



## **As Good As It Gets**

*A Torquere Press Single Shot by Zoe Nichols*

### *Chapter One*

All he wanted was ice cream.

Rick Moore pushed open the door to Gil's and listened to the tinkle of the bell announcing his visit. Inside, blissfully cool air conditioning blew away the sweat he'd accumulated in the short walk from his bar to the ice cream shop.

The Texas summer sun could be one mean sonovabitch.

He weaved his way through the smattering of tables, headed straight for the long line. In his faded jeans, sleeveless black shirt and battered Stetson, he was feeling about as cool as you could get in this damn weather but the ice cream would make everything downright chilly.

Rick crossed his arms as he stood in line, already fantasizing about that first spoonful of Rocky Road ice cream. *Ah, man, that was paradise right there*, he thought, licking his lips. Nothing could top it, outside of an ice-cold beer and a warm, willing man. Unfortunately, he still had five people to wait through and one woman had three grouchy, sweaty kids.

Rick sighed, shoving his hat back and ruffling his hair. It was going to be a long wait. He let his gaze wander through the place, checking out the red and white '50s style booths and chairs and the matching checkered floor. A long L-shaped display case took up most of the space and Rick leaned against it, tapping a finger against the cool Plexiglass that protected and displayed the buckets of ice cream. He could see his ice cream clearly and his mouth watered.

God, he'd sell his favorite hat for just one damn scoop. One crisp, melt-in-your-mouth spoonful...

"Hello, welcome to Gil's ice cream parlor," a sweet male voice chirped, pulling him from his thoughts. Rick blinked and looked around. When had he gotten to the front of the line?

"Sir? Can I get you something?" Rick finally glanced towards the owner of the voice and felt his groin tighten on cue. Oh yes, he almost purred. You can give me *something* all right. The speaker was slender as reed, pale-skinned and couldn't have been past the age of twenty with a mop of dark brown hair and leaf-green eyes. On his red polo was a tag reading "Devon."

The kid was so fresh-faced, he was shining like a newly minted penny.

Still, those green eyes drew Rick in and, bracing a hand on the pale red plastic counter, he smiled into them, his muscles tightening when those eyes suddenly grew a little uncertain and warm. Oh yeah, he was feeling it too, that bite of chemistry that was warming him despite the chill in the air. "I'd like a sugar cone of Rocky Road," he drawled and before the boy could blink, he dragged his finger along Devon's pert nose. "Double scoop."

Devon jerked backward, flushing. His mouth reminded Rick of the classic Cupid's bow, plump, pink and pouty. Before, he'd craved ice cream. Now Rick found himself lusting for a taste of that sweet mouth.

"Ri-Right away, sir. One moment," Devon mumbled and Rick admired the boy's surprisingly efficient movements even as he shamelessly eyed the slender body. Devon moved to the counter behind him, pulling out a big cone before walking over to the display case, pushing and holding it open with his arm as his slender fingers wielded the ice cream scoop and molded two large balls of Rocky Road onto the cone, patting it down with enough skill to tell him Devon wasn't as new as he looked.

Finally, Devon brought the loaded cone over to him, wrapping it in a small checkered napkin before handing it over. Rick deliberately shifting his fingers so he brushed Devon's as he accepted the cone. Devon flushed again, his hands visibly trembling as he worked the register, stammering out a total.

Rick pulled a large bill from his pocket, feeling just a little guilty for teasing the kid. Hell, he had the look of a virgin, the reactions of an innocent. It was just plain mean to flirt. But *damn*, he liked the look of that mouth. When the kid processed his bill and held out his change, Rick again adjusted his reach so that his fingers caressed Devon's open palm.

He barely caught his change from Devon's shaking hand. "Sorry," the boy whispered. "I can't control it. Please stop looking at me like that."

Rick couldn't resist the predatory grin that stretched his mouth. "Like what?"

Devon's Adam's apple bobbed. "Like you want to eat me up."

Hmm, not a bad idea.

Rick pocketed his change. Too bad the kid was way too green for his taste.

"Don't give me ideas, green eyes." He winked as the boy flushed again and left the shop before he said something *too* bad. He licked at his already melting ice cream. He'd lost the taste for it, in all honesty, but he'd eat it in memory of the boy wonder back in the shop.

And the mouth that looked tastier than any scoop of Rocky Road.

*Damn.*

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Devon Walker stretched out the kinks in his back as he stepped inside his apartment. God, his back and his feet were killing him. These eight hour days were a real drag, even if he got to work all day surrounded by some of the best ice cream in all of Texas. It was hell on his stomach to resist sampling but he loved serving it, loved seeing the happy looks that brightened up his customers' faces, especially now, during the summer.

The Texas summer sun could be one mean sonovabitch.

But it brought in customers trying to escape the heat. Speaking of hot, his brain brought *him* back to his mind for the umpteenth time. Mr. Tall, Dark and Handsome who'd flustered him so badly; he was still amazed he hadn't dropped the ice cream all over the place. With all that potent cowboy maleness focused on him, his mind had been complete mush.

He was proud of himself for managing as well as he did. And the looks that man had given him! Devon shivered, his cock straining his jeans as the picture formed clear as crystal. Those wicked blue eyes, running over him in frank appreciation and his hard mouth quirked with a predator's intent.

He'd never been more turned on to be considered someone's prey. Too bad he'd probably never see the guy again. *Story of my life*, he thought. Devon sighed, rubbing his face as he walked

straight down the hall to his bedroom. He toed off his shoes and was preparing to tumble headfirst into bed when the phone rang from the living room. Devon narrowed an eye on his watch.

Midnight. He'd closed the store at eleven-thirty and the half-hour drive had pretty much drained him. He only wanted sleep.

*So help me God*, he thought grumpily, mourning the sleep he would miss for work tomorrow, *someone better be dying*.

Devon walked back into the living room, the phone's squawking instantly becoming that much more irritating. By the time he reached for the cordless, he had a bitch of a headache and the promise of impossibly bloody death on his tongue.

He yanked the phone to his ear. "Hello?" he growled. Loud, rambunctious country music shot through the earpiece a minute after he spoke, aggravating his head to no end. He heard laughter and talking combining with it, making it a mesh of noise he was about to hang up on when he made out a familiar voice.

"Dev! Dev! Babe, are you there?" a female voice shouted, and Devon bit back a scowl. Why was she calling? No, scratch that, he knew *why* she was calling. There was only one reason his twin sister ever called: she was in trouble. Again.

"What do you want, Denise?" he said resignedly, leaning against the counter.

"Aw, don't sound so down! I swear this is a good call," she said cheerfully, her voice still raised over the music.

"No calls after midnight are good, Denise," he said, yawning involuntarily. "Now tell me what mess you've gotten yourself into this time."

Despite the noise that filled every bit of silence between them, he could still hear her tragic sigh. "You never trust me, baby brother. I'm not in trouble this time, I swear it. In fact, I'm getting married!"

The shock turned his knees into liquid and Devon found himself sliding to the floor. "You're what? When? To who? Why?"

She squealed. "I know you'd be thrilled!"

Well, he was certainly surprised, but thrilled? Not likely, not with Denise's track record with men. He was probably some forty-year-old gigolo who'd knocked her up. Devon could just imagine how the proceedings would go: baby shower, wedding, birth, baptism, divorce, custody battle.

All within, say, two months?

Devon sighed. "Denise, I'm happy for you, but why are you--" She cut off his brotherly spiel with another squeal.

"Oh, I know! I'm so excited, he's such a dreamboat. You've got to come meet him."

He groaned in immediate protest but her pouting pleas meant he'd never hear the end of it if he didn't. Especially because it was only matter of time before his mother got on him about it... Jesus, Mom!

"Denise, does Mom know yet?" he demanded, cutting through her begging. If she knew about it, it was only a matter of time before he was ass-deep in wedding cake books and bridesmaid gowns... God, what if someone made him help with the designing? Gay did not automatically mean *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. Not that anyone in his family seemed to believe him when he said it.

Her surprise was clear as day. "Of course not, are you kidding? She'd be all over me, trying to take over the wedding plans." He could just picture her chin thrusting into the air, a sign of battle readiness. "It's *my* wedding. I get to make all the decisions!"

Then smoothly, she crooned, "Which means you can't tell her either. You know how she is about being kept in the dark. If you rat me out, she'll be just as mad at you as she will be with me."

Devon groaned, knowing she spoke the truth. "You're such a bitch sometimes, Denise." The insult didn't faze her in the least. She actually giggled.

"But you love me! So, are you coming down to meet my beloved hubby-to-be or not?" Devon dropped his head onto the countertop, banging against it oh-so-gently. He should have never answered the phone tonight.

Hell, he should have never come home tonight. He should have hunted down the cowboy... Oh, but fantasies were just that. Fantasies.

"Do I have a choice?"

Denise giggled. "Of course not, silly! Okay, we're at the Honky Tonk, right off of Benson. That's pretty close to you, isn't it?" He wasn't the least bit fooled by her innocent tone. Wasn't it just like Denise to want to drag him out in the middle of the night? If he had enough sense, he'd just tell her no. But of course he wouldn't.

