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Cherry
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TOP SHELF
An imprint of Torquere Press Publishers
PO Box 2545
Round Rock, TX 78680

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ISBN: 978-1-60370-755-8, 1-60370-755-7

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First Torquere Press Printing: July 2009
Printed in the USA

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Introduction

I love a good cherry story. Whether it's someone's first time ever, or their first time with a new lover, whether what they've never done is kissing or penetrative sex, that first time the cherry is popped is always special.

Here are ten stories brought to you by Torquere veterans and newcomers alike. They all have one thing in common -- cherry popping. New lover's and old, innocent and not so innocent, there's something here for everyone.

I hope you enjoy this cherry collection as much as I do.

M. Rode

No One's Cherry

Julia Talbot

"I am not a virgin." Crispin wasn't anywhere near a virgin in theory, reality, or even physical proximity. He was at his friend Marc's Rainbow Barbeque party. There was no such thing as a virgin among Marc's favorite flamers.

"You so are." Marc toasted him with a glowing green margarita, which looked unnatural as hell. "You're a cherry."

"Marc, I was married for ten years. There's no way I can be a cherry." Crispin was thirty-two years old. He'd been in the army. No cherry.

"Yes, yes. Women." Marc flapped his free hand. "You got divorced because you were gay, and you've never so much as touched another dick. Ergo, virgin."

"Hey, I can't help it if the only fruity thing about me is my name." He didn't set off gaydars, or so he was told. Hell, he was damned manly, especially compared to Marc's buddies. Crispin had to admit he liked his men as manly as him. "You know how I feel about that. Until I can find a guy..."

"Who can take you and make you like it. Yes, darling, but that means you'll never get laid. Look at you. You're huge!"

He was not huge, either. But at six-one and two-hundred pounds of sold muscle, Crispin knew he could be a little intimidating. He wasn't a size queen or anything. He just had to stay in shape for his job.

Still, Marc's frank admiration made him flex a little.

"So not a virgin."

"So very much so." Marc glanced around, eyes lighting up when they landed on something beyond Crispin's shoulder. "Glenn! Come here a moment, love. I have a question to pose to you."

Crispin rolled his eyes before he turned around, expecting to see another skinny little queen with perfect hair, like most of Marc's friends turned out to be.

Glenn was so not one of those.

The guy who walked over in answer to Marc's shout was probably only about five-nine, but he was solid, well-developed guns hanging out of a tight gray T-shirt, his ridged abs showing just a bit. He had blond hair and pretty greenish-gray eyes, and he looked like he liked to get some sun. The tan was natural, not spray-on.

Crispin could jack off to this guy for weeks.

"Hey, Marc. Nice place you got here. Thanks for inviting me."

Oh, dude. The best thing about Glenn was his voice. It was like warm caramel, washing over him in a hot wave. Damn. Pretty.

"Hi, honey. Glad you came. This is my friend Crispin. Crispin, Glenn."

"Hey, there."

"Hi."

They shook hands, and even those were nice on Glen, square and strong and callused. Man worked with his hands.

"So what's up, Marc?" Glenn asked, eyeing Crispin when he spoke.

"Crispin and I are having an argument."

Glenn's eye-wrinkles did this amazing bunching up thing. Wow. "Oh, he's way too pretty to argue with, Marc."

"I thought you'd like." Marc waved the margarita, the green shit dancing in the glass like an absinthe fairy in a movie. "Well, I maintain that if you've never had sex with a man, you're a virgin. As in, if you're queer, women don't count."

"Hmm." Glenn was really studying him, now. Not so much with interest, but in that bug under the microscope way. Yay.

"I told him I am far from virginal." His cheeks heated, and Crispin cursed his fair skin. It usually worked in his favor; paired with blue eyes and almost-black hair, the girls loved his look.

Too bad the guys were iffy.

"You divorced your wife because you wanted to get it on with a man, and you never have!" Marc exclaimed, the margarita sloshing crazily.

"That's not the only reason I divorced Amy!"

"Amy, huh? Sounds like an all-American girl."

"She's a harpy," Marc said, sniffing.

Crispin glared at both of them impartially. "She is not a harpy! She was just miserably unhappy with me, and I can't blame her. Wouldn't you be if you never got laid because your stupid husband didn't realize he was gay until after he married his high school sweetheart?"

The last came out as a freakishly loud shout, and all activity in the pool area stopped, twenty or more perfectly coiffed male heads turning, all of the guests staring at him.

Crispin did the only thing he could think to do. He shoved his plate at Marc, who automatically reached out to grab it, and fled.

"Shit, Marc. That was brilliant." Glenn shook his head. So much for hooking him up with this great, if inexperienced, guy.

"You didn't help." Marc grimaced. "Well, go after him. Tell him you're not a jerk, you just play one on Marc TV."

"Oh. Good idea." It was a good idea. Glenn turned idea into action, too, sprinting after Crispin, catching him just as he was sliding into the driver's seat of a big pickup.

"Hey! Hey, can I have a few seconds, man?" Glenn grabbed the door before Crispin could pull it shut.

Those bright blue eyes met his. "Sure. What can I do for you, man?"

"I wanted to apologize."

"Why? Marc was a jerk, but I'm the one who made an ass of myself. You just stared." Crispin's lips flattened out, cutting off any more words.

"Sorry. I mean, Marc can be... He thinks he's trying to help."

"Yeah, well, thanks for coming out to say goodnight."

"Wait!" Damn, this guy was touchy. His whole marriage-divorce-not getting laid thing must have been really head-trippy. "Did you get to eat?"

"No. I'm not going back in there, though." Crispin's cheeks went cherry-bright. "I know I'm being an idiot, but it's been kind of a long day."

Huh. Well, if that meant Crispin wasn't always this on edge, that was a good thing.

"Why don't we go somewhere and grab some food, then? Maybe a beer? Marc will understand."

"You... sure. Sure, why not?"

"Cool. Can I ride with you?" He'd ridden in with someone else to get there, and he didn't want to have to explain to Kyle what was going on. The guy was nice and all, but they didn't know each other well. Marc had tried to hook them up, too, and it had been obvious that they weren't a match.

Crispin had possibilities.

"Yeah. Do you, uh, do you want to call Marc, or run back in and holler at him?"

"I'll call." Glenn hopped up in the passenger side of the truck after jogging around to that side, grinning. "If I go in there will be drama."

"God, yes."

He flipped his cell open and called Marc, leaving a message when no one answered. "Hey, man. Crispin--"

"Cris."

"Cris and I are going to get a drink and some food. Thanks for the invite. We'll see you later." Glenn hung up, and silence reigned for a bit.

Then Cris grinned a little, fingers beating a tattoo on the steering wheel. "So, where to?"

"How about steak?" He didn't want anything spicy, just in case he got to show Cris how good it could be between two guys.

"Okay. I know a great place."

Cris had great hands. They were scarred up, which told him the guy did something physical.

"You in construction, too?"

"Self-defense and boxing, actually. I own a gym."

"No shit?" That was kind of hot.

"Started in the army. It's what I'm good at." Cris grinned. "So you're in construction? That's cool. No gym rats for you."

"I might be convinced to try one?" He gave Cris a sideways, I'm interested glance, and was rewarded with a flush.

"You're going fast."

"Coming on too strong? I'm sorry. I'm used to gay men who have been around the block about fifty times."

"I haven't. Is that going to be an issue?"

"Well, I knew it going in." He grinned. "You just have to tell me if I push."

"I will."

They wheeled into a place called the Texas Roadhouse, and the smell of grilled meat and bread hit Glenn hard, reminding him that he hadn't eaten either. Yum.

This was turning out way better than he'd thought it would. Glenn just hoped they could stay on track.

They ended up at Crispin's place.

Crispin wasn't sure how. Oh, there had been steak and cheesecake and how about another beer? Then there had been the idea that he couldn't drive on another beer, but he had beer at home...

Maybe the whole cherry argument with Marc had affected him more than he thought.

Then again, maybe that wasn't giving Glenn enough credit for being hot, funny, and really kind of sweet, if a guy wanted to get sappy about it.

Not that Crispin was a sappy guy.

"Earth to Cris, man."

"Huh?" He jerked, glancing up from his beer label, which lay in shreds in his lap.

"Movie's over. You need me to head home? I can call a cab."

"Only if you want to go home. I've been having a good time." That was the truth, and he had promised himself and Glenn that he would tell the man if he was pushing.

"Me too."

"Well... cool. You want anything else?"

Glenn sat up in the big recliner, dropping the footrest to the floor. "Can I come sit on the couch with you?"

His heart started racing like he wasn't a thirty-something with plenty of sheet time under his belt. "I'd like that."

"Cool." Glenn got up, slow and easy, and eased over to the couch, settling in next to him. Close. Cris felt the heat of Glenn's solid body all along his side.

It made him breathe a little heavy.

"So, what all do you like to do, Cris?"

They'd already talked about what they did on their days off, their favorite foods, their families, and what kind of music and movies they liked. Glenn had to mean what did he like to do in the sack.

Crispin cleared his throat. "I like kissing."

"Do you? Would it be moving too fast if I kiss you?" Glenn had spiky blond eyelashes. They were thick, though. Pretty.

"Why?" It popped out before he could stop it, but he had to ask.

Glenn frowned, brow furrowing. "Why what?"

"Why do you want to kiss me? I mean, if it's just because you're jonesing on me being a guy virgin, I don't want that."

Glenn sat back, hand slipping off Crispin's thigh. The man actually did Cris the favor of thinking about it, head tilting. Then Glenn shrugged.

"No. I mean, it may have been what got me interested in leaving with you tonight, but I also had to overcome your reaction to get there."

Yeah. He'd been a drama-llama. And he was the one who always accused Marc and friends of being too big on the big scenes. It wasn't something he was proud of.

"Anyway, I've spent the night getting to know you, huh? I like you. I could have left just now."

"True." Cris grinned. "So kiss me already."

"Cool." Glenn moved even closer, half-turning to face him, one hand coming up to frame his face. It was kind of a chick-flick moment, but Cris didn't mind. It was hot enough that he only gave it a passing thought, how cheesy it could be.

Glenn kissed him, lips warm and firm against his, hot as fire.

God it felt good. Not like kissing a girl at all. He could feel Glenn's end of the day whiskers coming in, the little calluses on Glenn's fingers scraping his cheek. Damn.

He moaned a little, pushing up into Glenn's touch, his hands going up around Glenn's neck. They held on to each other, tilting their heads to get more of each other, and this was where Cris proved that experience was experience, no matter who you were with.

There would be no awkward nose bumping here.

Glenn's tongue pressed against his closed lips, asking entry, and Cris gave it, opening his mouth to let Glenn taste him. The scrape of tongue on tongue sent little shivers through him, ending in his nipples and his cock.

He wanted more. All of a sudden. It was like all his reasons for reticence were gone. Glenn was exactly the guy who could take him down and make him and exactly the kind of guy who wouldn't do that.

They finally broke off to breathe, and Cris blinked at Glenn, who licked his lips. "Can I push some more?" Glenn asked.

"Uh-huh. What are you going to push on this time?"

"I want to take your shirt off."

"How about I do it?" Cris was not ashamed of his body. Not one bit. He reached down and tugged his T-shirt off over his head.

"Nice." There was real admiration in Glenn's voice, in those pretty green eyes. It was sincere enough that Cris wanted to show off a little, wanted to give Glenn a real taste of his muscles.

What he got was another kiss, though, Glenn's hand sliding down his neck, then his chest. Glenn stopped at his left nipple, thumb and forefinger closing around it to pinch and pull.

Muscles jumped under his skin, and Cris gasped, his whole body shaking. "Damn," he said against Glenn's mouth. "Damn."

"Yeah. God, you're pretty." Glenn chuckled. "You wax?"

"Yeah. Makes it easier in the ring. You?"

"No. Wanna see?" Glenn pulled back and shrugged out of his shirt, showing off an expanse of chest that was damned impressive, covered in a wedge of blond curls.

