to notice.

"I'm not sorry." Jeremy's hands slid off David's hips. "I liked it."

David took a deep breath then held out his hand to Jeremy. The warm, calloused palm met his. Thick fingers laced through David's. "Come on." David tugged at their joined hands, pulling him toward the building.

As they walked through the lobby, David kept his hold on Jeremy's hand. Although he hoped his lover didn't notice the sweaty palm. The simple contact had David's blood rushing south. Desire swept through him with amazing heat.

As soon as they boarded the elevator, David pushed Jeremy against the wall. By the time the doors closed, David's tongue was ravaging Jeremy's mouth. "Need you..." The words slipped out between hard, deep kisses.

"You got me." Jeremy's hands ran up and down David's back. His body pushed forward into David's. The ridge of his erection bulged at the front of his dark jeans. "So what are you planning for lunch?"

Emboldened by the strange buzz, David pulled Jeremy's face close to his, cheek to cheek. David whispered in Jeremy's ear, "I'm going to fuck you."

Jeremy gasped for air and his hands clenched on David's hips. "Oh yeah!"

Although Jeremy hinted a lot and sometimes came right out and asked, David hadn't found the courage to top. Until now. Pushing aside memories of his first and only time with Ryan, David tried to wash his mental slate clean. Ryan was gone, a cherished memory wrapped in a shameful past. Jeremy was David's future.

When the elevator doors parted, Jeremy pushed David backward toward the opening. One of David's neighbors stood to one side as David tugged Jeremy past her toward the apartment.

"Hello, Mrs. Edelson." David didn't let go of his lover as he stuck his free hand in the door to hold it for the old woman.

"Thank you, David." No look of disgust, no recoiling in shock. The woman was in her seventies. "Wish I'd known you were gay. My grandson needs a fine young man like you to straighten him out."

David cracked a wide grin. "Sorry, Mrs. Edelson. I'm already taken." Releasing the door, David laughed as they closed.

Jeremy joined him laughing as he tugged David down the hall. "You better tell her to keep her grandson away from you. You're all mine."

"Really?" David paused in front of his apartment door, his keys in his hand. "All yours. Does that mean you're all mine?"

"If you want it that way." Jeremy's smile faded a little and his eyes grew serious.

"I do want it that way." David wrapped his arms around Jeremy. "I only want you. Always."

"Aren't you kind of young to be making that decision? I'm the only man you've ever dated. Shouldn't you check out the selection before you decide on an old man like me?"

"Nope. And you're not old. I...I just want you." David ducked his head toward Jeremy's for a fast kiss. With a hard hug, David whispered in Jeremy's ear, "I...love you."

Jeremy's hands rubbed up and down David's back. With a long sigh, Jeremy relaxed into David's embrace. "I guess it's just you and me then." Jeremy tilted his head up. "'Cause I love you too."

"Yes!" David hugged Jeremy tight, almost picking him up off his feet.

"Maybe we should go inside now?"

"Oh yeah..." Reluctantly, David released his lover so he could unlock the door. As soon as the door opened, Jeremy pushed David through the opening. "Are you a little impatient?"

"Yes." Jeremy kicked the door shut then kept pushing David down the hall. "I've waited months for this. Longer if you count the fact I hadn't been with anyone in months when I met you."

David picked up his pace then sprinted the last few steps to the bedroom.

Jeremy followed right behind him. With his shirt unbuttoned somewhat, Jeremy pulled the garment over his head. His gun and holster followed. Jeremy tucked the weapon in the top drawer of David's dresser. The white T-shirt underneath followed fast. "What are you waiting for?" Jeremy asked as he toed off his shoes. "Unlike you, I'm not self-employed. I only have an hour for lunch." Jeremy yanked his pants and underwear down together then kicked them off his feet. His fully erect cock bobbed up and down.

With an evil smile, David asked, "Should we wait then? Until you have more time?"

"No." Jeremy tugged at David's shirt. "Now get undressed before I have to shoot you."

David laughed but obeyed. As he pulled off his clothes, Jeremy pulled a condom and a bottle of lube out of the nightstand.

With his stash in hand, Jeremy plopped down in the middle of the bed on his back with his legs bent at the knee and spread wide. "Come on now. Let's not take all day." He patted the bed beside him.

David crawled over Jeremy then lowered his weight on his lover. "Can I take you like this? Where I can see your face?"

"Yeah. Oh hell yeah." Jeremy pulled David's head down until their lips met.

Hard, wet kisses, full of teeth and tongue, sent chills of desire coursing through David. For a while now, David had wanted to reverse their positions. The idea of Jeremy's ass clenched around his cock made daydreams and nights without Jeremy almost impossible to survive. Last night, David couldn't think of anything else. In spite of a serious case of blue balls, David refused to jerk off. Most of the time he avoided masturbating. Waiting for Jeremy built up an amazing anticipation.

Now David was so close to the edge, he wasn't sure he'd last long enough to get his cock in Jeremy. Pulling away from the tempting pressure between their bodies, David grabbed the lube.

"Need to do this now or I'll end up coming before I want to."

Jeremy stuffed one hand under his head and looked up at David. "Pretty horny, eh?" His other hand tugged the crown of his cock. He shifted his legs a little farther apart, giving David full access.

"I haven't seen you in days. Of course I'm horny." David spread the cool gel over his fingers. As many times as he'd been on the receiving end of Jeremy's cock, David should have the mechanics down. Even so, fear added to the thrill of desire. He didn't want to hurt Jeremy but he really wanted to fuck him.

Tossing the lube down next to him, David leaned forward. His fingers teased the crack of Jeremy's ass. Not an unusual thing. David had played with Jeremy's ass, even penetrated with fingers while he sucked him.