His mother would beat the shit out of him if he did. "Yeah," he said reluctantly. "It's close. But, damn, Denise, can't I meet him at some other time? Like... like over breakfast?" He snapped his fingers, inspired. "Yeah, that's it; I'll treat you guys to breakfast. I know this great place off of Tudor and Ross."

He wasn't even finished pitching his idea when Denise protested. "No, now's perfect! Come on, what have you got to do? Sleep? You can sleep when you're dead, baby brother! Live a little!"

Devon took a deep breath to keep from yelling at her about the consequences of having a steady job and the pressures of life in general but he'd have been wasting his breath. Denise didn't want to know about anything remotely resembling maturity and responsibility and she never would. It was a fact of life and he'd long since accepted it.

Didn't mean he didn't want to wring her blasé neck sometimes. "Fine. I'll come now. Just know I'm not staying long. That music's pissing me off and I'm not even there yet."

She squealed again. The sound made a nerve beneath his eye twitch and he pressed his finger against it, briefly closing his eyes.

"Oh, thank you, Dev! You won't regret it, I swear! I'll see you here, kisses!" The phone went dead and Devon realized his ears were faintly humming.

The music had nearly deafened him and already he had a sour taste in his mouth. Sleep was now officially out of the question. He'd be lucky to get home before five with the way Denise liked to party. He'd be a zombie at work. Devon hung up the phone and, dragging his feet, he went to put his shoes back on. He still wore his work clothes and shrugged it off. Denise would either take or leave it.

The things he did for family. Damn it!

## *Chapter Two*

Behind the bar, Rick was having a ball. Fridays were always packed to the rafters and today was no different. The jukebox in the corner hadn't stopped playing since the first group arrived, and every space possible was crammed with cowboys and girls chatting and dancing. He turned, catching someone's signal for a refill and as he grabbed a new glass, he spotted his blond trainee, Sean, heading his way.

Fixing the drink and sliding it down the scuffed bar, he took two more orders before Sean reached him, sliding behind the bar. "Hey, boss," he shouted cheerfully. The music was deafening and even this close, they had to yell. "This crowd's unbelievable, man!"

Rick chuckled, his hands busy with two shots of bourbon and a bottle of beer. He slid them their correct directions and wiped his brow. "Yeah, you'll see a lot of these, especially on Fridays." He sent his gaze tracking through the crowd, doing a quick check for the occasional underage stowaway and brewing fights.

Then his gaze snagged on a very familiar face, and his entire body responded, tightening and swelling in excitement. Well, hell. What was the boy wonder doing in here? He watched Devon move fluidly through the crowd, the scowl on his face surprisingly cute. Rick noted the ripple of reaction through the masses and felt something annoyingly close to jealousy nip at him.

The hell with them, he'd seen the kid first! Rick grabbed Sean's collar as he bustled by, one eye on Devon's progress through the crowd. It didn't matter if Devon looked too young to be in the bar, he'd officially stepped into Rick's territory, which meant he could be as naughty as he wanted to be.

And he planned on being *very* naughty. "Sean, watch the bar. I'm going to take a closer look at the crowd. People are looking a little riled." More like horny, but he'd be damned before he directed another man's gaze to Devon.

Looking faintly pale but determined, Sean nodded and Rick remembered this was only his third time handling the bar. And he wasn't going to be there to supervise. Devon suddenly turned sharply left, going deeper into the bar as Rick's friend and second in command, Davis Hathaway walked by, doubling for a waiter.

Problem solved. "Davis!" The dark-haired young man turned his way, eyebrows lifting. Rick pointed to the bar and then Sean. Davis nodded and headed that way while Rick patted Sean's shoulder. "Davis will help you. Don't poison anyone," he chuckled and vaulted over the bar, to the loud approval of a nearby group of dancers.

He winked and quickly made his way in the direction Devon had gone. The lights were dimmer in this part of the bar and cluttered with booths. Taking up most of the space was a dance floor currently cluttered with bodies gyrating to what sounded like "Honky Tonk Badonkadonk."

Rick grinned after eyeing a few of the dancers. There were a few examples of ‘badonkadonk’ on the floor that had no doubt inspired the song. He shook his head and turned his gaze on the booths, hoping to spot Devon’s pale face. As he looked, he felt a twinge of annoyance. What was he doing? Stalking some kid around a bar? Had he become that hard up for tail that he was willing to play hunter for it?

He shook his head again, this time at himself. Nah, that wasn’t why. He was just hooked on that candy-sweet mouth. Once he got a taste of it, he’d stop fantasizing about it. Like he had... all damn day. It wasn’t right for a man to get hooked on something like that. It was worse when the man walked around half hard because of it. Rick groaned inwardly.

Okay so maybe he was a *little* hard up. But all he had to do was get a hold of Dev... what in the hell was he doing with a woman? Rick came to a complete stop next to a booth and narrowed his gaze on Devon. The little brat was in a middle booth next to a speaker and looking real cozy between a chattering woman in a shocking pink dress and a solemn faced man in black that had to be closer to Rick’s age than the other two people. Hm, now this was a problem. He didn’t look like the type of guy into the Daddy scene, so Rick had no problem dismissing the other man.

That left the giggly, chattering woman who squeezed and petted Devon’s arm, obviously very close to him. Acid jealousy burned through Rick, surprising him enough to make him take a second look into his interests. Whoa now, there was no reason to get riled up over a boy. A beautiful boy, yes, but a boy nonetheless. Make that a possibly *straight* boy.

But if he was straight, what had all those blushes meant?

The woman leaned forward to kiss Devon’s cheek, and Rick found his legs moving towards their booth, forcing carelessly through the dancers until he was standing at the edge of their table and smiling into Devon’s startled eyes. "How you folks doin’ tonight?" he drawled.

The woman smiled, revealing perfect white teeth. He’d never been a woman beater but she was wrapped around Devon and that made Rick’s hand itch. "We’re doing great!" at the same time Devon stammered, his blush bright enough to see even in the dim lights.

"What are *you* doing here?"

Rick had the feeling his smile was predatory. Oh yes, the boy was definitely batting for his team. "This is my bar," he answered and held out his hand as a challenge. "And we never did get properly introduced. Rick Moore."

Devon used his free hand, disappointing Rick greatly. Rick’d wanted to see him pry the princess off of him. "Devon Walker," he said, his slim hand sliding gingerly into Rick’s bigger, rougher grasp. Electricity immediately surged up Rick’s arm and his jeans were suddenly in danger of unmanning him for life. Christ! Devon tried to take his hand back and Rick automatically held on, savoring the sensation.

If shaking the kid's hand almost killed him, what would the sex be like? Staring down at Devon, Rick knew he'd do just about anything to find out. "And who are your friends?" he purred, without as much as a glance at either of them. A part of him was shaking its head in disbelief. He was staking his claim in the most public way he could and he had the feeling it was partly because the human vine on Devon's arm.

Which was ridiculous. Rick didn't have a possessive bone in his body. Or so he'd thought.

Devon's fingers wiggled helplessly in his grasp. "M-My friends?" Devon shook his head. "Ah, this is my sister, Denise and her fiancé... um, I'm sorry," he said to the other man. "But you haven't told me your name yet."

"Malcolm Wright," the man said in a surprisingly deep voice. Rick glanced at him finally and barely kept from doing a double take. The man wore a severely formal black suit and what looked like a real white silk tie. With his preppy hair cut and unsmiling features, Rick would bet his hat the man was a lawyer. He had that soul-sucker look to him.

Denise giggled, hugging her brother's arm. "Oh, isn't this fun! Me, my love, my favorite twin ever and his man!" Both Devon and Malcolm looked horrified.

Rick had to smile. "We're not dating," he said, watching Devon's shoulder slump in relief. "But we're going to get to know each other *real* well, so don't count me out yet."

Devon managed to cough and groan at the same time. "I don't get a say in this?"

"Nope."

The boy blinked owlishly, his soft mouth forming an 'O' of surprise. Rick reigned in the urge to kiss it. There'd be plenty of time for that, he thought, feeling magnanimous now that he knew Devon was unattached and playing for the right team.

Denise finally released Devon only to bounce in her seat. Her dark hair, cut in a fluid bob, bounced with her, revealing glittery pink diamonds in her ears. "Wow, I like him, Dev." She nudged Devon, who only closed his eyes, shaking his head. She smiled up at Rick, oozing giddy charm. He was struck with the similarities then. They had the same bone structure, noses and mouths, the same big green eyes. He wondered how he'd missed it before.

And he wondered if Malcolm was as obsessed with Denise's mouth as Rick was with Devon's.

She shimmied in her seat. "So assertive and powerful." Her green eyes, as shiny as Devon's tracked all over him in frank study. She licked her lips. "Yum, power is *so* sexy, don't you guys agree?"

Malcolm grunted while Devon flushed, his eyes flying open. "Denise, stop, you're embarrassing... Rick."

Rick hid a smile at Devon's hesitation to use his name. *Can't keep me at a distance if you know my name*, he thought triumphantly, sliding his hands into his pockets. "I'm not embarrassed at all, Devon," he said with an innocent smile. "Denise is just being friendly, right?"