"Oh." Cris had to touch. Had to. He reached out, palm against one pec, feeling heat and fuzz and the beating of Glenn's heart, which was gratifyingly fast.

"That's good, man. It can get better."

"I bet." He knew what Glenn was angling for, and he wanted it, too. Cris unzipped his jeans and lifted his hips, taking the bull by the horns and just getting naked. It was kind of freeing, to get it over with, to be the first one with his cock waving around. It was weird not to be the only one with a dick.

Glenn hummed, wrapping a hand around Cris' cock. It felt like coming home, like he'd finally found just the right fit. Like he could come in seconds if Glenn didn't ease off. Cris wrapped his fingers around Glenn's wrist.

"You, too. I don't want to, you know, too fast."

"Okay. No problem." It took maybe three seconds for Glenn to skin out of his jeans, too, and then Cris had something to look at, something to hold on to. Glenn smelled earthy and sharp, and felt hot as fire. His cock leaked a little, and Cris pushed a finger against Glenn's slit before bringing it to his mouth to taste.

"Hmm. Salty."

"You never tasted your own?"

"No. That seemed weird."

"Dude, that's just a guy thing."

Cris rolled his eyes. "Maybe. If you say so."

"Oh, shut up." Glenn moved in and kissed him again, hard, grabbing his cock again and stroking nice and firm. Sweet.

The feel of Glenn's cock in his hand distracted him enough to keep him from exploding like an overfilled balloon. The kiss took his breath, both of them getting a little desperate now, moving faster.

"Come on, man." Now he could tell Marc he'd touched a dick not his own. And he liked it. A lot. "Come on. I need the edge off."

He said it against Glenn's mouth, and Glenn bit Cris' lower lip, hard enough to sting. Not quite hard enough to draw blood.

"Yeah. Oh, shit. Yeah."

"I bet you like this, too." There was a wild glint, a wide grin, before Glenn pushed his thumb against the slit at the tip of Cris' cock.

His hips jerked so hard he saw stars, his eyes rolling back in his head. Jesus.

"I like it. You're right."

"I thought so." Glenn did it again, then again, before sliding down to grab Cris' cock again and pull, hard, up and down.

The friction pulled his balls right up to the base of his cock, and Cris' belly went hard, something in it just quivering.

He came like he hadn't in... years. It had to be years.

"Finish me off, man. I'm--I'm ready."

Cris blinked, wondering how long he'd sat there with his fingers wrapped loosely around Glenn's cock, his mouth open while he panted. Shit. Laughing a little, Cris shook off the ringing echoes of his orgasm.

"Sorry, man. Sorry." He started stroking, knowing the rhythm he liked best when he was about to shoot, really going to it.

Glenn moaned, head lolling back against the couch as they turned a little, Cris taking the lead now. He wanted all sorts of stuff, wanted to taste and maybe experiment, but this was a good start, a good way to begin. Cris pulled, tightening his fingers, going all the way to the balls before stroking up over the tip, really squeezing there.

"Fuck!" Glenn bucked against him, and the smell of spunk that wasn't his suddenly filled the room, a little spicier, a little more earthy. Wow. He hadn't known it would be so different.

Glenn panted, one hand resting on Crispin's chest, the other still holding his cock. Now that they urgency was over, they kinda looked gamers holding joysticks.

Cris fought the urge to laugh hysterically, knowing it would kill the mood.

"That was pretty good for an appetizer, huh?" Glenn kissed the corner of his mouth, leaning against his chest.

"I think it was dessert."

"Maybe one of those cordials Marc is always serving after dinner."

"You think he would have done that at a barbeque?" Cris asked, feeling a little disconnected and fuzzy.

"Nah. He would serve chocolate martinis."

Ew. Cris was not sorry he'd missed that. "Well, good thing we came here."

"Yeah." Glenn studied him a moment. "Would it be pushing if I said I wanted to do more with you? Like, a lot more."

"Only if you just want that and not to get to know me better." Cris pulled Glenn up a bit and leaned back against the couch cushions.

"You mean you don't give out on a first date?" Glenn grinned, staring right into his eyes. Cris could see the admiration there, and he thought they might just have that second date and then some.

"Nope. I'm old-fashioned that way."

Nodding, Glenn hummed. "Fair enough. You may be old-fashioned, but there's one thing we can't say about you now."

Hey, that was right. Cris chuckled. "I've been saying it all along. I'm no one's cherry."

First of Foot, Right of the Line

Kiernan Kelly

F.B. tilted the tall paper cup with its familiar logo to his lips, draining the last of his decaf vanilla latte. Coffee didn't provide the instant jolt to his system like it once had, not since Matt had weaned him off caffeine, but he still enjoyed the taste of a good cup of Starbucks once in a while.

He wiped his mouth clean with the back of his hand. Decaf or not, he knew from experience that lattes tended to leave a white foam mustache in their wake. No Marine could look tough while sporting a frothy upper lip, and tonight, F.B. intended to look positively *forbidding*.

The clock read five-fifteen. The sun was already hanging low over the city; soon the streetlights would wink on. He had to get home soon -- he and Matt were due to leave for the party in an hour and a half.

Party. He snorted sardonically to himself, his fist crushing the empty cup into a twisted, unrecognizable lump of soggy cardboard. "Party" wasn't exactly the name F.B. would give to the shindig Matt was dragging him to that evening.

"Execution" would be more fitting, or "bloodbath," maybe, but definitely not "party."

He'd never gone home to meet his lover's family before, but it was time to pop his cherry, and F.B. was absolutely dreading the experience. Up until then, he and Matt had been solely a Corps of two, and he was reluctant to allow anyone else membership. Not only that, but no matter how much Matt assured him Matt's family was accepting of their relationship, F.B. remained unconvinced.

"Come on, F.B.! We've dated for two years and have been married for six months. It's time you met my family," Matt had said a couple of weeks earlier. *"You didn't want a big, fancy wedding. I agreed to make you happy, but now it's your turn to give me what I want, and what I want is to show off my big Marine to everybody."*

It was true, of course. When F.B. proposed to Matt in the middle of a hardware superstore a year ago last Valentine's Day, he hadn't really thought as far ahead as the actual wedding ceremony. He'd just assumed Matt would want what he wanted -- something small and fast, a quick civil ceremony in front of a judge at City Hall.

As it turned out, they'd had very different ideas of what a wedding should be. Matt wanted an all-out, no-holds-barred, *Bridezilla* wedding complete with monkey suits, a full orchestra,

limousines, and a three-tier cake with little plastic groom figures on the top, attended by everyone they'd ever met in their lifetimes. The very thought of such a public display made F.B. vaguely sick to his stomach. He was too used to keeping his private life... well, *private*.

In the end, when Matt saw how disturbed F.B. was with idea of a big wedding, he'd agreed to a simple ceremony at the courthouse, witnessed only by two of their closest friends, and followed by an intimate dinner at Matt's favorite restaurant. There'd been no invitations with lace and ribbon, no tuxedos, no flowers, no music, and no lavish reception. Matt's family hadn't even attended.

Now it was payback time. Matt insisted F.B. meet his folks, and there was no way for F.B. to worm out of it. They'd driven into town last night, gotten a hotel room, and were due to leave for Matt's parents' house in an hour and a half.

F.B. was a former Marine. He'd fought in the Gulf and participated in countless dangerous missions with the Corps. He was no coward, but today, as the clock inexorably ticked closer to go time, he wondered whether it might just not be preferable to eat a bullet rather than bite it. After all, this visit involved F.B. coming out to Matt's parents to not only say, "hey, I'm gay," but also, "I'm the guy who has wild monkey sex with your son."

"Man up," F.B. said under his breath. "You can do this, Marine. First of foot, right of the line," he thought, referring to the privilege given the Marines in 1848 that allows the Marines the place of honor in any Naval formation, bestowed upon them because, traditionally, the Marines are usually the first to fight.

Unfortunately, the honor of meeting Matt's family was one for which F.B. would gladly suffer standing at the back of the line.

He tossed his massacred coffee cup into the trash and left the shop, his legs taking long strides toward their hotel, back straight, chest out, eyes front. Still, he couldn't silence the tiny voice whispering in the back of his head that he was heading unarmed into an enemy camp where he'd be sorely outnumbered.

An uncomfortable feeling fluttered in his gut, one he didn't immediately recognize. It took a few minutes, but he finally realized what he was feeling.

For the first time since he was a snot-nosed green recruit on his first day of basic training, F.B. was truly afraid.

When F.B. arrived back at the hotel room, Matt was riffling through his duffle and cursing up a storm. "What the hell is all this, F.B.? Why did you pack this shit? We're visiting my folks, not staging a coup." He gestured toward the small pile of arms on the bed.

"Since when do you snoop through my stuff?" F.B. growled in return. He picked up his Ka-Bar, his Beretta M9, and his baton, all Army-issue, and all acquired in a slightly-less-than-legal manner after F.B. mustered out, stuffing it all back into the battered green duffle.

"You're scaring me, F.B. You packed as if you were planning on going to war."

F.B. paused, studying Matt. He looked upset; his handsome face was drawn, and worry clouded his normally bright eyes. "I... aw, fuck. You want to know the truth, Matt? Your big, bad Marine is scared shitless about this whole deal. I don't know how to behave, or what to say to your folks. I packed my gear just so that I'd have something familiar with me. I thought it might help me get over my jitters." He felt ashamed and hung his head, risking only quick glances at Matt.

To F.B.'s surprise, Matt visibly relaxed, and his lips curled in a smile. "I can guarantee you that they haven't booby-trapped their living room, F.B. They already know about me, about you, about us. They *want* to meet you. It's going to be fine." He sat down and patted the edge of the mattress. "I should've noticed how nervous you were, and said something about it earlier. I'm sorry."

F.B. swung his heavy duffle to the floor and took a seat. When Matt crawled up behind him and began massaging his shoulders, he felt some of the tension straining his muscles drain away. "Nah, this is my problem, not yours."

"Your problems *are* my problems, big guy. We're in this together, remember? We are a Corps of two, as you always say. You don't need an arsenal to meet my folks, only me by your side. Don't make me have to court-martial your ass." Matt accentuated his words by flicking F.B.'s ear.

F.B. chuckled. "Okay, okay. I get it. No heavy artillery allowed."

"What are you wearing tonight, by the way?"

"Camouflage?"

"Nice try."

"I should've brought my dress blues."

"F.B., you need to stop thinking about this as a military exercise. We're just going to my folks' house to meet my family. Jeans and a nice button-down will suffice."

"I know, I know. I can't help it."

"Goddamn, F.B., your muscles are tight. You need to relax. Want me to help?" Matt's lips brushed against F.B.'s ear as he spoke, his warm breath sending a shiver tripping down F.B.'s spine.

Oh, those were magic words. F.B. knew Matt's favorite technique for helping him relax, and his cock instantly came to full attention, pressing uncomfortably against his fly.

Matt got up off the bed and knelt between F.B.'s legs. F.B. ran his fingers through Matt's tousled blond hair, then planted a big hand on either side of Matt's face, tipping it up toward his. Full lips and an impish smile lit Matt's face as F.B. ducked down for a deep kiss full of tongue and attitude.

He could easily kiss Matt for hours -- indeed, he'd done just that many times in the past -- but time was a factor here. They needed to leave for Matt's parents' house soon, which didn't leave them much time for foreplay.

Matt must've been thinking the same thing, because as F.B. plundered Matt's mouth, Matt's fingers were working on F.B.'s khakis, popping the button and sliding open the zipper. His camo-green briefs peeked out, pushed through the opening by his fully erect cock.

"Mmm, my Marine is all ready for me, huh?" Matt asked. He tugged on the waistband of F.B.'s pants, a not-so-subtle hint for F.B. to move his ass.

"You know us... Marines and Boy Scouts. Always prepared." F.B. lifted his hips to help Matt slide his khakis down to his ankles.

"I always liked that about you," Matt said, then fell silent as he bent over F.B.'s lap and mouthed him through the cotton underwear.