David slid his finger under Jeremy's heavy balls. Pressing against the perineum, David watched Jeremy's reaction.

His eyes closed and his mouth open, Jeremy breathed a deep sigh.

Moving his finger down lower, David circled the puckered flesh around the anal muscle with a slow, easy touch.

"Oh yeah..." Jeremy's soft whisper made David smile.

One finger, just to the first knuckle, pushed inside. Jeremy had his own ideas about the pace of their lovemaking. With a sharp shove, David's finger slid in completely.

"I'm not a fragile flower here. Just get on with it." Jeremy set a fast pace by pushing his hips toward David. "I want to be fucked sometime before I die."

"Not funny. But I get your point." David matched the rhythm set by Jeremy. After several strokes, David lined a second finger up with the first.

As both fingers plunged into Jeremy's ass, Jeremy moaned. His hand slid up and down his cock, pre-come lubricating the slid and stroke. "Good enough. Let's get to the main course."

David wanted to argue. Jeremy never fucked him with so little preparation.

"Trust me. I know what I'm doing. You don't."

Nodding, David pulled away. Grabbing a condom and the lube, David prepped himself. His dick ached with need and each touch tempted him to come but he held back. Jeremy had asked David to top many times but he always held back. As if doing that with anyone other than Ryan would be wrong. But today David felt as if he'd put his past behind him. Even Ryan didn't hold a place close to his heart anymore. Just a cherished memory. Jeremy claimed all of David's heart now.

David pulled one of Jeremy's legs up until his calf pressed against David's chest. Using his other hand, he guided his cock against Jeremy's ass. "Ready?"

"Oh yeah." Jeremy took a deep breath as he nodded to David. When David pushed, Jeremy exhaled. A long, deep sigh and Jeremy's body relaxed. David's cock slid halfway into tight, molten heat.

"Fuck!" David resisted the urge to slam home.

"Keep going..." Jeremy repeated his deep breathing and David's length slid in completely.

"Oh damn. You're so tight." The almost viselike grip of Jeremy's body was nearly too much to handle.

"Fuck now. Before you lose it." Jeremy emphasized his words by rocking his hips.

David's cock rode the short strokes without coming. "Okay." Withdrawing slightly, David pushed in again.

"More." Jeremy pulled back at the same time David did.

Almost sliding free and unwilling to lose the incredible heat, David plunged a little harder than he'd planned.

"Yes!" The shout from Jeremy startled David. "More like that."

David pushed Jeremy's other leg up toward Jeremy's chest. With his fingers digging into Jeremy's thigh, David reared back then rammed home. The grunts of pleasure and encouragement from Jeremy kept him moving. Long, hard strokes into tight heat had David too close to the edge. If he didn't back off, slow down, he'd be finished.

Jeremy's fingers curled into the bedding. His body was tense, muscles bulging as he met David's strokes. With his mouth open, jaw slack and eyes closed, Jeremy groaned each time David slammed into him.

"Jeremy...gonna come." David couldn't stop the rising need. His body tightened as the spiraling heat swirled through his balls. He took one hand off Jeremy's thigh then reached for Jeremy's leaking cock. He lost the rhythm of his strokes.

"Don't. I'll do it. Keep going." Jeremy's hand slid down his stomach until his fist wrapped around his cock. Jeremy matched David stroke for stroke, hard and fast.

"Coming!" David's body tightened, muscles complaining of overuse threatened to cramp. Even the threat of pain didn't diminish the ecstasy flowing through David's body.

"Yes!" Jeremy's joyful shout accompanied an intense tightness on David's cock.

Unable to do more than jerk his hips, David welcomed the sensation. His hand moved down then wrapped around Jeremy's. Together, they pulled long, slow strokes until Jeremy's cock was empty.

David leaned forward, letting Jeremy's leg slide down his arm until Jeremy wrapped his leg around David's thigh. Dipping lower, David met Jeremy's mouth in a languid kiss.

"You okay?" Jeremy whispered.

"Oh yeah. You?"

"Uh-huh."

"I missed you the last couple of nights." David didn't want to interfere with Jeremy's work but he hated not seeing him. Even if all Jeremy could spare was a couple of hours, it was better than nothing.

Jeremy ran his hand up and down David's sweaty back. "I know of a way where you'd get to see me every night. No matter how late I get off work."

"Really. Live together?"

"If you want to." Jeremy's gaze scanned David's face as if looking for a reaction.

"I think I'd like that idea."

"Really?" Jeremy's lips split in a wide grin. "Not too soon?"

"No, even my shrink doesn't object to the idea."

"So you talked about it?"

“Yes,” David whispered. “And he thinks I’m ready to work on a committed relationship.”

“Good.” Jeremy pulled David down for another long kiss.

David relaxed into his lover’s arms. Life was good. Living life was even better.

About the Author

By day, Shayla Kersten is a mild-mannered accountant. By night, she's a writer of sexy romances. Torn between genres, Shayla writes erotic stories about hot heroes and their sexy women as well as hot men and their passionate heroes.

A native of Arkansas, Shayla spent four years in the Army as a missile specialist, stationed in Germany and Oklahoma. After her enlistment was up, she spent eleven years in New York City taking a bite out of the Big Apple. Even her love of theatre and the nightlife of the big city couldn't cure terminal homesickness for the Natural State. In 1995 she returned to her roots in Arkansas.

Shayla now divides her time between her mother, her spoiled-rotten dogs, her dratted day job and her obsession – writing. And no, her mother doesn't know what she writes. That's between Shayla, her dogs and her readers!

Shayla welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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