He winked at her and was pleasantly surprised when she winked right back. Ah, an ally already. "Friendly as can be."

Malcolm gave him a sour look then, obviously annoyed at their interaction. Rick almost rolled his eyes. What was such a vivacious girl doing with a stick in the mud? The music changed, sliding into the upbeat bump and bounce of "Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy." Could there be a more perfect song?

It was just natural to hold out his hand. "Devon. Come dance with me." He didn't bother to hide his intentions when he smiled. Devon's eyes went wide while Denise squealed.

"What a great idea! Let's all go dance!" She shot out of her seat, bouncing on a pair of platform heels the same color as her dress. "Come on, you slow pokes, let's go, let's go!"

Malcolm came out of his seat stiffly while Devon slid around the other side, both of them wearing frowns. "Denise, I'm not a very good dancer," Malcolm said but his fiancée was grabbing his hand and pulling him towards the floor even as he voiced the mild protest, leaving Rick with Devon.

He didn't waste any time in backing the man up against the table. Devon's hands came up immediately, bracing against his chest. "What're you doing?" he hissed. "I thought you wanted to dance?"

Rick dropped his hands to the tabletop, effectively trapping the smaller man. "Ever heard of the mating dance?" he said cheerfully and when Devon's mouth dropped open in shock, Rick gave into temptation, fitting his mouth to Devon's in one swoop. He demanded entrance, running his tongue along the seam of Devon's lips until, with a surrendering moan, Devon opened for him. His tongue dove in, drowning in the hot taste of Devon. It was better than Rocky Road, better even than an ice cold beer.

It was heaven. Rick plundered, sucking on Devon's tongue until the man kissed him back, his hands reaching up to pull Rick's hair, knocking his hat clean off. Purring at the tug of pain, Rick cupped Devon's ass and pulled him in closer, shoving a leg in between the other man's and pulling him closer until they lined up perfectly, cock to cock. Devon rubbed against Rick like a cat, his teeth sinking down onto Rick's bottom lip.

Rick tore his mouth away to groan, his hands kneading the firm cheeks in his palms. Devon's mouth never stopped moving, sucking on his lip, licking his cheek, nibbling on his throat. Rick couldn't remember the last time he'd held such a willing bundle of man. He bent his head to Devon's ear, suckling the lobe and delighting in Devon's hard shudder. "Come home with me," he whispered when he released it. "Tell me yes."

Devon panted, his slim body vibrating against him and making it impossible for him not to thrust, grinding his cock against Devon, his hands squeezing Devon's ass.

"I don't... I don't usually do this," Devon finally answered, speaking through kiss-swollen lips. Rick couldn't resist nibbling on it again, earning a long moan. "Jesus," Devon panted when Rick gave him room to breathe.

"Doesn't matter. I've done nothing but think about you and your sexy mouth all day. Come home with me, Devon. Besides, you heard the song," he said, trying to induce a shred of humor to keep Devon from realizing just how desperate he was feeling.

"Save a horse, baby," Rick drawled, releasing one cheek to cup Devon between his legs, his thumb running against the bulge there. "Ride me."

Devon shuddered, eyes closing, his slim hips pushing against Rick's hand. Against his fingers, he felt scorched from the heat all but radiating from Devon. God, he could imagine it already. Devon was so slim; he'd be tight as a virgin. Rick shuddered and knew there was no way he was letting him go tonight. His concentration was shot anyway; he'd be useless for the rest of the night, fantasizing about Devon's lethal mouth.

The man in question finally opened his eyes. "Okay," he said slowly, sounding partially unsure, partially lustful. Rick chose to focus on the lust part. "When can we leave?"

Rick set him down on his feet, his mind racing to think of everything he needed to do before he could leave the bar. Devon's gaze was still liquid with heat and made it hard to concentrate. It also made him desperately horny.

*Come on Rick, think!* Uh... Davis closed up shop with him before, he'd put the man in charge and then get while the gettin' was good.

"Give me an hour and I'll come back for you," he said, backing away when his hands began to tingle. "Will you be here?" He bent to grab his hat, dusting it off before putting it back on his head.

Devon nodded and nibbled on his lip then gasped when Rick, literally hurting just from watching, cupped his cock through his jeans and shifted it, trying to find a comfortable spot.

"Did you have to do that in front of me?" he said breathlessly, his eyes trained on Rick's zipper.

He gave Devon a sultry smile. "You wanna take care of it for me right here?" he taunted, smile widening when Devon flushed tomato red. "I didn't think so. Well, until you're able to help me out, I've got to do something to keep me acceptable for mixed company." He was turning to leave when Denise and Malcolm came back, both flushed from exertion.

Hm, sweaty and red, Malcolm almost looked human. Weird. "Ah, looks like things got a little hot over here too," Denise sang, skipping over to them, her cheeks flushed a pretty pink. "Found something better to do with my brother than dance, Rick?"

He couldn't keep from smiling at her. She was an infectious girl, he'd give her that. "Nope, just a different dance, Denise," he chuckled before winking at Devon. "An hour, don't forget it."

The other man nodded while his sister's eyes sharpened with curiosity. Her fiancé looked on with a faint frown. "Hm? Are you guys headed somewhere?"

Devon cleared his throat. "Yeah. Don't worry; we'll still get to hang out."

Denise smirked and Rick chuckled as he waved his goodbyes, his mind already on his escape. Now, all he had to do was get enough done to make that hour a reality.

He swung around the corner and vaulted over the bar again. "Davis! I need you to do me a favor, man..."

### *Chapter Three*

An hour turned into three and Devon was so pumped full of nerves, he was shaking as he waited for Rick in the empty bar, the music long since shut off. Denise had made it worse before she'd left for home, cooing over Rick's body and his bar. "Keep this one, baby bro," she'd squealed while Malcolm had looked on, silent as ever. "He'll take care of you for life. In bed *and* out!"

Malcolm had even stirred himself enough to pat his shoulder awkwardly. They were still getting to know each other but he'd appreciated the gesture from the stoic man. He seemed solid, exactly what his flighty sister needed. "Be safe, please," he'd said. "Your sister would be distraught if anything happened to you."

And those words had reminded him, more than anything else, that Rick was a stranger. Granted, he was a hot stranger who had crawled inside his mouth and branded him with an out of this world kiss... but a stranger. What was he doing? Devon came to his feet, propelled by nerves and had managed one step when Rick suddenly appeared, pulling on a warm-looking black jacket.

"Devon, I'm so sorry," he said, tugging off his hat to run a hand through his hair. "It turned into hell right when I was going to take off and we needed all hands."

Devon nodded rapidly even as his gaze strayed back to the glistening ruffled strands. His fingers twitched and all he could think about was running his fingers through them again. "It's okay. I, um, I managed to entertain myself while you were gone."

"Mm," Rick murmured, his gaze running around the room. "Sister and her fiancé took off, huh?"

"Yeah, I was only supposed to meet Malcolm and approve of him," he shrugged, not in the least bit concerned about his twin. "I'll probably be called in when she really starts planning the wedding."

Rick's face suddenly broke into a lazy smile. "I'd love to see you in a tux," he crooned, stalking towards him in long strides. "All fancied up." He paused only inches away, his heat engulfing Devon and sending goose bumps skittering down his spine. His fingers glided over Devon's cheek to his chin. "Are you ready to leave?"

As much as he'd ever be. "Yeah," he whispered. "Let's go."

Rick's hand ghosted down until he caught Devon's. He flushed but let Rick keep his hand and pull him out of the bar, waving to the two men with wash rags behind the bar. "Yo, don't forget to lock up and return the keys to me in the morning, Davis."

The dark-haired man nodded, eyeing their clasped hands. Devon tried to pull away but Rick held him firmly. "No prob, boss," Davis smirked. "Have a good night."

Rick saluted the blond. "Did good today, Sean. Keep it up."

The man grinned widely. "Thanks, boss!"

Rick waved again as he pulled Devon out into the night, shutting the door behind him. There weren't many cars out and Rick was quick to point out the big black pickup truck that screamed masculinity parked, ironically, only a short distance away, from Devon's Jeep. "There's my ride."

Devon admired its clean lines and gleaming color beneath a streetlight as they approached but his brain focused on the warmth surrounding his hand and the flustered feeling it inspired kept him quiet as they walked. Doubts began rattling through his head again and when Rick released him to fish his keys out of his pocket, they washed over him and he started to back up, wondering if he'd completely lost his mind. He didn't do one night stands. He'd never had, what was he thinking?

He only made it half a step before Rick turned, grabbing Devon's hand and whipping him around to pin him against the truck, capturing his mouth in the same fluid gesture. Devon melted on contact, his doubts unable to withstand the rushing heat as Rick shoved his tongue inside, a warm, welcome invader that stole every secret he possibly had. When he lifted his head, Devon was startled to find his fingers locked in Rick's hair, nudging the rim of his hat. Swallowing, he licked his tingling lips and released Rick to stare, wide-eyed, at him. "What was that for?"

He smirked. "You're cute when you're drowning in worry."

Devon flushed. Was he that obvious? Rick chuckled, stepping back to open the passenger door.