Matt's hot breath warmed F.B.'s skin as he teased F.B. through the briefs. It was sexy as all hell, but the material prevented F.B. from feeling the full effect of Matt's wet mouth, or the silky smoothness of his tongue and sharpness of his teeth. F.B.'s patience wore thin quickly, and he lifted his hips again, sliding his underwear down to join his pants in a puddle at his feet.

F.B. moaned long and low as Matt's lips closed around his cock. He loved the feel of Matt's mouth, always had. Matt knew exactly how to please him, how much he enjoyed having his cock tongued, licked slow and long from balls to tip and back again. Matt's mouth worked its magic on his prick, tongue swirling over the head, flicking under the ridge, languidly following the thick vein running along its underside. A nip of sharp teeth made him gasp; the tiny discomfort instantly forgotten when Matt abruptly swallowed him to the root. Had F.B. been able, he would have lain back and let Matt suck him all night.

There were times when F.B. liked it slow and easy, but then again, there was something to be said for fast and hard, and F.B. was never one to prefer playing the passive partner. Tonight was no exception. Maybe it was because the coming visit was so outside his realm of experience that he felt a loss of control, but he felt a strong need to take charge of at least this much of the evening. Growling low in his chest, he pulled away from Matt's mouth. "Come here," he ordered, his voice made even huskier than usual by his heightened need.

He stood up and kicked away the pants and underwear tangled at his feet, and hooked his hands under Matt's arms. He lifted Matt up bodily, easily tossing him onto the bed. Matt's grin did nothing to diminish the burning desire F.B. felt, or his need to dominate.

His teeth bared, practically snarling, F.B. yanked Matt's gym shorts and underwear down and off in one move, tossing them aside. His eyes watched as Matt's hands skimmed over Matt's chest and abdomen. There was a teasing light in Matt's eyes, and an impish tilt to his lips that turned the heat in F.B. belly up several notches higher. "Cocktease," F.B. growled.

"I prefer flirt," Matt answered. "A cocktease doesn't finish what they start. I do."

F.B.'s mouth went dry as Matt deliberately stroked himself, then licked his fingers.

F.B. never tired of looking at Matt, of touching him; his body was so different from F.B.'s own. Where F.B.'s heavily muscled body wore a map of every skirmish he'd fought, in the form of scars and tattoos, Matt's body was long and lean, and his skin smooth and clear. Usually, F.B. would take his time, kissing and licking Matt's delectable skin from his forehead to his toes and back again.

Not today.

Today, F.B. needed, and badly. His nerves felt raw, twitching like live wires under his skin. He needed release, needed to ease his painful arousal and full balls, in addition to soothing his jumpy nerves.

He was so wound up, he could barely think. Were the lube and condoms in his duffle, or Matt's suitcase? His heart pounded as he tried to remember, but couldn't, and realized that even if he did remember, he wasn't going to be able to hold off long enough to retrieve them anyway.

It didn't matter. He had other options.

He straddled Matt's legs, scooting up until his balls touched Matt's. Their cocks, similar in size and shape, bumped, sending a shiver racing along F.B.'s spine. He looked down at Matt from under hooded eyes. "Put your hand on us. Jerk us off together. I want to watch."

Matt bit his lip and did as F.B. ordered. His long fingers felt warm on F.B.'s skin as he squeezed their pricks together. Pre-come slicked his hand, making his strokes smoother. F.B. leaned down, taking Matt's mouth when he felt his orgasm begin to build again. This time, he let it go, grunting against Matt's lips as he came.

He felt Matt shuddering underneath him, and felt hot liquid splash on his belly. His own come mingled with Matt's, quickly cooling. He lay down next to Matt, feeling more relaxed than he had since they'd made the decision to visit Matt's parents.

"Better?" Matt asked. He patted F.B.'s leg, then crawled off the bed and padded into the bathroom, ostensibly to wash up. F.B. knew he should follow, but he also knew getting up meant

getting washed, getting dressed, and going to Matt's parents' house. He wanted to bask in the floaty afterglow a while longer before facing the inevitable.

Matt had other ideas. "Come on, get up! We're going to be late if we don't get moving."

F.B. stifled a groan, stood up, and obligingly -- if unenthusiastically -- followed Matt into the bathroom.

Matt's parents' house was a modest ranch set in a Stepford-like neighborhood of homes, all of which were edged by neatly trimmed lawns and pristine white walkways. They were evenly spaced, symmetrical, and identical down to the white gingerbread trim. F.B. wondered why he felt an odd sense of familiarity until he realized it was because the houses reminded him of barracks.

A middle-aged version of Matt answered the door. Ron Garner's hair was still blond, although a shade or two darker than his son's and streaked with gray at the temples, but their eyes were same soft blue. The sight of Matt's father shocked F.B. -- he didn't appear much older than F.B. himself. He hadn't thought about the difference in age between himself and Matt much before, but now it became glaringly obvious, and F.B. felt a little like a dirty old man.

He managed to maintain his stoic expression as he shook hands with Ron. To F.B.'s surprise, Ron's face and grip seemed to hold no animosity, and his smile seemed genuine.

"It's good to finally meet you, F.B. Matt's told us a lot about you!" Ron said, before turning F.B.'s hand loose and enveloping his son in a bear hug. "Matt! You look good, son."

"Thanks, Dad. You look good, too. Where's Mom?" Matt asked when Ron turned him loose.

"In the kitchen with Bitsy and Foo making dinner. Well, Mom is making dinner... chances are good that all Bitsy and Foo are making is a mess," Ron said, laughing as he stepped to the side. He held the door open for F.B. and Matt.

"I've told you about Bitsy and Foo, my niece and nephew. They're three and four years old respectively, courtesy of my brother Paul and his wife, Brenda," Matt explained as he led F.B. inside. "Who, by the way, are expecting demon child number three any day now."

F.B. nodded. The way Matt had described his family made them seem like the Brady Bunch. Having come from a family that had more in common with the Addams Family, F.B. was hard pressed to believe any family could be so idyllic, so accepting. He'd grown up an Army brat, the only son of a career man with little patience for the boy who'd tried his best to be the perfect little soldier, but almost always came up short in his father's eyes.

Still, if Ron Garner was any indication of the rest of Matt's clan, it would seem that Matt hadn't exaggerated.

Instead of reassuring F.B., the thought made him feel even more like an outsider.

A slender, dark-haired, very pregnant woman lay on the sofa in the living room, thumbing through a magazine. She looked up as they entered the room. "Matthew!" she cried, her lips curling into a grin. She struggled to stand up, but the size of her belly seemed to make the task all but impossible.

"Hi, Brenda. Don't you dare get up -- we'll come to you. F.B., this is my sister-in-law, Brenda. Brenda, my husband, F.B.," Matt said, equally enthusiastically. F.B. followed him to the sofa, where Matt bent down and gave Brenda a warm hug and patted her belly. "Look at you! How many babies do you have squirreled away in there?"

Brenda laughed. "Only one, says the doctor, but it feels like a half dozen, and of the elephant variety, if you ask me." She looked up at F.B., holding out her hand. "Nice to meet you, finally. Welcome to the zoo we like to call the Garner family." Her smile was bright and welcoming, and F.B. couldn't help but return it.

"Good to meet you," he answered, shaking her hand, careful not to squeeze too hard. "Matt mentioned that you were expecting. When are you due?" It seemed like a safe, logical question to ask an expectant mother. God knew, he'd had little -- make that *no* -- personal experience with one.

"Next week, and that's not soon enough," Brenda said. "What does 'F.B.' stand for, anyway? Matt's never told us."

F.B. had been expecting the question, but felt the blood drain from his face to his boots anyway. His moniker was an abbreviation of "fuck buddy," a nickname given him by his lover during basic training -- his C.O. The name had stuck with him through his career, and followed him out of the Corps. It somehow didn't seem prudent to share that information with Matt's family, though, no matter how accepting of his lifestyle they seemed to be.

Matt saved him from struggling to come up with a lie. "Fabian Bernard." Matt said it with a straight face, although F.B. could see the mischief twinkling in Matt's eyes.

F.B. shot him a black look, subconsciously flexing his muscles. *Fabian? Do I look like a Fabian?* He made a mental note to ream Matt a new one when they got back to the hotel.

Brenda nodded, and looked at Matt. "Mom's in the kitchen with the kids. They've been waiting for you."

"Cool. Be back soon. You just lie there and let that baby finish cooking, okay?" Matt said. He bent over and kissed the top of his sister-in-law's head. The fondness they held for each other was obvious.

Matt led F.B. out of the living room, down a short hallway, and into the kitchen, where a petite woman was removing a roast from the oven. Two small children were busily icing a cake at the table, although they'd managed to cover themselves in just as much, if not more, chocolate frosting than the baked goods. When they looked up and spotted Matt, their wide, delighted grins were almost identical.

"Uncle Maddy!" they screamed in unison, jumping down from their chairs. They flew across the room to Matt, wrapping their sticky, chocolate-covered hands around his hips, hugging him. They clearly adored their uncle.

Matt enthusiastically returned their hugs. "Hey, Bitsy-girl. Hey, Foo-bear. This is your new uncle, F.B."

F.B. suddenly found himself under attack by a pair of chocolate-covered, pint-sized commandos.

"Uncle Bee!" Bitsy cried, tugging on F.B.'s shirt. He bit back a grimace at the chocolate palm prints she left on his white button-down, and courageously lowered himself to her level. He received a sticky, wet kiss on the cheek from both children for his trouble.

"Uh, it's 'F.B.,' hon," he gently corrected her.

"Forget it, F.B. Once Bitsy names you, it sticks. That's why I'm 'Uncle Maddy,'" Matt said as he scooped Foo up into his arms. "Foo's real name is Rufus, after Brenda's father, but as soon as Bitsy could talk she named him 'Foo.' He's been 'Foo' ever since. Her full name is Elizabeth, but she can't say *that*, either, hence the 'Bitsy.'"

Uncle Bee. What a great name for a former Marine, F.B. thought, refraining from rolling his eyes. Makes me sound as if I should be living in Mayberry, baking pies for Andy and Opie.

"Elizabeth! Rufus! Look at the mess you're making! Go to the bathroom and wash your hands and faces before you paint the whole house chocolate brown."

F.B. looked toward the sound of the new voice. A man stood silhouetted in the doorway.

"But Daddy, Grandma said we could help!" Foo cried, instantly echoed by his sister.

"Paul, I did tell them they could frost the cake," Matt's mother put in, turning from the stove. The kids went back to the cake, instantly absorbed by the serious task of making sure every bit of it was slathered in an inch-thick layer of frosting.

"I'm sorry about your shirt," Paul said, pointing toward the tiny chocolate handprints on F.B.'s button-down. "They're a little too enthusiastic sometimes."

"Not a problem," F.B. said, sticking out his hand. Paul's handshake was firm, and his smile eerily similar to Matt's. Paul was a little taller, thicker around the middle, and had a receding hairline, but the family resemblance was still strong. "They're cute."

"Bro!" Matt cried, flinging himself at Paul. The two danced around the kitchen, trading mock punches. Matt laughed, and faked Paul out with a quick left jab before playfully clipping him on the chin with a right. Paul swung a roundhouse at Matt, who ducked away and bumped a hip against the kitchen table, making the children squeal with delight.

"Boys!" Matt's mother exclaimed, removing the potholders from her hands and throwing them down onto the table. "That's enough!" She turned toward F.B. "I'm very sorry about all this, Sometimes I think neither one of them ever grew up. You must be F.B. I'm very pleased to meet you at last." She reached up to give him a warm hug.

"No worries, ma'am," F.B. replied. Truth be told, he felt a twinge of envy at Matt and Paul's roughhousing. He was used to being the only man with whom Matt enjoyed such a close connection. Sharing Matt was something he wasn't sure he liked, even if it was only with Matt's brother. The fact that Matt and Paul shared a history together -- however brotherly -- that F.B. wasn't a part of, made the jealous twinge threaten to grow into a full-on streak. It was all he could do not to insinuate himself between Matt and Paul and make his claim on Matt clear. He tried to shake it off and concentrate on what Matt's mother was saying. *Don't go there, F.B. Paul is Matt's brother, and not somebody trying to get into Matt's pants. You never had patience for overbearing, possessive assholes... the last thing you need is to become one yourself.*

Matt seemed to have no inkling of F.B.'s thoughts as he indulged in a shoulder-shoving match with Paul.