"Yeah, you're that obvious." He smiled, leaving Devon both breathless and mortified. Was the man a mind reader too? Hell, he'd never get a private thought again.

"Trust me, sweetheart." Rick tweaked his nose. "We're going to have a real good time."

Devon nodded, unable to hold onto the doubts with Rick smiling down at him. The truck was high enough off the ground that Devon was a little nervous as he climbed up, afraid he'd do something goofy like lose his balance.

Until he felt Rick's hands on his butt. Devon's breath stalled in his throat, his ass clenched as Rick boosted him up, his thumb rubbing the seam of Devon's jeans.

"Up you go," his tormentor said huskily. "Be careful."

Devon slid into the leather seat, his entire body trembling as he settled. He looked over as Rick shut the door and caught his lingering smile. His head hit the headrest with a muted thump and Devon fought to control his breathing as Rick rounded the truck, jumping inside with the ease of long habit. As he settled in and started the engine, Devon pulled on his seat belt and squirmed to get comfortable. The slide of the leather didn't help a damn thing, reaching him through his jeans

and the thin material of his briefs. The squirming had him rubbing against it and trying oh so hard not to moan.

As Rick pulled out onto the mostly quiet street, Devon found his gaze drawn to Rick's hands. Big and powerful, one easily controlled the wheel while the other rested on the gearshift. He had surprisingly elegant fingers for such a manly man, Devon noted, and held back a whimper at the memory of them cupping and kneading his bottom. Chills raced up his spine as new images erupted in his mind, of those fingers wrapped around his cock, pushing inside him, stretching him out.

"Oh ,God," he whispered then jumped when Rick's warm hand landed on his thigh, rubbing lazily. Devon licked his lips, finding it hard to breathe. The hand trailed upward and inward until it bumped against his bulging zipper. Devon held his breath as Rick's fingers paused for a long moment, hovering over him. His hips lifted without his command, arching toward those taunting fingers.

Rick's hand descended and cupped him, stroking along the zipper. Devon whimpered, putting his hand over Rick's open palm and thrusting against it, shuddering. His mind emptied of everything but Rick's hand and the long, slow strokes. He'd give anything to feel the warmth against his naked skin, then caught his breath when Rick one-handedly unzipped his fly and snuck inside his briefs, closing his hand around Devon's straining crotch.

He cried out, dropping his head back against the headrest. "Jesus, Rick!" The big hand stroked him unhurriedly, driving him ballistic. "How are you doing this to me?" It was meant to be rhetorical railing against his sex appeal but as Devon glanced up, he was snagged by Rick's twinkling blue eyes as the other man answered his question.

"I'm a damn good multi-tasker, babe. You'll learn that very quickly," he murmured, turning his gaze back onto the road, his hand pumping steadily. Devon could hear himself panting and he closed his eyes, thrusting helplessly. His balls were tingling and when Rick's fingers glided up to play with the head of his cock, he could feel the precome that had gathered at the tip. He looked down and bit his lip against a groan at the sight of his cock trapped in the circle of Rick's sticky fingers.

Rick pulled his hand up smoothly and Devon watched his cock disappear into the tunnel before reappearing again quickly. The fast pump made his balls swell and his body was shaking with the warning tremors of an orgasm. He was too far gone to notice when the truck stopped or when Rick released both his and Devon's seatbelt.

He was lost to Rick's world-class handjob. He whimpered as Rick sped up, purring incentives into the air. "Come, baby, come for me, and let me see you spill all over my hand." The sultry words were followed by a hard squeeze and it was enough to throw Devon's tortured body over the peak. He came with a keening cry, his hips jerking wildly into the caressing fingers still surrounding him.

Devon slumped against the seat when he'd emptied, his eyes feeling heavy. Too sated to feel embarrassed, he turned to Rick and found himself stirring as the other man licked his fingers clean. The sight of Rick's tongue, pink and bright, scooping the come off his fingers made Devon's stomach tighten. When his fingers were clean, Rick lowered his hand and smiled at Devon. "I could get addicted to the taste of you," he said softly before unlocking the doors. "You might want to tuck yourself away so the neighbors don't see you."

Devon flushed at the reminder of his semi-nakedness and quickly put himself away before climbing out the truck. Rick was already standing by his door when he gingerly eased out, his legs still shaky. Once he was on solid ground, Rick captured his hand and to distract himself from the warmth running up his arm, Devon glanced around. Rick lived in suburbia with a brick one-story ranch style house and a crisp green lawn.

Thick green bushes lined both sides of the lawn and a large oak tree stood sentry in the middle of the lawn. Devon let his gaze roam before coming back to Rick's face. The other man was watching him with a faint smile. "Do you like it?"

Devon nodded. It beat the hell out of his little apartment; that was for sure. Rick grinned and pulled him towards the front door and inside. The lights came on but Devon only got a blurred image of dark blue walls and white trim before Rick backed him up against the door, capturing his mouth again. Devon moaned at the wet thrust of tongue into his mouth, reaching up to anchor himself around Rick's neck.

Somehow he didn't think he'd be seeing the rest of Rick's house tonight.

Big hands slid down Devon's sides, leaving tingling trails of heat in their wake and cupped his ass, lifting and pressing him against the door. He wrapped his legs around Rick's lean hips and battled with Rick's demanding mouth. Devon gasped when the hands glided between his legs again, pressing through the material towards his waiting hole.

"Need you naked," Rick growled against his mouth and his hands left his butt to pull at his shirt. Devon raised his arms from Rick's neck and let the other man free him of it, tossing it somewhere over his shoulder

"Oh, yes," Rick purred, his fingers trailing over Devon's chest and stomach. Devon's muscles twitched when Rick found his nipples, plucking and pinching them. Devon cried out when the pinch edged past pleasure into pain. His cock throbbed and he pushed his chest further into the sensation.

"Aha," Rick murmured. "Someone loves his pain. I wonder... have you ever used nipple clamps before?" Devon shook his head. "I think we should try it, don't you?"

Devon moaned as the fingers tightened on his nipples. "Rick!" His voice cracked. "Please!"

"Mmm, we'll try it later," Rick purred, dropping his hands to free Devon from his jeans again. His hand glided over Devon's pulsing cock beneath his briefs, and another cry broke the barrier

of Devon's mouth. Devon let his legs drop back to ground, trembling as Rick pulled his jeans down along with his briefs.

"Step out of them."

Devon didn't hesitate, shoving his pants off quickly. He focused on Rick's hands as they pulled his sleeveless shirt up and over his head, taking the hat with it. Devon's cock jumped and his fingers flexed at the sight of smooth, tanned muscle, gleaming in the light. He reached to touch the flat brown nipples only to have his hands captured and anchored over his head.

"Not yet," Rick breathed and one-handedly unzipped his jeans, his cock bursting free the minute he shimmied out of them, pulling necessities out before kicking them away. Devon's mouth watered at the sight of the heavy shaft, the mushroom head smeared with precome. His own looked no different and he stared up at Rick, dignity crushed beneath lust.

"Please," he begged hoarsely. "Fuck me."

Rick crowded him immediately, letting his cock push against Devon's.

Devon gasped. "Please!"

"I love how you beg," Rick whispered and, releasing the Devon's hands, lifted Devon against the door again, nudging his cock against the line of Devon's ass, leaving behind a moist trail. Devon whimpered, locking his legs around Rick's hips. He reached down to open himself and Rick's cock slipped up, teasing his hole for a long, straining moment. Devon squirmed, panting with need. Rick's fingers played over his, stroking and stretching and making Devon beg.

Then, in one smooth thrust, Rick drove his hips upward, filling Devon to the point of bursting. Pain flared, shocking a gasp out of him. The burning glide of slick latex made him blink. When had he...

His breathing hitched as Rick, hands gripping his hips, pulled back and slammed into him again. He nailed Devon's prostate and sane thought was obliterated as pain morphed into pleasure. The cries broke free then, and Devon grabbed onto Rick's shoulders as the man set a brutal pace, pounding him into the door.

His dick throbbed as Rick ruthlessly bombarded his body, one of Rick's hands snaking down to stroke and pump Devon's desperate cock. He moaned and crushed his mouth to Rick's, drinking in his taste.

His body trembled as sensations threatened to rip his body apart. "Not going to last," he panted.

Rick's hips pushed harder and, with a punishing thrust, hit Devon's prostate. Devon gave a choked cry as the pleasure burst through him, leaving his body to squeeze around Rick's cock. The man inside him growled as Devon came, his hand becoming a hot vise around his cock. He

purred, hitting that sweet spot again and again until he burst inside Devon, leaving him shivering at the warmth and wishing, for just a moment, that the condom wasn't necessary.

Devon panted as Rick drained himself, tingles of aftershock shooting up and down his spine and raising goose bumps along his skin. Weak, he slumped against the door while Rick braced himself against it, his big body still shuddering inside of Devon.

"Jesus, green eyes, you almost killed me." He turned his head to nibble on Devon's ear. "I like a man who can drain me dry."

He flushed at the murmured comment then in disbelief when his cock, which should have been limp for days after that mind-blowing orgasm, twitched in re-interest. It stirred against Rick's abs and the man smiled against Devon's neck. "Already?"