Matt's mother shook her head at them and stepped away, still smiling. "You can call me Linda, but personally, I'd prefer it if you called me Mom. After all, you *are* a part of this family, even if I *didn't* get to attend the wedding." She ended her little speech by throwing a pointed look at Matt.

"Do you want to get the lecture over now, Mom, or save it for dessert?" Matt asked, finally stepping away from Paul. He kissed his mother on the cheek, and hugged her.

"Don't sass me, Matthew Garner. I have a right to be upset since you got married without inviting your family. You didn't even let us *meet* F.B. beforehand! I'm entitled to nag you about it." She looked F.B. up and down, and he saw approval in her expression. "I will say that this is one fine Marine you've picked to share your life with, though. I like him, so I guess I'll forgive you," Linda said, with a warm smile and a wink.

F.B. returned Linda's smile with one of his own. His gut instinct told him this was a good woman, and he always relied on his gut to tell him the truth. It didn't quite relieve the discomfort he felt, or the feeling of being an outsider, but it helped. "Thanks... Mom." It felt odd calling her that, considering she wasn't much older than he was, but he knew it would please her.

It did, and her smile grew broader. "Well, I've said my piece... for now. Dinner will be ready soon. Matt, why don't you take F.B. out back and show him my roses? They're in bloom. Paul, would you help set the table?"

F.B. tried hard not to seem too eager when Matt nodded and led him through the back door into the yard, but the whole "meeting the family" thing had been a nerve-wracking experience. He'd thought he did a fairly good job at hiding his feelings, but from the way Linda's laughter followed them out of the house, he figured she'd seen through him. He felt the back of his neck heat up, and cringed.

Since when did he blush? It was incomprehensible, and yet his neck and cheeks were burning. The entire evening was throwing F.B. for a loop, and he didn't like it one bit. He swallowed hard, resisting the urge to rub his face, and turned his attention to the yard.

The property was a spacious rectangle of thick grass, bordered by a wooden privacy fence weathered an indistinct gray by the elements. Rosebushes grew along the back fence, spotting the perimeter, their blooms' colors all but lost in the darkness.

"So, do you want to look at the roses?" Matt asked him.

F.B. shook his head, and pulled Matt up and into his arms. Matt's body fit against his like hand-in-glove, familiar and reassuring. "Not particularly. I've officially met your family. Can we leave and go home, now?"

Matt chuckled. "My father would read me the riot act if I tried to take you away before he could trade war stories with you, and my mother would hunt us down and drag us back by our ears if we left before she could interrogate you about everything that's ever happened to you since you were a zygote."

F.B. snorted. "Your mom is all of five foot three and a hundred pounds soaking wet. She couldn't drag my duffle bag, let alone *me*, anywhere."

"You don't know her very well. When she's pissed off, she has the strength of a hundred mothers. Please, don't make her angry. You wouldn't like her when she's angry."

"Are you trying to tell me that sweet little lady in the kitchen is the Hulk?"

"Except for the green skin, bad hair, and penis... yes."

F.B. laughed, then suddenly cupped Matt's ass with both hands, squeezing, and ducked down for a long, deep kiss. Matt's body immediately responded to him, and he felt a little reassured by the way Matt's cock pressed eagerly against his hip.

"What was that for?" Matt asked, looking surprised and sounding breathless.

"Just a little reminder that even though you're here with your family, you still belong to me, and the minute we get back to our hotel room, I intend to remind you of that fact by stripping you naked and marking every inch of you with my lips and teeth."

F.B. chuckled as Matt gave a low moan and adjusted himself. "No fair giving me a hard on, F.B. Now I have to sit at the dinner table with a fucking boner."

"Serves you right for telling your sister-in-law that my name is Fabian."

"You're not going to just let that one slide, are you?"

"Not on your life, mister. I'm going to take that one out of your hide later tonight, in delectable, bite-sized pieces."

Matt mewled, making F.B. grin, and he led Matt back inside the house.

Brenda's water broke just as they were finishing dinner, and the flurry of activity that followed left F.B. at a complete and total loss.

Brenda's expression was strained, and her face as pale as milk. "Oh, my God! Paul? Paul! I'm having the baby... *now!*" she cried, her arms wrapped around her huge belly. She moaned as if in great pain.

"*Now?*" F.B. asked Matt. "As in... *right now?*" He wasn't sure if he should back out of the way, or squat down in front of Brenda like a catcher at a baseball game.

Linda took charge of the situation, reminding F.B. of his old drill sergeant. "The more children you have, the faster the labor can progress," she said as she helped Brenda to her feet. "This baby can take hours in coming, or minutes, and since her water's broken, my money is on the latter. Paul, get Brenda's suitcase. Ron, bring the car around. Matt, you and F.B. get the kids out of the way. We need to get Brenda to the hospital quickly. Get a move on, gentlemen!"

Matt held Foo, while F.B. cradled Bitsy against his chest. Her small face was pinched, her eyes swimming with tears. When her mother hissed in pain, Bitsy opened her mouth and let loose a wail that would have rivaled any air raid siren. "Shh," F.B. crooned, although he felt a little like wailing himself. "Your mommy's okay. She's just going to have the baby, is all."

"Mommy!" Bitsy shrieked, her short, chubby arms reaching for her mother. F.B. tightened his hold to keep her from wriggling free.

"I'm okay, sweetie," Brenda said, although her pained expression told F.B. otherwise. "It's time for your new brother or sister to come. We talked about this, remember? You and Foo stay with Uncle Matt and Uncle Bee, okay?"

"You hurt, Mommy?" Foo's voice was frightened, and sounded just this side of panicky.

"No, Foo-baby. I'm fine." F.B. gave Brenda credit for maintaining a poker face, since he could see the pain flaring in her eyes. "You two be good for your uncles, now, okay?"

Then F.B. and Matt were alone in the house with the two sniffing children as Linda swept everyone else out the front door to the car. They watched her load Brenda into the back seat, and slip in beside her. Ron drove while Paul rode shotgun, and as the car pulled away from the curb and disappeared down the street, Bitsy and Foo's cries redoubled.

They were alone with the children.

The inconsolable, crying children.

F.B. felt something very akin to panic flood his veins.

"Matt... what do we do now?" he asking, raising his voice to be heard over Bitsy and Foo's wails.

Matt shrugged. "We babysit, that's what."

"This is outside the realm of my experience, Matt. I can disassemble and reassemble my firearm in sixty seconds flat, and I can shoot the period off the end of a sentence, but I don't know *anything* about children. I never babysat before!"

"So? There's a first time for everything. You'll learn." Matt seemed totally unperturbed. "There's nothing to it, F.B. The kids are scared now, but they'll calm down. We'll bathe them, then tuck them in for the night. It'll be fine, you'll see."

F.B. hoped Matt was speaking the truth. After a few minutes, Foo and Bitsy proved him right, their cries dying down to hiccups before ceasing altogether. Foo rested his head comfortably against Matt's shoulder, and Bitsy tucked her head under F.B.'s chin, noisily sucking her thumb. F.B. finally began to relax.

Until Bitsy popped her thumb out of her mouth and said, "Poop."

"Please tell me that's the kiddy version of swearing," F.B. said to Matt. He cringed when Matt answered with a grin.

"Nope. It's not an expletive -- it's a warning. You'd better get her to the potty."

"Oh, hell... er, heck no! You do it," F.B. said, trying to thrust Bitsy at Matt.

"Poop, poop, poop!" Bitsy chimed, smacking F.B. and Matt alternately.

"Not a chance. I have Foo. You have Bitsy."

"I want to trade, then," F.B. said, reaching for Foo.

Matt danced Foo out of F.B.'s reach. "Sorry. I had him first."

"Poop, poop!" There was a sense of urgency in Bitsy's voice now, one that warned F.B. of dire consequences should he delay any longer. He glared at Matt, biting back a long torrent of words that were indeed expletives, each one more foul than the last, and carried Bitsy toward the bathroom.

Matt's laughter followed him all the way down the hall.

F.B. set Bitsy down in the bathroom where, luckily for him, she went about her business with the aplomb of a seasoned professional. All F.B. had to do was turn his back and wait, then help Bitsy dispose of the evidence in the porcelain toilet and wash her hands.

All in all, he thought he handled the entire experience like a true Marine, and felt inordinately proud of himself.

"See? That wasn't so tough, was it?" Matt asked when F.B. carried Bitsy back into the living room.

"I handled it, but next time, you're taking latrine duty," F.B. said firmly. "What do we do now?"

"Bath time, then bed," Matt said, leading F.B. back toward the bathroom.

F.B. quickly figured out that in Matt's family, *bath time* was a euphemism for an indoor tsunami.

Although there couldn't have been more than three or four inches of water in the tub, Foo and Bitsy managed to soak both him and Matt head to foot by the time the bath was over.

They towel-dried the kids -- a feat in and of itself, since the wet, wriggling, giggling children were more slippery than greased piglets -- dressed them in their pajamas, and carried them into their shared bedroom.

Tucked into their beds, sleep seemed out of the question. They didn't close their eyes and instantly fall asleep as F.B. had hoped. Instead, Bitsy and Foo clamored for a bedtime story.

"Story! Story, Uncle Bee!"

"Well, go ahead. Tell them a story, F.B.," Matt said as he pulled down the window shade and took a seat on Foo's bed.

"Oh, no. You tell them one," F.B. retorted, frowning.

"They want to hear one from you," Matt insisted. He was enjoying this, F.B. realized. F.B. consoled himself with the many ways he'd extract revenge on Matt the moment he got him alone later that night.

"The only stories I know end with gunfire and explosions," F.B. said, growling. "Or s-e-x."

"S-e-x!" Bitsy instantly parroted.

"Oh, shit," F.B. grumbled before he could stop himself.

"Shit!" Bitsy and Foo cried together, bouncing happily on their beds.

Matt, thankfully, came to his senses in time, and jumped in before F.B. could manage to teach the kids the full range of vulgarities in his vocabulary. "Okay, okay, if you want to hear a story, then you have to settle down. Once upon a time, there was a prince..."

F.B. settled wearily into a rocking chair near Bitsy's bed, absurdly grateful that Matt had taken over story time. He'd fought in hand-to-hand combat with guerillas, had suffered desert heat, arctic cold, hunger, and thirst during his tours with the Marines. He'd bent his back to hard labor, and had marched miles in the rain and under a boiling sun, but nothing he'd ever experienced before had left him feeling so tired. He felt as wrung out as an old sponge, ready for the trash.

And oddly euphoric at the same time.

Maybe it was the way Bitsy smiled at him, or the way her small arms tightened around his neck in a hug, or the way Foo laughed with such pure joy in his voice, or the way Matt looked at F.B. with gleaming eyes when he'd kissed Bitsy and Foo goodnight. Maybe it was everything, the whole experience, poopy and wet though some of it was, that gave rise to a strange sort of yearning deep inside F.B.

He loved Matt more than any single person he'd ever known in his lifetime, enough to put a ring on the man's finger and publicly declare Matt his husband. He couldn't imagine a single day in his life without Matt in it. Up until a few hours ago, it had seemed like an idyllic life, and more than enough to keep him happy forever.

But...

What would it be like to have kids of their own? To have little, round faces looking up at him and Matt with love shining in their eyes every night; to receive wet kisses and chocolate palm prints on a regular basis?

F.B. knew it was entirely possible. They could use a surrogate, or adopt...

He shook his head, trying to rid himself of the fanciful notion, but hours later, as the sun rose and Ron called to say Brenda's baby had arrived, another girl, and both mom and daughter were doing fine, F.B. found himself still thinking about it.

"You're awfully quiet," Matt said, as F.B. stuffed odd bits of clothing into his duffle. It'd been three days since Amanda Lee joined the Garner family, a pink-cheeked baby with a shock of

black hair and the ability to make everyone who came in contact with her fall instantly in love. She'd already been christened "Yee-Yee" by her big sister, Bitsy, and true to Garner family tradition, everyone was calling the baby by that name.