Devon shivered at the silky whisper. "I-I can wait until you--oh!" He whimpered as Rick's cock pulsed inside him. Pain-pleasure rippled through him as his body protested to being used again. Still, without his control, his ass squeezed around Rick's dick, making the other man gasp and thrust involuntarily.

Rick lifted his head to grin down at Devon. "I think round two calls for a bed." His fingers trailed down Devon's back. "Your back's going to need it."

Devon couldn't stop a shudder of anticipation. "Lead the way."

## *Chapter Four*

Devon opened his eyes to the glare of the sun through a window, softness beneath him and a hard, warm weight burning up his back. Groaning quietly against the assault on his eyes, he raised his arm automatically to check his watch and block the sun. At first the numbers blurred together, presenting a jumble mess that made him want to close his eyes and slip back into his dreams.

Then the numbers separated and straightened out. Holy shit, nine in the morning? He had to be at work in an hour! Devon's mind snapped awake then and his body followed suit, bringing all his sex aches to the surfaces of his brain. His body hurt in places it hadn't hurt in months and felt so good, he was tempted to lie still and savor it.

But that part of his brain that kept him getting up every day and never forgetting a bill was insistent. And unfortunately, he wasn't the irresponsible twin. For a crazy minute, he wished he could be as blasé as Denise. Wished he could call off and spend the day just lounging around with Rick.

The minute the thought cleared, he was filled with warmth and Devon could feel his mouth curl into a soft smile that absolutely nothing to do with sex and everything to do with the man beside him. He groaned soundlessly.

Still, Devon looked over at him and couldn't resist a sigh. Sprawled on his back and taking over half of the bed, Rick's big tan body a gorgeous contrast to the rumpled white sheets wrapped around him, he slept with a faint smile on his face. His lashes created black half moons on his cheeks and Devon's fingers itched to trace over them, to feel the soft featheriness against the supple skin.

He swore softly at himself, instinctively trying to not wake Rick. The man was insatiable and could have him back in bed in a heartbeat. And despite his strange dawdling, he really needed to get to work. Devon carefully scooted towards the end of the bed, holding his breath as he slipped free of the tangled sheets and as quietly as he could, slipped from the bedroom and working off his memory, made his way to the living room where he found his clothes.

Putting them on brought back the scorching memories of why'd he'd lost them, and Devon had to pause more than once to steady his breathing. When he was dressed, he searched his pockets for his cell phone, knowing that waking Rick for a ride was simply out of the question. He couldn't handle a goodbye and didn't want to think about why he couldn't.

He was searching for a number to call when a throat cleared. Instantly flushing with a combination of guilt and arousal, Devon turned around to find Rick leaning against the wall across from him, deliciously rumpled in a pair of unsnapped jeans. Devon swallowed as his cock rebelled at the sight of Rick and threatened to tent his jeans.

"Good morning," he said with forced cheer. "Did I wake you?" Boy, this was awkward. He sighed inwardly, briefly wishing he were a different sort of man. The kind who could handle The Morning After.

Rick shook his head, shoving his dark hair from his face. "Nope," he said, his voice rough with sleep. "I'm normally up this early." Devon couldn't tell if he was joking or not. Rick nodded to the phone he clutched. "You callin' someone for a ride back to the bar?"

Somehow, he had the feeling "yes" was the wrong answer but he said it anyway. "Um, yeah. I... I have to be at work in an hour." Why did he feel so guilty about leaving? It made no sense but he couldn't shake it off.

Rick pursed his lips. "Ah. Put your phone away, and gimme a minute to find a shirt and shoes and I'll take you to get your car." He began to turn away.

"No!" Devon calmed himself when Rick turned to face him, eyebrows raised. "No, seriously, it's okay. I'll just call my sister and I'll go. If you'll just give me your address so she can Mapquest us..." His voice trailed off weakly.

Rick glided toward him like a large, graceful cat, making his breath back up in his throat. "I said I'll take you, Devon," he said softly. "You don't *need* a ride."

Devon shook his head desperately. "And I said it's *fine*. Don't go out of your way for me." Why didn't he shut up? Why didn't he just accept it?

Because he couldn't do it. He couldn't be in that truck with Rick and not be affected. He couldn't be in that truck and not touch that gorgeous body... shit, there was *no* way he could get a ride from Rick. Damn it, he wasn't made for one night fucking stands! His brain, fully awake and active was drowning in confusion.

Rick scowled. "Why is it such a big deal? I brought you here; I can take you back to the bar for your car."

Devon bit his lip and finally admitted a portion of the truth. "I don't want either of us to get confused. This was just a one time thing, nothing more, nothing less. I don't need you to take care of me now."

Rick reared back as if he'd been slapped. "Oh, because I took care of you last night, right?" He sneered and looked magnificent even doing that.

That one hurt and Devon's temper thankfully saved him from doing something foolish like cry. He was doing this for his survival. Otherwise, he'd never forgive himself. "What does it matter to you? You can't sit there and tell me you picked me up looking for a long-term relationship."

The way Rick flinched told Devon he'd scored a prime hit. Why he didn't feel triumph was anyone's guess. *You wanted to be wrong*, a soft voice whispered, saying what he didn't want to think. *You want him to care. Like you do.*

No! Devon shook his head, unwilling to confront the emotion rioting in his head. He looked up at Rick and his voice softened without his control. "Please don't fight me anymore, not about this. Let me go."

Rick's face had turned stony. "I'm not holding you here," he said coolly. "Leave already, princess. Don't want you to be late for work, do we?" He turned on his bare heel and headed back down the hall. The sound of the door clicking shut sounded so final; Devon winced.

*A nonsensical fight*, he thought blankly, staring at the spot Rick had been, *but a very informative one.*

Rick was done with him. He blinked rapidly while his fingers dialed Denise's number from a long lost habit. She answered sleepily, mumbling her hello around a yawn.

"Den," he whispered, making sure his breaths were slow and even to not give anything away. "Come get me."

Unfortunately for all her flighty behavior, Denise wasn't his twin for nothing. Her voice sharpened instantly. "Devon, what's wrong, honey?"

Air threatened to clog in his throat. "Come. Get. Me."

She didn't bother to ask again. "Address?"

He knew it was foolish but he glanced over his shoulder towards the hall. Of course he couldn't ask. He doubted Rick would even acknowledge him. Devon opened the door and walked to the end of the driveway and looked around for a street sign. Lucking out, he spotted the sign and then the address numbers painted on the curb, rattling off both to his sister.

He listened to her look it up, cursing at the slowness of her computer until he finally heard the sound of her printer. "Okay, baby brother," she said, "You're less than ten minutes from me. I'm coming to get you right now. Hang fast and, whatever you do, don't give him the satisfaction of your tears."

He blinked hard. She sounded so unlike his carefree sister, so genuinely worried about him. He was suddenly glad he'd called her. "'Kay," he said quietly. "I'll be outside."

She murmured her assent then hung up, leaving Devon with his thoughts all over again. He stared determinedly toward the street, ignoring the house behind him with all his strength, mostly because he wanted to turn around and go right back to the man inside, even knowing the man wanted nothing to do with him.

"Face it," he mumbled to himself. "You've done something very, very stupid today." The question was when had it happened? This morning when he'd realized he'd wanted to spend more time with Rick? Last night between orgasms?

Or had it happened before that? Who fell in love that fast? Devon raised his knees and dropped his forehead onto them. He was a fool and Rick Moore was so far out of his league; it was laughable. He spent a good ten minutes lamenting on his astronomical stupidity when he glanced up to see something fast and red bearing down him at the speed of light. Seeing his sister's Porsche was a serious relief, he told himself.

That was why his cheeks were wet. That and only that.

As she pulled to a screeching stop beside him, scaring several birds out of the oak tree beside him, Devon came to his feet, brushing himself off. The top was down and he noted with some surprise that his sister was actually toned down for once. She wore no makeup, a brown peasant dress and a pair of black sunglasses shoved into her messy hair.

He could feel her eyes lasering over him as he rounded the hood of the car and, in a delayed attempt to stall her questions, Devon dredged up a wan smile. "Hey, thanks for getting here so quickly." He settled into his seat and pulled his seatbelt on. "It was getting kind of awkward."

Denise, surprisingly, didn't say a word but pulled open her glove box and handed him a small, soft package. Devon didn't have to look at it to know what it was. He simply ripped it open and pulled out a tissue to wipe the wet tracks from his cheeks. Denise gunned the engine after one mute glare at the house and they shot away with Devon fighting not to look back. What would he do if Rick wasn't there?

Or worse, what if he was there? And why would he be? He'd made his intentions clear didn't he? Devon fought with himself all the way until at the last moment; he looked into the rearview mirror, hoping for something he was afraid to even name... only to find nothing.

Rick wasn't there. He'd probably forgotten all about him. Devon closed his eyes against the burn, angry that the tears wouldn't stop, furious that he was crying in the first place.

One night stand. It had been a one night stand.

Too bad only one of them seemed to remember that.

## Chapter Five

Seven days. A week since he'd seen Devon, since he'd touched him, stroked him and been inside him. A week where nothing went right, when no man was good enough. Nobody compared to Devon Walker and it was driving Rick up the wall. No sex, no peace in his own fucking thoughts.

It was like he was haunted by the boy. He slammed the shot glass down and blew out a frustrated breath. *Face it, man*, he thought to himself. *You miss him.*

But that made no sense! How did he miss a complete stranger? Rick rubbed his aching temples and turned as if to physically escape his thoughts, only to find Davis eyeing him warily.

"What?" he growled and Davis shook his head. It was a slow Friday afternoon and with nothing to occupy them except for one or two drink refills, Rick and Davis were idling behind the bar.

"Nothing," Davis turned, hesitated then cleared his throat. "'Cept, ah... you don't seem like yourself, boss."

Rick swung back to the glass, grabbed up a rag and began to clean it all over again, ruthlessly scrubbing. "Don't know what you're talking about."

"You've dried that shot glass three times now," Davis pointed out. "Any shinier and we'll be blinded."

Rick sat the glass down and began cleaning the counter instead. Davis had something to say about that one too. "Boss, there haven't been more than three people in all afternoon. Nothing needs to be done."

He spun on Davis. "How the *fuck* would you know, kid? Are you the boss now? Why don't you make yourself useful and make sure the inventory's up to date since you can't seem to find anything productive to do other than bitch at me."

Davis didn't even flinch under the onslaught and somehow that made Rick feel like more of a jackass than yelling at him had. "Christ." He dropped his head and closed his eyes, horrified at his flare up. "Davis, man. I'm sorry."

"Forget about it." Rick opened his eyes to find Davis leaning against the counter. A slightly damp towel sat on his shoulder and his dark eyes drilled into Rick, making him feel like he could see more than Rick himself could see.

Or wanted to.

Rick stared down at the counter and watched his reflection scowl. "Nah, man, seriously. You didn't deserve that shit. I'm just..."

"In love." Davis' quiet voice cut his explanation in half.

He choked on shock. "Wha... what? Whoa, no way." Rick shook his head even as something began welling in his chest. "No, I don't do the love thing." Why did that sound so unconvincing?

Davis shook his head and leaned his back against the bar, not even pretending to pay attention to the few patrons in the bar. Rick wanted to scold him for it but the two or three people tucked away in booths weren't even paying attention to them. The real drinkers wouldn't start slipping in until nine or so.

Like vampires, they were probably sleeping in preparation for the night. Rick blew out a breath and glanced at Davis. "I'm not in love, you know. It's impossible." Of course it was impossible. This wasn't like those romances his mom read where the hero falls in love with the guy he had one night of mind-blowing sex with.

Davis snorted. "Do you remember what happened the night you went home with that boy?"

Like he could forget? His cock ached just remembering. The handjob in his truck was probably one of his favorite memories. Devon was absolutely beautiful when passion broke through his sweetness and made him raw.

He could barely sit in his truck because of it. "Yeah. Yeah, I do."

"Good, your brain was still functioning," Davis smirked and Rick punched his arm. Davis waved him off with his towel. "Now, I want you to think hard about this: what were you doing before you left?"

Rick blinked. What? "Checking on you and Sean."

"And?"

"And what? That was it. I gathered him and left."

"Jesus, man, you're dense." Davis glared at him and Rick had the feeling he was missing something incredibly obvious. And when Rick only gave Davis a blank look, he was earned a good swat from the towel.

Rick dodged it and glared. "Well, you're not making any sense here. There's nothing significant about me leaving with another man. I've done it enough times for nobody to really raise an eyebrow about it." Though Devon's youth might have had a few elbows nudging. But that was all.

"If you're trying to make a point, mate, make it. You're giving me a headache," Rick growled and rubbed his temples to show he wasn't lying.

Davis sighed. "Dude, you left holding the kid's hand."

Rick frowned, still lost. "So what? I was taking him home with me; I did a lot more than just hold his hand." And those memories would stay forever etched in his brain, along with the smell of Devon, the way he felt, and how perfect it felt to fall asleep next to him, exhausted and...

Perfect? *Oh hell.*

Davis shook his head at him, apparently unaware of Rick's brain clicking into place. "In the two years I've worked with you, I haven't seen you hold hands with a man once. Granted, not all of them looked as soft and sweet as Junior did," Rick was only able to ignore the jibe by sheer force of will. "But you've treated all your tagalongs just like that: tagalongs. I've never seen you single out any of them." Davis lifted one solitary finger. "Except one."

"Devon," Rick said softly while his heart went insane with revelation in his chest. "His name's Devon."

*My Devon.*

Davis smiled suddenly and the expression was full of pride. "I see you got it finally."

"Yeah," Rick dropped his elbows onto the table and hung his head miserably. "But is it too late?"

The doors swung open and Rick was tempted to ignore whoever was coming in. Davis could take care of them, he was sure.

"Shit, did he figure out he's in love with my brother before I got hold of him?" The familiar, feminine voice was tight with angry amusement and when Rick looked up, his heart twisted at the features that were so close to Devon's.

"Hello, Denise," he said lightly and straightened from the bar. The way she was holding her purse made him wary. "Can I get you something to drink?"

She pursed her lips, which were of all things, bright orange. They matched her orange leather dress, purse, and -- good God -- hair. Somehow, she was still effortlessly beautiful. "I don't know if I want anything from you, you jackass. You know you fucked up my brother, right?"

Rick winced while Davis chuckled. "I like her," Davis said.

Denise smiled at him. "I'd like you too, puddin', but I'm engaged."

"Damn." Davis' smile never faltered. "Lucky bastard."

"I think so too." She turned her gaze back on Rick and he almost shivered at the murderous intent in its glossy green depths. "I came in here with full intentions of beating the life out of you. Or at least some sense."

She glanced at Davis. "A beer, would you, sweetie? Domestic. Thank you," she added when Davis went to fetch it. When he handed it to her, already uncapped, she rewarded him with a glittering smile before taking a long pull. Swallowing, she sighed and went right back to glaring at Rick.

"You know what I told my brother before I left him that night? I told him you were a keeper. That you'd be able to take care of him, in bed and out. Fortunately for your dumb ass, I still do think that."

Rick swallowed hard. "But why? I mean, hell, I'm grateful, you're one dame I don't wanna be on the wrong side of... but why?" He'd fucked up so badly. He could still remember peeking out the window, watching Devon's slender body bend in misery.

Hearing Devon dismiss him, dismiss that night had had him lashing out, trying to hurt when he hadn't realized he'd been hurting as well.

And now he'd lost the one man he'd probably ever truly care for.

Denise took another, daintier sip of her beer. "Because I saw the way my brother looked at you and the way you looked back. You think I left him alone with you because I'm some trusting ditz?"

She didn't wait for him to answer and Rick wasn't sure he had one anyway. "Nope, I left you 'cause I figured you'd seduce him and make his night. That's what he needed. He works too hard and he's more responsible than... well, any other human being on the planet."

Her eyes softened as she talked about her twin and Rick could read the affection from her, clear as day across her face. He tried to remember if Devon had given him any particular looks that night but could only see the boy's face twisted in passion, eyes glazed with lust and later when he'd tried to leave without telling him, there'd been anger.

And now, he realized, so much more.

How had he missed it? Maybe he hadn't wanted to see it. Rick shook his head. No point in lamenting on past stupidity. He had to figure out a way to get Devon back into his present. Hell, did he even stand a chance?

He glanced at Denise and swallowed pride for that chance. "Denise, I probably don't deserve another go even if you do have faith in me," he said quietly, pushing his hat back so he could look her squarely in the eye.

Davis had moved down the bar, ostensibly counting glasses but really giving Rick a moment. That man was definitely in line for a raise. "But, I want to try. I want to show him that I... that I care."

Denise narrowed her eyes. "You made him cry, Rick. You think just 'caring' can fix that? If you can't say the word, then it doesn't matter what I think or even what Devon wants. If you can't admit it, then you might as well give my brother up."

His gut clenched at the idea of Devon crying for any reason, let alone over him. But it hurt even more to imagine a life completely void of Devon Walker. Hell, he was losing it after a week. But months or years?

The hell with that. "I can say it," he said, and Denise's straight face slowly broke into a smile.

"But," Rick held up a finger. "I want to say to him. The first time, I want to tell him."

Denise grinned fully. "Right on, cowboy. Glad to know there's some romantic soul in you after all."

Davis sidled back over to them. "I couldn't help but overhear," he smirked at Rick's self-conscious scowl. "But now that Rick has discovered his heart, how does he get your brother to listen to him spill its secrets? I've unfortunately made a girl cry a time or two, myself." He leaned against the counter. "And she's normally against talking to me, oh... ever again."

Rick shoved him even as his heart tumbled to his toes. "The comedian here's got a point," he said gruffly. "Devon would have all the right to never talk to me again."

Denise rolled her eyes. "Of course he does. But that's not the point. And since you've found sense all on your own, I just might be willing to help you with the rest. But." She stabbed a bright orange nail into his chest. "If you make my baby brother cry ever again... I'll kill you."

She said it with a brilliant smile and Rick couldn't keep from smiling back. "Your fiancé is a very brave man," he said.