They'd said their last goodbyes to Matt's family, and were gearing up for the day-long drive back home. F.B. remained lost in his thoughts, quiet and pensive, and now, evidently, Matt had had enough of the silent act.

"What's wrong?" Matt asked. "Talk to me, F.B."

"Nothing's wrong."

"It scares me when you get quiet like this. What's going on?"

"Nothing. Just thinking."

"About what?"

"Nothing."

To F.B.'s consternation, Matt snatched the T-shirt from F.B.'s hand, and insinuated himself between F.B. and the duffle bag. "Stop saying that and look at me. I know when something is bothering you. You haven't said a word since we left my parents' house, and not many before that."

"I've been thinking," F.B. repeated.

"I think we've already established that. What I want to know is what you've been thinking *about*, F.B."

"About kids."

"What? You mean Foo and Bitsy, or Yee-yee?"

"No, about..." F.B. hesitated, then decided he might as well jump in feet first. Maybe if he talked about it out loud, he'd be able to get the foolishness out of his head. "About having one of our own."

Matt gaped at him, for once, struck dumb.

"Did you hear me?"

"Oh, yeah, I heard you... I'm just not sure if I understood you. You've been thinking about *what*?"

F.B. smirked. "Kids. Children. Miniature human beings. That maybe we should get us one."

Matt stared at him for a long time, until F.B. began to feel distinctly uncomfortable. Maybe it *was* a crazy idea, and he should've kept his big mouth shut. He shouldered Matt out of the way and resumed packing.

Matt grabbed a pair of pants out of F.B.'s hand, and tossed them aside. "Are you *serious*?"

"That depends on whether or not you think I'm nuts."

Suddenly, Matt's lips curled in a slightly goofy smile, and he sank onto the mattress. "A family? Us? Wow..."

"We could talk about it, yeah?" F.B. smiled at Matt's reaction, and sat down. He slung his arm around Matt's shoulder, pulling him close. "Weigh the pros and cons."

"A kid. A little drooling poop-factory of our very own?" The look in Matt's eyes was dreamy, as if he were seeing something F.B. couldn't. "Wow. I wonder how long the adoption process takes? We'll need to get a lawyer, first thing. Brenda was a paralegal before she married Paul and left her job to be a stay-at-home mom. Maybe she knows someone."

"Matt? Matt, slow down. I said we should *talk* about it. Discuss it. I didn't say we should run out and sign papers today," F.B. said, although his heart began beating with the same excitement he saw flickering in Matt's eyes.

"Afraid, F.B.?" Matt asked, turning that smile F.B. loved so much in his direction.

"Watch it, boy. I've never been afraid of anything in my whole life, and I'm not about to start now," F.B. replied. He tried to sound stern and not let his excitement show, but knew he failed miserably. He gave in and grinned, then leaned in for a long kiss.

Their kiss deepened, growing needful, and as shirts and pants were shucked and skin met skin, all thoughts of children, their own or otherwise, fled.

In the end, they decided to use a surrogate, since the state they lived in made it very difficult for same-sex couples to adopt. Matt had insisted F.B. be the child's biological father. "First on foot, right of the line, remember?" he'd said at the time. "It can be my turn next time."

In the end it mattered little who provided the genetic material. They both fell instantly and completely in love the first time they laid eyes on little Jesse Garner-Winston, their first child, a sweet bundle of black hair, blue eyes, dimpled cheeks, and a cry that rivaled F.B.'s best frog voice.

As they cuddled in bed the first night they brought Jesse home from the hospital, Matt lying on one side and himself on the other, with Jesse securely tucked between them, F.B. realized his

Corps of two had officially grown to three. Moreover, he admitted, there was plenty of room left over for a full platoon of new recruits in the future, and he couldn't be happier about it. From that moment on Matt and Jesse would be first on foot, right of the line in F.B.'s life.

Nice Girls Do

Mallory Pajh

There's another group of girls this evening, different from the ones who were here in the afternoon, or maybe some of them are the same; it's hard to say. There's a group of girls, anyhow, pretending not to walk by the front gates, and yet another group standing on the opposite side of the street, as if that extra distance makes it easier to pretend they aren't standing in front of the house.

It's been like this for the past three weeks, ever since the local news ran that story about Alan climbing down into a storm drain to rescue a litter of abandoned kittens. He had climbed down not once, but twice. The reporter called him a hero, which Alan denied. "I just did what anyone would have done, if they'd heard the crying," he said. The reporter didn't tell him that wasn't true; she was media-savvy enough to know that his modesty only made him more appealing. When Taz watched the story that night on the small television in his room, he smiled but didn't say anything, either.

All of the kittens were adopted within two days, but even without that as an excuse, girls continue to show up. The rough edges of Alan's oft-serious expression has been keeping them at a distance, and while the kittens didn't alter his appearance, the way the local female population views him has apparently changed.

Taz has never thought Alan rough, but then, he has the advantage of having known Alan since he was a toddler. Taz came here when his father took the position of botanist for Mrs. Kensington's prize-winning orchids and roses. Newly widowed, Taz's father had accepted the offer of in-house accommodations for himself and his ten year old son gratefully. When Dad passed on a few years back, the Kensingtons insisted that no one but Taz would do for them. Even Alan, normally so reticent, said he hoped Taz would stay. And so Taz has stayed.

Taz watches Alan stare at the current group of female hopefuls, the confusion on his face deepening when they only turn and even walk away from the gaze they seem to be seeking. "I guess I may as well start dating them," Alan sighs aloud.

When Alan looks off to the left, Taz follows his gaze; the edge of a skirt flashes and twirls and disappears. The breeze, carrying hints of tittering to them, brushes Alan's bangs into his face and then away again. Alan shakes his head. "I think I will have to approach Madeline about showing me how to go about it all." He casts a glance in the direction of the neighboring house, but the whimsical girl next door is not outside. "Even if she doesn't have a lot of experience with this romance business, at least she's a girl. So she must know what girls are all about, what they want and expect. Although," he slows with another reconsideration, "she doesn't seem at all like the

girls who are expressing this interest in me." He sighs. "But maybe, even though we're nothing more than friends -- still, we are friends -- so maybe she would consent to practice with me."

Taz clears his throat tentatively. When Alan looks at him, Taz suggests, "Perhaps you should pick the girl you like best and practice with her."

Alan doesn't respond at first. Then rubbing the back of his neck, he says, "I don't particularly like any of them." Looking past the front gates again, he continues, "Even though they pay attention to me, none of them really know me. And I'm not sure they want to, not really. They group around me and they say things and sometimes I even say things, but it's not like I'm really talking to any of them. I'm not the person they think I am. I'm not a hero."

He falls silent, but Taz recognizes it as a silence holding words, so he waits.

"I don't have trust with them," Alan says at last, turning his face up to direct his words and gaze into the setting sun. "I feel like I'll just make a fool of myself and they'll laugh at me. It's ridiculous, isn't it, that I'm nearly twenty and don't have a clue?"

Taz doesn't point out that Alan has only just turned eighteen, and that at any rate, there is no shame in virginity even at twenty. There is no pregnancy of words in the silence this time, but Taz gives it a few moments before he offers, "You could practice with me." When Alan looks at him, Taz adds, "If you want to. I could look more girlish, if it would help you." He reaches back and pulls out his hair tie; freed from the ponytail, his locks tumble down, some falling over his shoulders, framing his face.

He drops his eyes, but he can still feel Alan's stare. Then he hears Alan say, "Don't do that." From his peripheral vision, Taz sees Alan raise his hand as he comes toward Taz, and for a moment Taz wonders if Alan means to strike him. But Alan only reaches around and gathers up the hair that has tripped down Taz's back. He fingercombs the strands out of Taz's face, and when he's satisfied, he takes the hair tie from Taz's hand and twists it around to hold the new ponytail. Then he takes a step back to look at his work critically. "That's better."

Taz keeps his face turned down even now, until Alan says, "How do we start, then?"

Their eyes meet, Alan's filled with that mixture of uncertainty and determination Taz has seen so many times. After a moment, neither looking away, Taz says, "We should go somewhere private. Somewhere with little chance of being interrupted." He's thinking of the greenhouse, perhaps, though it's hard to know when a whim of Mrs. Kensington's will take her there.

"No one would dare interrupt me in my own room," Alan says.

This is the last moment for hesitation, and Taz takes it. If he agrees now, he will cross a threshold he's never dreamed of crossing -- not consciously, at least.

With Alan still looking at him, Taz smiles and says, "All right."

In his room, Alan draws the shades, replacing dusk with the soft glow of a halogen bulb. They stand facing each other. "The most important thing," Taz tells him, "is to relax. You want to be aware of yourself and your partner. If touching helps you relax, you can do that."

"Looking is good," Alan says, so they look at each other for a while, into each other's eyes.

When Alan tilts his head and leans in, just a fraction of movement, Taz leans in as well, more, almost all the way, holding and breathing, and finally whispering, "It's okay," against Alan's lips. Alan opens against him, accepting his tongue and pushing into Taz's mouth, too. Taz uses his mouth to show Alan how to work his, uses his hands to show Alan how to use those, too, in a kiss. Awkwardness and nerves dominate at first, but Alan is gentle as ever and Taz is patient, and it isn't long before Taz steps back, smiles, and tells Alan he has it.

"I don't want to be proficient," Alan says. "I want to be good. Please." He tilts his head. "Instruct me further."

Charmed against his better judgment, Taz sits on the bed and draws Alan down beside him. As they resume kissing, Taz uses his hands now to show Alan how to use them for more than just kissing; as they fall back onto the bed, he uses himself to show Alan how to use his whole body for kissing.

When he feels evidence of Alan's arousal brush against his thigh, Taz pulls back.

"What next?" Alan asks.

"If she's a nice girl," Taz smiles. "She will thank you and politely bid you a good night."

"What if she's not a nice girl?" Alan wants to know.

"If she's not a nice girl," Taz says, holding his voice low and steady and conversational, "she might give you a hand job or a blow job, or maybe even let you fuck her."

They look at each other, Alan's gaze sinking into him deeper and deeper, Taz looking back evenly. When Taz takes his hair down this time, Alan doesn't stop him. "I'm not very nice," Taz says.

"Yes, you are," Alan replies, looking from Taz's hair to his face.

"I'll let you fuck me, anyhow," Taz dares as quietly as he can.

Alan swallows. "Okay."

There's no sound but breathing and the rush of heartbeats. "We'll need a few things," Taz says as he gets up from the bed, straightening his clothing, pulling his hair back and up.

When he returns a few minutes later, Alan is peering out the crack he has opened between the

shade and window. His own clothing and hair have been straightened. Taz drops his eyes as he closes the door behind him. "Have you changed your mind?"

"No." Alan lets the shade fall against the window and crosses to him, taking his face in both hands and kissing him deeply. "How was that?" he asks when they part, still holding Taz's face, his eyes searching Taz's for approval and instruction.

"That was very good," Taz murmurs. With a grin, Alan kisses him again.

They stand like this for awhile, joined at the lips, until Taz directs Alan to take him over to the bed. They continue kissing as before, with hands and mouths, with warmth and heat; this time, instead of only pushing clothing around, they stop to undress.

"What are you doing?" Alan asks. When Taz looks at him blankly, Alan plucks at the sleeve of his shirt.

"Ah." Taz feels a blush rise to his face and turns it down. "I thought it might be easier for you this way." His hands brush over an empty swell in front of his flat chest. "Less of a distraction."

Alan stares another moment. "It's more distracting like this," he says, so Taz removes his shirt and lets it fall to the floor with his other clothing.

They kneel naked on the bed. Reaching into the bag he fetched from his room, Taz hands the lubricated condom to Alan. "Do you know what to do with that?"

Alan nods. "We practiced in health class. On bananas. It's not the same, but I understand the principle."