Denise's laugh twinkled in the air like wind chimes. "The very bravest," she agreed. "Now, someone get me another beer and I'll share my plan. A rather brilliant one, if I do say so myself."

Rick pointed at Davis and the other man immediately brought another beer over, uncapped just like before and Denise sipped before she began to talk.

And talk... and talk... *God I hope this works.*

## Chapter Six

"Walker! Phone!" Devon's boss, Gil Marsh, stuck his head out of the backroom and hollered again. "Phone, Devon, come on, boy!"

Devon glanced up, temporarily forgetting what he was doing. Icy cold mint chocolate ice cream spilled onto his fingers and he bit back a curse as he hurriedly shut off the shake machine. But it was too late.

Ice cream gushed over the cup and onto his hands. *That's number three*, he thought as he smiled apologetically at the slightly sweaty, elderly man. "Sorry, Mr. Vincent. Just give me a second to make you a new one." *What is wrong with me?*

He shook his head at himself. Like he had to ask.

The old man only smiled patiently, making Devon feel more like a jackass for messing up his order for the third time. "That's all right, Devon, take your time."

The chunky redhead behind him snapped her gum irritably. "How 'bout not? Maybe you ain't worried about time, pops, but I am. Hurry up, kid!"

Devon took a breath to keep from snapping at her and instead quickly went about remaking the shake. Grant, the only other scooper on duty besides him, took the grouchy bitch, and Devon snatched a towel to clean his hands as he headed into the backroom.

Old Gil was tucked behind his desk in a corner. He wordlessly handed the cordless phone to Devon and then went back to frowning at the papers in front of him.

Devon wandered to the farthest corner of the room for some semblance of privacy. His hands were still sticky and they made sucking noises as he gripped the phone. "Hello, Devon Walker speaking."

"Hi, baby brother!" Denise's voice was full of sweet affection. "How's work?"

Devon felt a smile crease his face and was still amazed about it. Just the week before, he'd wanted to strangle her. Now within the last few days, years of distance had crumpled between them. She'd been right by him, hugging him, gorging on snack foods with him (her cure-all to everything), and even letting him blubber like a baby on her shoulder.

Not that he was very proud of that moment. Hell, he didn't like admitting to it, even in his thoughts! To get so worked up over a man who couldn't have cared less about him was just the most pitiful thing a guy could do.

But he was passed it.

Kinda.

If he just didn't think about Rick, his heart didn't bleed, and the memories didn't come up and he didn't remember Rick's taste and the feel of his body... shit, stop it, Walker!

Devon shook his head. "It's work," he laughed. "What do you expect it to be like?"

"I wouldn't know. I'm the carefree party girl, remember?" she teased, making him smile. "Anyway, this isn't just a check-up call, baby bro. I'm actually calling for a very specific reason."

She sounded almost serious, which had Devon settling the phone closer to his ear and leaning against the wall to keep his balance. Behind him, Gil grunted, which was his way of telling Devon to hurry up.

"What's up?" He raised a hand to Gil -- five minutes.

"Well, it's Malcolm's birthday today! And I ordered a special cake from Gil's and I *was* going to pick up but I kinda got delayed with some other details. Would you mind telling Gil that I need it delivered? Better yet, how 'bout you deliver it?" She rambled on before he could answer. "You said it's slow anyway, so this way you get something fun to do. Cool, yes, yes?"

Devon rolled his eyes. Some things never changed. At least this favor was easy. And it *was* slow day. Hell, what was he doing, trying to convince himself? He'd have gone if it'd been busy as hell. That just the kind of power Denise seemed to wield over him as the one minute older sibling.

You'd think that minute was an hour with the way she wielded that power. He shrugged. At least it would get him out of the shop before he messed up again. "Sure, Denise, I'll do it."

Her gleeful 'thank you thank you!' made him grin and he almost said his goodbyes then when he remembered that he didn't know the location. "Den, where am I delivering this cake?"

There was only a slight pause after his question but then Denise filled it with chatter, and Devon forgot about it and was instead horrified. "Honky Tonk bar, you remember it, right? Of course you do. Anyway, they're expecting it, just drive it over and I'll take it from there okay?"

Devon was rooted to the ground in shock. "Denise!"

"Gotta go, baby bro. Bring the cake okay? I already told them you would and I've got to take care of those pesky details. Love you, sweetheart, bye!" The line went dead.

*And my sister is next.*

But she'd live until he tossed the delivery on someone else. No way in hell was he going anywhere near that bar or cowboys or country-related anything!

*Time to move out of Texas*, he thought as he headed back over to Gil to hand him the phone. "Hey, Gil, that was my sister and she said she had a cake ordered."

"Yep." Gil looked up at him beneath his dark bushy brows. "She ain't comin' to get it?"

Devon shook his head. "No, she can't make it but I figured--"

"That'd you it take to her instead? Good idea boy. Grant's should have it boxed already. Get goin' now, time's money." Gil waved him off but Devon shook his head.

"No, wait, Gil, can't Grant take it? He's faster. I can take care of the rest of the customers..." His voice trailed off as his boss shook his head.

"No go, kid. Why am I gonna make Grant do it when he already knows how to delivery cakes? You haven't yet and your sister's the perfect customer. Consider this your practice run. Get goin', Walker."

Gil's gaze dropped back to the papers on his desk, and Devon knew he was dismissed. His heart plummeted to his toes. He had no choice now. He'd been summarily boxed in by his sister and his boss.

Was the world plotting against him? "What I'd do to piss you off?" he asked the ceiling as he walked out to get the box from Grant.

Maybe, if he was fast enough, he could drop off the cake, wish Malcolm a happy birthday and high-tail it out of there before Rick even figured out he was there.

And maybe even strangle Denise along the way. Hell, crazier things happened, right?

\* \* \*

Inside the backroom, a crotchety old man named Gil Marsh smiled at the door and picked up the phone.

After the first ring, she answered breathlessly and Gil proudly announced his news. "On the way."

"Thanks, Gil! I owe you one."

"No prob. Just make sure it all works out."

Denise Walker sighed. "I'm gonna do my damndest, Gil. But it's up to them in the end."

Gil nodded to himself. "Ain't that truth?"

They said their goodbyes and Gil glanced at the doorway. "Good luck, son."

\* \* \*

The bar looked closed, Devon noted, as he pulled his Jeep next to the curb. *How odd*, he thought as he climbed out, carefully holding the pink box housing the cake. Especially for a Friday.

He knew from personal experience just how wild the bar could get. He glanced at his watch. It was almost three; shouldn't the bar be filling up now?

A birthday party headed by Denise Walker meant lots of people, lots of noise, and lots of food. And then more people. Unless Malcolm had somehow changed all that. Maybe Denise had gotten her choice of place to throw it and Malcolm had gotten his choice on everything else.

Which was possible, Devon mused as he locked the Jeep and headed towards the front doors. Denise would want a bar party, and Malcolm struck Devon as the type to have only a small group of people, if any at all.

Yeah, that was plausible. Still, Devon's stomach jumped with nerves and it just *felt* like a setup. He grimaced as he knocked on the doors. When there was no immediate answer, he shuffled his feet and looked around for signs of humanity. Or a sign that he was supposed to put the cake somewhere and then scam.

Wouldn't that make life so much easier?

Devon was getting ready to do just that when the doors pulled open suddenly and a familiar young man appeared. Devon blinked as he tried to grab his name. . . .

David? No, no, Dean? Davis! That was it. Davis looked at him solemnly and Devon cleared his throat. "Uh, delivery for Denise Walker?"

Davis smiled. "Right this way." He turned on his heel and Devon followed, blinking as his eyes adjusted to the dim lighting. Huh. Maybe the bar *was* closed. Leave it to Denise to get a whole place shut down just to throw a party.

Devon followed Davis deeper into the bar toward the booths where he'd been last time. The lights were brighter here this time and looking around, Devon noticed just how big the room really was.

Rick had a really nice place. Devon shoved the thought away when the man's name brought a lump to his throat. Damn it!

Davis paused next to one of the booths and Devon glanced at him curiously. "You can leave the cake here," Davis said, smiling. "And then take a seat. Your sister will be out in a minute to pay."

Devon frowned in confusion. "That doesn't make any sense. Gil doesn't accept on delivery payments. She would have paid over the phone." He frowned harder. "And how do you know

she's my sister?" This was just getting weirder and weirder. The sensation of this being a setup was drowned in confusion.

"Dude, you're twins, how could I not? And about the pay," he shrugged. "Don't look at me, ask her about it. I just know she's supposed to pay the delivery boy. Which is you. So sit."

Devon sat. Davis nodded then walked away. Devon was quick to jump back to his feet. "Hey, where are you going? You can't just leave me here!"

"Don't worry," Davis didn't so much as pause. "You're not by yourself. See ya later, Junior."

Devon watched Davis disappear through the doors while his stomach did a thousand one jumping jacks in his throat.

Did he say setup? Make that *ambush*. He could feel it coming as surely as he could feel his stomach twisting. What was he doing just sitting here for? Devon came to his feet; nerves churning only to halt as Rick appeared.

Déjà vu made his body shiver. Or was that the lust between them, ever strong, tangling up his insides? He refused to say it was joy. Still, his gaze roamed over Rick hungrily, taking in the dark jeans and black button up that stretched tauntingly over his amazing chest.

Devon curled his fingers into fists to keep himself together. His heart bled.

"Hello, Devon," Rick said quietly. His blue eyes were cloudy, unreadable as they wandered over him. Devon was painfully aware of how young he looked in his red polo and jeans. So unworldly compared to Rick.

"Rick," he answered, thankful that at least his voice didn't convey his nerves. "Where's my sister?"

"Denise isn't here." Well, duh. Rick started toward him, forcing Devon to look away lest he begin to drool over Rick's muscled legs. "In fact, nobody's here."

Devon whipped his head back around and caught his breath when he realized just how close Rick had gotten in so short a time. Damned long-legged bastard. "Then why am I here with a cake?"

Rick tilted his head and a faintly nervous smile lifted the corners of his mouth. Nervous? Rick? "It's your cake," he said softly.

Devon froze. "M-My cake? But, no... it's not my birthday." He blinked. Now how monumentally stupid was that?

Rick just smiled. "It's not a birthday cake, Devon. Look at it. Please."

Devon shoved his chin up and hoped to God Rick didn't notice its trembling. "I don't want to see it. I don't even want to be here." Still, he found himself turning back to the box. It sat innocently on the table, a bright happy pink.

His stomach twisted like it was a bomb. Then he turned away from it and pretended he didn't see the flash of hurt in Rick's gaze. "No. No, I don't want to see it." He made to go around Rick only to have the man pivot and grab his arm, pulling Devon into his body.

Devon bit back a groan as he collided with all that warm muscle. It practically burned him through the clothes. His fingers itched to slip under the shirt and stroke it. "Let me go, Rick," he said as evenly as he could. He wanted to rub against the man, soaked in the warmth.

His heart cried. "Let me go," he whispered again. "Please let me go."

"No," Rick said softly. "I did it once and lived in hell for it. I'm not about to do it again." There was something soft rolling through the words, something that he wanted to listen to...

Devon blinked back a wave of emotion. He would not believe. *He would not believe!* "Well, I don't want to be held. Let me go so I can go back to work and back to my life. The one I had *before* you." He pushed against the arms holding him almost tenderly and was freed so quickly; it startled him.

Then he shook his head. Had he'd been hoping Rick would hold onto him after all? *Barking up the wrong tree there, boyo.*

Rick's voice cut through his thoughts and Devon found himself locking gazes with him. He swallowed as Rick's voice curled around him, husky with an emotion Devon refused to name. "Please look at the cake, Devon. And if... if you want to walk away still, I won't stop you."

Devon swallowed. "You promise?" he said quietly. "You promise to... to leave me alone?" *No matter how much it hurts me to say it; I can't have him try again. I'm not strong enough to survive a second attack.*

Hell, he was barely surviving the first. Rick's jaw clenched but after a moment he nodded. "I promise."

Devon nodded reluctantly and turned back to the cake. With only faintly trembling fingers, he pushed open the top and for a moment, his gaze was suspended on the box. What was he so afraid of? What could a cake do?

Devon looked down.

Stopped breathing.

And damn it, he felt tears. He blinked furiously to keep them away.

Written in soft blue letters across the top of a vanilla ice cream cake was a message just for him.

*Please forgive me. I'll never let you go again.*

Devon felt hands on his arms and Rick turned him around until Devon was staring into his eyes, the same soft blue as the frosting. "I'm sorry, Devon," he said quietly. "I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am."

Devon sniffled. "Were you... going to let me go again? If I didn't like the cake?"

Rick's face took on a fierce cast. "Never."

The word made his heart swell, and Devon cried harder while Rick pulled him into the circle of his arms, hugging tightly and crooning in his husky voice. When Devon could finally breathe around the tears, he cleared his throat enough to whisper, "Liar."

Rick jerked back and stared down at him. "What?"

Devon sniffled. "You lied. You said you'd let me go if I wanted to."

"Do you?"

Devon stared hard into Rick's face. He saw the emotion in his eyes, the same one that had coated his words. He couldn't so easily forget the pain though and he took a breath for courage to confront it. "You turned away," he said instead of answering the question. He wasn't sure.

Not quite yet.

Rick's fingers glided along the swell of his cheek, leaving a long line of sweet heat. "You pushed me away before I had a chance."

Devon felt tears welling again. Damn, he was such a watering pot. "What was I supposed to do? Would you have accepted my heart then and there?"

Rick's heavy sigh was all the answer he needed and Devon pushed away from him. He hugged himself tightly to replace the lost heat. Rick pulled his hat off and ruffled his hair with a frown.

"I wasn't looking for love," he said point-blank. Devon flinched. "I don't know how I would have reacted if you'd just claimed you loved me. But that's because I've never seen someone fall in love so fast."

Devon hugged himself tighter and almost ran. But he'd wanted to hear this, he reminded himself. "So you're calling me a liar or something?"

"No!" Rick threw his hat on the table and paced over to him. "No, I'm not. Stop being so defensive and listen to me."

Devon looked at his feet, too humiliated to look him in the eye.

Rick sighed and nudged his chin up with his hand. "Devon, listen to me. I wasn't looking for it, no. But it found me anyway," he said softly. "It found me through you."

Devon stared up at him. His mouth trembled as something that felt like hope bloomed in his chest. "What're you saying, Rick?" He needed to hear it.

Rick's smile was nervous and beautiful all at once. "I love you, Devon."

\*\*\*

"Please say something," Rick said, when all Devon did was stare up at him. The suspense had turned his stomach into a series of hard knots and he held his breath against the anxiety.

Was it enough? Could it be? Would Devon let them try again? Rick's thoughts whipped around in never-ending circles.

He was amazed he could even think. During the entire time Denise had set up the plan, he'd worried. Wondered. Hoped.

God, how he'd hoped. Rick resisted putting a hand to his jumpy stomach. If this wasn't so damn nerve-wracking, it would probably be somewhat funny.

Only a week ago, he'd told himself that Devon was too pure, too innocent. If anyone had told him then that'd he'd fall head over ass in love with the boy, he'd have called them crazy.

Crazy. That's how he felt. Crazy with fear that Devon wouldn't accept him... but also determined. He'd been telling the absolute truth when Devon had asked him if he'd let him go.

Hell, he'd put his intentions on the cake. He loved Devon far too much to let him walk away without doing his damndest to hold on.

"Rick?" Devon's voice broke through his musings and his gaze shot straight to him.

"Yeah?"

He watched that sweet bow of a mouth turn upward at the corners, bringing Rick's addiction to it to the front of his brain, nearly obliterating sane thought. "I don't want to go."

In one long step, Rick had Devon in his arms, pulling him in and lowering his mouth to nibble on Devon's ear. He felt his slender arms wrap around his neck and Rick's inner smile was full of fierce relief. "I'm never letting you."

Devon turned his head, forcing Rick to let go of his ear and take his mouth instead. Rick wanted to claim Devon's mouth as fast as he could but he forced himself to slow, to nibble on the lips, to sip at the sweetness inside.

Devon was the one who turned it rougher. His tongue slid forward and demanded battle, his hands gripped his hair and, most persuasively of all, he moaned, a sweetly needy noise.

Rick was lost. He didn't remember stripping his clothes off or pulling off Devon's. He barely remembered pushing the boy onto the nearest table. The condom was almost forgotten and the lube nearly slipped away from his trembling fingers. But he was completely there when he pushed Devon's legs open, cupped his ass for leverage and pushed home, sucked into tight, sweet heat.

Devon's cry was the most beautiful sound he'd ever heard. Rick pulled back and slid in, groaning himself this time, lust destroying his mind as surely as Devon destroyed his self control.

He didn't hold back, slapping a hand down on the table as he thrust. When Devon's eyes drifted closed, he growled for him to open them. "Let me see you, baby," he said.

Devon's eyes fluttered open as he closed a hand around his weeping cock, pumping in time to Rick.

"Gonna come soon," Devon whimpered. Rick tweaked one pale nipple and delighted in Devon's hard shudder.

"Love you so much," Rick hissed as his balls tightened with anticipation.

"Love you too," Devon moaned as his orgasm hit, his insides squeezing Rick until he burst as well, pumping wildly as he emptied.

Weak-kneed and dizzy, Rick slumped against the table, his face leaning against Devon's heaving sides. He could feel the sticky remains of Devon's come leak down the sides and was tempted to stay there for life.

Until his brain clicked back on. He straightened, ignoring Devon's soft whimper as his cock moved inside him and stared down into sated green eyes. "Do you mean it?" he demanded, his heart trembling in his chest. "Do you?" Did he still? Did he really?

Devon smiled tiredly. "Yes. Love you."

Rick swallowed against the lump in his throat. He pulled free and sat down in the booth, tugging Devon into his lap. Devon cuddled into him like a satisfied kitten, his nose nudging Rick's throat. "I swear things will get better, Dev," he pledged, lowering his head to brush a kiss across Devon's forehead.

*Thank you, God, for giving me a second chance.*

Devon only smiled and leaned up to kiss him softly. "To me, being with you is as good as it gets."

*Amen to that.*

As Good As It Gets

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