Turning away to hide his grin, Taz rummages for the tube of his favorite water-based lubricant. As he squeezes a dollop onto his fingertips, he feels Alan watching him, and casts a glance up. "You won't have to do this with real girls. It's not necessary for you to learn about this part." He holds Alan's eyes until Alan gets his meaning and looks away.

Still turned away, Alan says, "Do girls ever let you do it like this? Um. Take them this way?"

Caught off-guard, Taz pauses with a slick fingertip poised at his entrance. "Some do."

"Then I think I should learn about this. Shouldn't I?"

"All right," Taz says. Taking it for permission, Alan faces him once more. As he prepares himself, Taz explains, "You want to get as much around and inside..." His words trail off, though his fingers continue the demonstration. Eyes fixed on where Taz's fingers have disappeared inside himself, Alan nods his understanding.

When Taz feels adequately slicked and stretched, he lies on his stomach, legs spread. "I'm ready now." He feels Alan kneel behind him, but when Taz looks back to see if Alan's ready, he finds

an intense but unreadable expression on Alan's face. "Do you want to stop?" he asks gently.

"No," Alan says immediately, then falls silent. "It's just," he finally continues, gesturing the length of Taz's body, "is this really how it would be?"

"It depends on the girl," Taz says. After a moment's thought, he adds, "The missionary position is the most common, though."

"Then that's what I want to do," Alan says firmly.

Taz rolls onto his back. He concentrates on breathing steadily as he spreads his legs for Alan, covering himself as best he can with one hand.

"Do *you* want to stop?" Alan asks.

Taz shakes his head. "No," he says. "But that's good, that's a very good instinct to ask what your partner wants." He smiles as Alan catalogues this internally. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." Alan nods. Then, seeming to remember what Taz has just told him, he adds, "Are you?"

Taz smiles and nods, too. "May I help you?"

Though he remains as intense as ever, relief sweeps just beneath the surface of Alan's expression. "Please."

Taz reaches for him, guides him in, opening himself as Alan's cockhead presses against his hole. "That's good," he encourages, "that's nice, nice and slow, and it's okay to push." His breath catches as Alan adds a little more force; all resistance yields and Alan slides in. "Oh yes, good. Wait a moment to let me adjust." When Taz's body has become accustomed to Alan's cock, he places one hand on Alan's hip, the other still careful to cover himself. "You can move now. Just do whatever comes naturally."

"It would feel more natural if you had both hands on me." Alan touches the hand between them, and with a small nod Taz moves it to Alan's other hip, careful to keep his eyes on Alan's face. Alan's gaze never leaves him.

Now Taz uses his words, his hands, his own hips to encourage and urge, and Alan's eyes fall shut as he moves, in and out and in -- and then abruptly, after only a few more strokes, he gasps, shudders, and stops.

"Fuck," he says. "Damnit." He looks quickly at Taz, just as quickly drops his eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm." He breaks off and sighs. "Very, very sorry."

Taz only smiles up at him. "It's okay," he reassures Alan. "It's normal to come quickly the first time. You'll last longer next time."

Alan nods but doesn't smile. He sits back, pulling out as he does so. Taz sits up, too, swinging his legs over the side of the bed and getting to his feet in one motion.

"You haven't come yet."

Taz looks over his shoulder as he kneels to gather up his clothing. "That's all right."

"No, it isn't," Alan says. "What kind of man would I be to let my lover leave unsatisfied?"

Still on his knees, Taz shifts to face him. "I'm not a girl," he says calmly, "so my satisfaction won't be like a girl's."

Taz could go on, but Alan has that stubborn, determined look again, and this time there is no uncertainty. The determination articulates as, "Come back to the bed."

Wordlessly, Taz rises and sits on the edge of the bed. Alan kneels on it beside him. Alan's hand comes into his line of sight, and Taz watches with fascination as the hand hovers and then touches his cock.

"You were harder than this before," Alan says. Taz slides his eyes away. "Is it okay for me to touch you like this?" Alan asks as his fingertips travel Taz's length. "Is it something that you want?"

Taz closes his eyes. "Yes," he breathes.

"Lie back." Alan's tone softens as he amends, "Will you lie back with me?"

Wordlessly, Taz pushes himself back onto the bed, shifting to lie down with one of the pillows once again under his head. He turns onto his side as Alan lies beside him. "You don't have to do this," Taz tells him quietly. "I could -- if it's important to you to know I've come, too, I could masturbate for you."

Alan studies Taz as he considers the offer. Then he shakes his head. "No," he says, "I want to be the one to do it." He looks down at his hand resting loosely around Taz's cock, then back up at Taz's face. "I'm just not sure how to."

Taz lightly touches the back of Alan's hand. "Just do what you do when you're taking care of yourself."

Alan nods. He relaxes the curl of his hand even more, slides up onto his fingertips, his ring finger and pinky drifting off, and begins stroking like that, flicking the pad of his thumb across the head on random upsweeps.

"That's -- *oh* --" Taz's mouth slackens as Alan's thumb brushes across him again, and he forgoes articulation in favor of just breathing.

But then Alan stops. "This doesn't feel natural."

Taz recovers normal breath and smiles as he opens his eyes. "It's all right," he says. "I would be happy to take care of myself."

"That's not what I mean," Alan says, his tone riddled with impatience. He opens his mouth, closes it, and the pique is gone but the determination is still there when he opens it again. "It's the angle that doesn't feel right." He rolls onto his back, legs parted. "Here." When Taz doesn't move, Alan spreads his legs wider, pats his torso, and repeats, "Here. Come lie here."

With Alan looking at him so expectantly, Taz carefully climbs between Alan's legs and lies back, his head resting on Alan's shoulder, his body resting on Alan's, his back arched to give Alan's cock breathing room.

"Are you comfortable like this?" Alan asks.

"Yes."

"Are you sure you wouldn't be more comfortable if you relaxed?" Alan smooths his palm over Taz's belly with gentle pressure, not stopping until Taz yields against him. "Isn't this better?"

"Yes," Taz murmurs.

"Good." Alan resumes stroking with his fingertips, his other hand cupping and massaging Taz's balls, and Taz is compelled to arch again. His own fingers dig into the bedclothes on either side of Alan's thighs. "Is this okay?" Alan asks without breaking his rhythms. Taz nods. "Is there something else you'd like?" Alan asks. "Something specific? You can show me--"

"This, what you're doing." Immediately regretting the impoliteness of his interruption, Taz adds, "I like that you asked." Alan has it in him to make someone an excellent lover someday, Taz can feel it. He'll tell Alan this, but later; right now, he surrenders to his own selfishness, to Alan's touch. Right now, when he turns to Alan and opens his mouth, it is only to dare a kiss against Alan's neck.

Alan continues stroking and rubbing and massaging, squeezing and flicking and caressing, and when Taz tells Alan how close he is, Alan's hand leaves his scrotum to splay along Taz's throat and jaw, nudging Taz's face toward him, covering his mouth with an open kiss as Taz comes. Their mouths keep touching after, breathing into one another, finally sliding away.

Taz allows himself to bask for a few moments before shifting from between Alan's legs and sliding his feet to the floor.

Bracing himself on his elbow, Alan asks, "What are you doing?"

"The comforter." Taz gestures at the slick evidence of their activities.

A kick from Alan sends the comforter to the floor, settling that matter. "Stay a little longer."

Giving in to his own smile as he yields to the request, Taz settles down on his back.

Alan remains propped up. "Would nice girls stay the night?"

"Sometimes."

"What about nice boys?" Alan touches Taz's face to brush back loose strands of hair.

Taz blinks softly. "Sometimes."

"And what about you?" Alan asks. "What about now?"

Taz swallows. He looks at Alan looking at him; he looks at Alan and, smiling, opens his mouth and closes his eyes when Alan kisses him again.

Lessons

Kathryn Scannell

Danny O’Riordan appraised the elegantly furnished sitting room where he’d been invited to wait for his instructor. Soft light came from hanging cloth-covered lanterns, gently illuminating without highlighting anything. The chairs were simple, dark wood, upholstered with silk in shades of gold. Every wall had a large mirror on it, making the room seem larger. Somewhere nearby a fountain burbled, making a soothing background noise. It was all very high class for a whorehouse.

He shouldn’t think of this as a whorehouse. It was an entertainment establishment, sanctioned by the Guild of the Jeweled Lotus, more familiarly known as the Courtesan’s Guild. His staff assured him it was quite highly rated. And he was embarrassed as hell to be here. He could tell himself until he was blue in the face that taking lessons in sexual technique was completely normal in the Tengri Empire. It really made sense for him to do it. It would be one less area where he was at a disadvantage, and there were far too many of those. As a young human from Earth who was not a wizard, he had a substantial collection of disadvantages to overcome in a society where everyone important had magic, and most of them were of the extremely long-lived Tengri race.

It was God damned awkward. Sex with men was still new. On top of that, he was here because he’d lost a bet and this was the forfeit Imperial Prince Melketh had picked, implying that he needed instruction like a backward child. But he’d given his word, so he was stuck.

He wanted to get up and pace, but that would have told the people watching he was nervous. He couldn’t help being embarrassed and uncomfortable, but damned if he’d advertise it. He knew there were watchers. Servants were everywhere in the Imperial City, keeping things running from behind the scenes. There were the Dragon Guards assigned by the Emperor to keep him safe. If he seemed too upset they might have orders to step in, and he’d still be stuck with a forfeit he hadn’t been able to discharge. So he sat and sipped tea from the delicate porcelain tea service a servant had left on the table before him, pretending to savor it.

The door opened, admitting a handsome Tengri man. He was of average height for a Tengri, about six foot four, and lightly built. His slanted eyes were a deep golden brown beneath elegant black brows which stood out against his pale skin. Red highlights gleamed in the mane of straight black hair which rippled down his back. Jeweled sticks caught part of it up in a knot, and the delicately pointed tips of his ears were just visible through it. He wore an open-necked shirt of flame-red silk, revealing a slice of lean, elegant chest. Skin-tight gray pants clung to every muscle in his legs and ass, as well as a suggestive bulge in front. Soft leather shoes, trimmed in glittery gemstones, completed the outfit. He moved like a dancer. He radiated sensuality and

desire in his every move. The desire was probably an act, given his profession, but Danny couldn't tell for sure. Tengri used magic as naturally as breathing, and the man's defenses blocked the emotional leakage that Danny's empathy would have picked up from a normal human.

"Lord Daniel." The Tengri bowed very low. "I am Tsien Liu, courtesan of the fifth rank. We are honored that you've chosen our establishment to serve you."

"You came very highly recommended by Imperial Prince Melketh." Danny rose, smiling politely. He was a bit above average height for a human, about five foot ten, but he still had to look up to meet Tsien Liu's eyes.

"Please, my lord, be seated. We should become acquainted first. I understand this is your first visit to one of our establishments." Liu gestured elegantly at the chair as he sank gracefully into one nearby.

"Ah, yes, it is." Danny sat back down, holding his tea cup like a shield.

"Then we should talk first about what we will be doing over the coming weeks."

"Weeks?" Danny was sure his voice had squeaked. "I, ah, wasn't expecting this to be so, um, extensive." He didn't have time to spend weeks here. There was a war going on, and he had duties. Every day he spent here meant losing nearly two at home on Earth because of the time differential between worlds.

Liu looked surprised. "Well, Imperial Prince Melketh has generously arranged for the full course of instruction for you. That can normally take as much as year, depending on how frequently you wish to visit. I had thought that you might be eager to try everything now -- most young people are. Of course you do have commitments. The lessons can be spaced out as much as necessary to accommodate your other duties."

Danny caught overtones of sex in the word Liu had chosen for "duties." He was still getting along by relying on a translation spell, but he had learned enough of the Tengri language to begin catching some of the subtleties that didn't translate automatically. He felt his face turning red. Of course the entire city knew he'd recently become one of Emperor Mordellir's lovers. Imperial Favorite was an official position at court. It sometimes even had formal rank associated with it, although not in his case, since he wasn't a citizen of the Empire. But it wasn't something he thought about as a duty.

"You're not really comfortable with your position yet, are you?" Liu sounded sympathetic, but Danny remained suspicious. Tengri always had ulterior motives. It was practically a cultural imperative. This man had been selected by someone who didn't particularly like him. "Don't worry. We can help with that, too. It's rare for someone so young to catch the eye of powerful people like the Emperor and Imperial Prince Melketh. You're very fortunate, but if it's going to last, you'll need to learn some skills to fall back on once your novelty has worn off. Prince Melketh advised us to be particularly sure we instructed you in the things that the Dragon of

Heaven is known to most enjoy.”

Danny choked on his tea. That sounded like Melketh had set him up a training session on how to be Mordellir’s boy toy. That wasn’t what their relationship was about at all. He loved Lir, and he was sure Lir cared about him, at least as far as his duty to the Empire would let the Emperor care. This wasn’t a career choice, or a path to power for him. As liegeman to the Elven King, Aran of Avalon, Danny had all the power he needed, indeed more than he wanted. He’d be happier if Lir weren’t Emperor. Avalon and the Tengri Empire were allies at the moment, but that might not last forever. That limited how much either of them could trust the other. There was nothing to be done about it though. Lir was Emperor, and Danny couldn’t back out of his oath to Aran.

Practically speaking it wasn’t actually a bad thing if people thought he was a power-seeker, trading his favors for the Emperor’s ear. In the Empire that was seen as clever, not as morally dubious. If people thought there was genuine emotional attachment between them, they’d see attacking him as a way to put the Emperor off balance. There were enough people who wanted to kill him already without adding that. Maybe Melketh had been thinking about that when he’d arranged this. He would be helpful to Danny in spite of his jealousy if he thought it would be good for Lir.

Danny would grit his teeth and wear the label and the assumptions about his motives that went with it. If word of it got home to Boston, well, it wouldn’t cause that much more trouble than having a male lover in the first place. Lir knew better. That was enough.

“It, ah, does take some getting used to,” Danny admitted out loud. “Life is a great deal more complicated here than at home, or in the Elven court. I have a lot to learn.”

Liu smiled. “You’re lucky to have Melketh’s support.”

Danny nearly choked on that. *Melketh’s support, my ass! He’d just as soon slit my throat to get me out of the way.*

“I’m fortunate in many ways.” Danny agreed, thinking more of Lir than of Melketh. Lir *had* offhandedly suggested doing something like this. If he hadn’t thought this was at a good idea, he’d have interfered by now. Danny knew perfectly well that he couldn’t so much as take a shit without his Dragon Guards knowing about it, and reporting it if they thought the Emperor would want to know. It was best to go ahead and run with it. He’d probably pick up good techniques here, no matter what Melketh’s motive in sending him might have been. “Where do we start?”

“Well, today I want to just get to know you a bit, get a sense of what you’ve already done, and what your strengths are. Then I’ll put together a list of things we want to work on. I’ll be the primary instructor, but there will be other people from the staff helping out. I can’t give you hands-on instruction in pleasing a woman. One of my guild-sisters will take charge of that. I gather you’re a bit more experienced there than with men?”

Danny nodded mutely. This was becoming much more involved than he’d thought when he’d agreed to it.

“There are still fine points we can show you. We’ve had millennia to perfect them, after all.” Liu smiled lazily, his expression hinting at all sorts of delights. “Then there are techniques for multiple partners, which we’ll need some help with. Prince Melketh thought you’d benefit from the full range of instruction. I don’t suppose you read Tengri?”

“Not really. I’m working on it, but it’s slow,” Danny admitted.

“Well, trying is good. Not many humans even try.” Liu smiled brilliantly. “Don’t worry about it. The books we’ll give you are mostly pictures anyway. Once I have an idea what you need, your staff can work with me to schedule things.”

“Okay, I guess. This is a little more involved than I’d expected,” Danny agreed uncertainly.

“We’ll take it one step at a time. First, you need to relax. I can see you’re nervous from halfway across the room. We’ll start with a soak and a massage, you can tell me about yourself, and we’ll see what happens from there. Come this way, my lord.”

“Please, just call me Danny. If you’re going to spend months teaching me intimate skills, we should at least be on a first-name basis.”

“Danny.” Liu said the name slowly, savoring it. “I like that. I think I’m going to enjoy teaching you.”

Danny let Liu lead him through a door into an opulent Japanese bath. Servants appeared to undress them. A young woman unbuttoned the deep blue silk jacket Danny wore. She stopped in bewilderment when she encountered the concealed high-tech body armor beneath it, then reached hesitantly for one of the straps.

“No, I’ll take care of this. It’s complicated.”

“Yes, my lord.” She smiled shyly at him.

With the ease of long practice, he stripped out of his armor -- knives in their forearm sheaths, the set from his boots, then the arm and leg armor panels, and finally the body harness, leaving him in sweaty underwear. He laid the armor pieces carefully aside on a bench, and then deposited the underwear on top of them.

“Ah, you’re as beautiful under your clothes as I thought you would be. Powerful, but not all big chunks of muscle. Watching you fence must have half the court wanting you. And just enough hair on your chest to be exotic.” Liu smiled reassuringly at him.

Liu, too, was naked now, and Danny paused to admire him. He couldn’t help but compare Liu to Mordellir. They were of the same race, but quite different. Mordellir’s hair was blacker, lacking the red highlights, and he wore it short with a soldier’s practicality. His build was heavier. Still graceful, but more solid. He made Danny think of a big cat, while Liu was a greyhound.

Mordellir had the beauty of a finely honed weapon. Liu, on the other hand, was a work of art. His lean dancer's muscles played beneath flawless pale skin, unobscured by body hair, as he turned to survey Danny. He apparently liked what he saw. Danny's eyes strayed downward to Liu's penis, still cloaked in its foreskin. It was long and slender like the rest of him, and twitching with the first stirrings of interest.

Liu walked over, his cock swaying of its own accord, just slightly out of sync with his stride. He took Danny's hand, bringing it up so he could kiss it, the tip of his tongue flirting gently with Danny's fingertips. "Come, Danny. The tub is waiting for us."

Together they slid into a stone hot tub. Liu took Danny's hand again, stroking it beneath the water surface. "Ah, what strong hands. Is it true you're as strong as a Kennakriz barbarian?"

"It is." Danny started. What was he thinking? He should have talked to Liu about this before he'd even taken his clothes off. "I'm not actually Kennakriz, but I am much stronger than a normal human. Can you protect yourself, or do I need to remember to be careful? I know how to be gentle and restrained with women, but I'm not sure I can manage that with a man yet."

Liu leaned over to kiss his ear. "Don't worry, Danny. Of course I can protect myself. How strong are you?"

The kiss sent little shivers of pleasure through Danny. "Strong enough to pick up a horse without working too hard at it."

"I can handle that. Don't give it another thought today. We'll put learning not to hurt ordinary humans on the list for later." Liu slid closer and his hand trailed across Danny's chest, tracing the scattershot pattern of scars sprayed across it. "I don't know much about Earth. Are you from one of those cultures who keep scars to show how manly and brave you are? The one on your face does make it striking, but these really aren't something I'd advise keeping."

Danny laughed. "No, if I'd kept everything that's happened to me during the war, I'd have a lot more than just those. If I'm still in one piece when the war is over, I'll get them fixed. For now, they don't hurt, they don't slow me down, and that's good enough."

"I wouldn't wait too long. It's not that difficult a thing for a healer to fix, and they're not really an asset for you. You have a beautiful body, and you need to maintain it." Liu leaned over to run a hand down Danny's back, ending by cupping one of Danny's butt cheeks in his long fingers just hard enough for Danny to feel the tips of his nails. Danny stretched and leaned into Liu's arm without really thinking about what he was doing, imagining he was going to enjoy this after all.

He turned toward Liu, shifting on the bench so he could run an exploring hand around Liu's ribs and down toward his groin. He gently traced the firm muscles across Liu's belly, then let his fingers draft down toward the man's dick. Liu's other hand intercepted them gently. "Patience, Danny. We have all evening. I want to know all of you, not just your cock. We'll come to that eventually."

Liu gently tipped Danny's face up to meet his own. He brushed back a stray lock of Danny's wavy brown hair and kissed him on the brow. It was a surprisingly sensual experience, not the quick peck that Danny was used to getting from relatives. Liu sucked gently on the skin -- not enough to leave a mark, but enough to make it sensitive. He drew back a moment, letting his breath play across the damp skin, then he moved back into contact with his lips again, keeping them open while he made little teasing circles with the tip of his tongue. Danny's breath caught in his throat at the sensations. He wasn't even sure he had names for them, but he wanted more.

Liu must have sensed that. He shifted down, repeating the process on Danny's left cheek. Then, moving over to the right side, he worked his way along the old knife scar that sliced down across Danny's cheek, just missing his eye. The scar tissue didn't have as much feeling as normal skin, but when Liu drew his tongue down it, Danny felt an odd ghost of sensation, erotic and a little unsettling at the same time. Liu moved down the curve of his chin to his neck, and Danny forgot to think about what had come before. Liu nibbled gently on the skin after he'd sensitized it by sucking on it, making Danny gasp with the intensity of the feeling. Pain blended over into pleasure. This must be what made women who'd never seen a real one fantasize about vampires. He felt his dick swelling in response.

Liu paused, letting the sensations he'd just started linger and echo, while Danny got his breath back. Then Liu moved on to the other side. As he did, he let a hand drift down through the water until it found the base of Danny's spine. He began slowly tracing lazy circles there with a fingertip while he nibbled on Danny's neck.

"Oh, Gods. That's wonderful. Don't stop." Danny gasped. His dick was fully erect now. "I'm so close."

Liu raised his head and looked deep into Danny's eyes. "Not yet, Danny. Give it time." His mouth on Danny's stopped any protest Danny might have made. Their lips met, then the tip of Liu's tongue darted in, exploring, as Danny gasped. He tasted of something exotic and slightly spicy. He sucked back, drawing Danny's tongue after him, urging Danny to explore. After a moment, sharp teeth grabbed Danny's tongue, stopping just short of being painful. Danny tried instinctively to draw back. Liu held on for a moment before letting go, leaving no doubt that he was letting go because he chose to. Danny gasped for air. His dick throbbed, he was so close. "Please, I need--"

"Not yet, my dear." Liu rubbed against him sensuously. "I think it's time we got out of the tub."

Danny let Liu draw him up the steps leading out of the tub, his cock still standing at attention. Liu's was also swollen and quivering. Surprisingly, no bath attendants appeared to dry them.

"Sometimes it's more pleasurable to do things for each other than to let servants do them," Liu explained, picking up a soft, fluffy towel. He patted Danny's upper body dry with it, very gently, then began working his way down the back of Danny's legs. He came around in front, kneeling to dry the front of Danny's legs.

Danny looked down at Liu kneeling there, with his long dark hair falling around him like a curtain, the ends dripping water from the tub, and thought he was one of the most beautiful things Danny had ever seen. He reached out gently to stroke Liu's hair, brushing the tip of an ear as he did. Liu gave a pleased gasp. "Oh, yes, Danny. Do that again. That's wonderful." He looked up, his eyes wide in his pale face. Water drops sparkled on his chest.

Danny reached out to stroke his ear again, enjoying the rapt expression on Liu's face. Then he drew a finger down along the line of Liu's jaw, tipping his face up. Liu responded by catching the finger in his mouth, sucking and nibbling on the tip. Danny gasped in return. Liu was only sucking his finger, not his dick, but damn it didn't feel that way. His dick was leaking steadily now. He was so close to coming it was almost painful. He drew back the finger, slowly, drawing Liu's head closer to his dick as Liu kept hold of the finger. Finally Liu let go, and Danny drew his hand away.

"Ah, you are impatient." Liu looked indulgently at Danny's dick. "I should do something to soothe that, or you won't hear a word I'm saying." He grinned, and patted Danny's stomach and thighs dry with the towel, circling carefully around Danny's bobbing dick and tightly drawn up balls.

"Liu." Danny growled. "Enough teasing. Do something. Now."

Liu responded by licking gently around Danny's balls. Danny hadn't thought he could get any more aroused without coming, but somehow he was. His brain sang with the tension of it. It formed words demanding that Liu finish the job, but he couldn't make his tongue work to say them. Liu began caressing the end of Danny's cock with his tongue, drawing Danny's inner tension even tighter. Then, blessedly, he opened his mouth and sucked Danny in.

Danny didn't need a second invitation. He slid home in the warm, wet tunnel of Liu's throat, thrusting. He reached down and grabbed Liu's head in both hands, wrapping his fingers in the long hair, holding Liu's head steady as he thrust into Liu's mouth. He felt Liu struggle, trying to rise to meet his thrusts, but he didn't care. All he could think about was the need to drive himself into Liu, to come until he had nothing left. When he finally stopped, it felt as though he had poured everything out. Dark spots swam in his vision, and he swayed on his feet.

Liu's hands reached out to steady him as he pulled away, and guided him gently to a seat on a bench behind them. Danny sank back onto the bench, leaning against the wall and gasping. "Oh. Oh, God. I don't think I've ever come like that."

Liu smiled wickedly. "You will again. Still having doubts about the value of lessons?"

"No, not any more." Danny came slowly back to himself, realizing with a cold shock just how totally caught up in the moment he'd been. If he ever got worked up that way with a normal human, he'd kill them. With his strength, if Liu hadn't had magic to protect himself, Danny could have just snapped Liu's neck. He shivered.

"What's wrong, Danny?" Liu sat beside him on the bench, putting a comforting arm around him.

“I got totally lost in what I was doing. If you hadn’t been able to protect yourself, I could have killed you. I have to be able to remember to be careful.” Danny shivered again.

“I know. We’ll teach you how to stay in control. It just takes practice. You need that here anyway, even with people who can protect themselves. One of the most important things I’ll teach you is how to keep a little part of yourself apart and watching, not caught up in what you’re feeling. Being that lost in the moment here could be fatal for you, never mind the person you’re with. No one who’s had proper sex education here will ever be that vulnerable and oblivious with you. If you open up to them that way, you’re asking to be taken advantage of.” Liu gazed into Danny’s eyes.

“I know that, in theory.” Danny grimaced. “We both just saw how well it worked in practice.”

“You needed the demonstration. It’s not as insurmountable a problem as you think. I’m considered quite good at my trade. You wouldn’t be such an easy target for a lot of people. But when we’re done, you won’t be an easy target for someone like me, either. You have good instincts -- we just need to work on making you aware of them, and giving you some control, so you use them, not the other way around. Now, come with me.” Liu drew Danny to his feet, and led him into an adjoining room.

“Lie down on the table for me. On your stomach first.” He gestured at a padded table that occupied the center of the room.

Once Danny had stretched out on the table, Liu began gently massaging his legs. “Now, while you relax, help me get to know you better. Tell me what attracts you in a partner?”

Danny frowned. “You know, that’s a very complicated question.” He paused, enjoying Liu’s touch on the backs of his thighs. Should he admit to the empathy? He normally tried to keep it a secret, but it was easy enough to find with a simple detection spell. Liu seemed to be on the level about teaching him. He might as well risk it. Maybe he’d get some extra hints for managing it. “My talents are kind of random, not really magic. It’s pretty obvious that I have extra strength and reflexes. I also sense emotions.” He felt Liu’s hands tense a moment, and caught a flare of surprise that leaked through Liu’s defenses. Direct physical contact had the effect of bypassing even very good mental defenses.

“That’s good to know, Danny.” Liu ran his hands down the inside of Danny’s legs as he spoke. “I haven’t tried to look too closely. I thought your security might take exception.”

“Mmm.” Liu’s hands felt good. “They might -- I’m not sure. Anyway, that complicates what attracts me. Sometimes I’m attracted by people who would be totally uninteresting otherwise because they’re turned on by me. Now, if you’re talking pure physical appeal, a lot of what gets me going is the way someone moves. A graceful woman with good muscles can really turn me on. Not the muscle-bound body builder type -- they just don’t seem natural. But a dancer, or a martial artist...” Danny smiled, pursing his lips. “A lot of that involves legs and ass, but they have to be able to use them too. Perfect legs don’t cut it if the person who owns them is all stiff

and awkward. Hair and skin color don't really make much difference to me. I like all of them. Breasts are definitely a nice feature, too."

"And what about men?" Liu had moved up now, and was massaging Danny's butt cheeks and hips.

Danny wriggled slightly in response to Liu's hands, then yelped in surprise as Liu swatted him playfully where Liu had just been massaging. "Hold still. You're supposed to be getting a massage, not making out with my table. We'll get to that."

"Ah, okay." Danny relaxed into Liu's hands. "Men are even more complicated. I can't honestly say I've ever been attracted to a man without that empathic connection. Today was kind of a first. I've never actually done anything with a human man, just Elves and Tengri. I guess probably the same sort of thing would apply physically. You do pretty much fit the type. It's still too new for me to have a very coherent idea yet."

Liu's hands stilled for a moment, then continued. "How new is it, Danny?"

"About three months, give or take a bit. The time differential between here and Earth makes that part a little confused," Danny mumbled, a little distracted by Liu's hands, which were now massaging his back.

"Three months," Liu repeated. "You're telling me you managed to get into the Emperor's bed only three months after your first experience with a man?"

Danny felt himself blush. He was glad he was face down, so it didn't show too much. "Actually it was more like a couple of weeks. He was only the second man I've been with. You're number three now."

"Oh. My. Imperial Prince Melketh left out a few details when he talked to me about this." Liu's hands stopped, remaining on Danny's shoulders. "Forgive me, Danny. I had no idea you were so inexperienced. I would have gone more slowly today."

Danny rolled over so he could look up at Liu. "Don't. Don't apologize, and don't worry about it. Nothing's been hurt. It was a valuable lesson. Melketh may not have known either. It depends on how much Lir, I mean, how much Emperor Mordellir chose to tell him. Gods know *I'm* not telling him intimate details of my personal life, sexual or otherwise."

Liu looked troubled, biting his lip delicately. "It's important for me to know, though. It makes a difference in what I teach, and how. I truly thought from your responses that you had more experience."

"I don't think I'm going to match any of your standard approaches. Show me what you think I need to know. If it's going too fast, I'll tell you."

"All right. Just, please, if something is a problem, tell me. I want to work with you. I think you

need this education, but it scares me a little, too. I don't know much about Earth, and a lot of what I do know is probably wrong. And you're such a confusing mix of experience and innocence." Danny felt Liu's concern leaking through his shields. It felt like honest concern for another person, not nerves because he expected to get into trouble for something.

Danny smiled up at Liu. "I promise. If something is upsetting me I'll let you know. Now, I've told you a bit about me. What about you? Turnabout is fair play."

"Me? It's not generally considered good form to share too much of your personal life with clients. We're here to entertain you, not to share our life stories with you. Yours is far more important." Liu's hands were busy again, working on Danny's legs from the front.

"Humor me. It's one of my weird Earth hang-ups that you need to accommodate." Danny grinned. "America does have whorehouses, although nothing as elegant and artistic as this. I grew up around working girls, so I'm more used to seeing the business from that side than from the client side. I'm curious about how it's different here. How did you get into this line?"

Liu relaxed a bit. The massage was becoming more sensual again as it moved up the front of Danny's body. "As Tengri go, I'm not all that much of a wizard. I'd never be more than average. I don't really like to fight, so the army isn't a good option either. I like to dance, and I like sex, even more than most Tengri. So this was really kind of an obvious choice."

"I'd like to see you dance. Is that part of the curriculum?" Danny wondered. He was feeling a little unfocused again as Liu's hands worked their magic.

"Not usually, but it could be if you're interested. No guarantees, though -- I won't teach you if I think you don't have enough aptitude that it would be a useful weapon in your arsenal."

"Fair enough. I don't really want to make a fool of myself doing something I have no talent for either." Danny agreed. He was sure it wouldn't be a problem. He was a world class martial artist. How hard could dancing be? No need to argue the point now. "Do you expect to do this the rest of your life? I guess you could. With your magic, you don't have to worry about getting too old to be attractive."

"After a fashion." Liu answered, moving around to the head of the table. "Close your eyes, I'm going to work on your face now."

Danny obligingly closed his eyes. Liu's fingers were gentle and sensuous as they teased the muscles of his face into relaxing.

"Eventually I'd like to have my own House." Liu admitted. "A place focused on the finer arts as well as the arts of love. Fine food, dance, music, perhaps the occasional display of paintings or a drama. That takes money. Unless I find a patron who wants to invest in it, it will take me a long time to save enough to start. I'd need a suitable building, then furnishings, a few employees, and good slaves to staff it. The kind of place I dream of isn't something I can start on a shoestring and build. I might start with a small house, but the staff and the furnishings need to be top notch

from the very beginning to attract the right clients. So it will likely be a while.”

“And in the meantime?” Danny murmured lazily.

“Oh, I get paid for my work here. I get experience. I make connections. Every important client who leaves happy is someone who might turn into a patron, or who might mention me to another client who might become a patron. And generally, I enjoy my work. I enjoy sex, and there’s real power in making someone forget themselves and dance to your tune, even for an hour or two.” He could hear Liu smile. “Who knows? If I give you skills that keep you in the Emperor’s favor for a decade or two, you might turn into a significant connection yourself. Even if you don’t, I think I’m going to enjoy the lessons. You’re beautiful, and potentially quite talented. You could be an artist at this.”

Danny blushed again. “I don’t think I’d go that far. I like my partners to leave happy, but calling me an artist is definitely overstating.”

“Don’t let your ego get too inflated.” He felt Liu wag a finger. “I didn’t say you were. I said you could be. If you want to work at it. It’s like any art -- it takes practice, not just raw talent. But you have a lot of things to work with. Being blue-eyed, Caucasian, and from Earth makes you exotic. You’ve already got powerful connections, and the empathy can give you a whole extra level of advantage if you learn to use it.”

“It can, but I’m not sure it should. It seems manipulative and dishonest.” Danny frowned.

“Manipulative? Of course it’s manipulative. Everything at court, especially sex, is manipulative. If that bothers you, what in the name of all the gods are you doing trying to be an Imperial Favorite?” Liu stared at him in open incredulity.

“Making a fool of myself, probably.” Danny shook his head ruefully. He couldn’t afford to answer that one honestly. “You’re right. I do need to learn what I can do with the talent. Put that on the list, too.”

“It doesn’t have to be manipulative. Consider -- is it manipulative to use it to guess at what your partner wants, so you can give it to them?” Liu smiled encouragingly.

“No, I guess not. You’re right anyway -- there are going to be times I’ll want to use it to manipulate someone who’s trying it on me. I imagine that will happen here pretty regularly. I probably look like a soft target.”

“Yes, you do. Elves are notoriously naïve, and Earth is supposed to be even more backward. So it’s a fair bet that people will assume you’re a complete innocent. They’re not entirely wrong,” Liu answered soberly. “Being aware of it is half the battle, though. The rest is education, and being smart enough to know when to use it.”

“Okay, what’s next then?” Danny sat up.

“I need to plan the right sequence for your lessons. We’ll focus on getting you caught up on the male side first. Once we accomplish that, a lot of the advanced techniques apply universally. I’ll send over some books that you can page through. You’ve probably got someone on your staff who can help read them?”

“Um, I suppose so.” Danny turned red at the thought of asking one of his household staff to help him read a sex manual. They’d probably want to help him with the homework, and he was *not* going to take advantage of them that way. No matter how normal it was here.

“If you don’t, we could arrange to send someone over. There are people in early stages of training who could benefit from it,” Liu offered helpfully.

“I think I’ll start by seeing how much I can puzzle out on my own. I am trying to learn to read Tengri,” Danny countered. “Does that mean we’re done for today?”

“Are you up to more? I thought you might be tired.” Liu glanced down at Danny’s cock, which was as relaxed as the rest of him.

“I suspect you could get me going again if you put your mind to it,” Danny answered drily. “But that wasn’t what I meant. I’m feeling quite content, but you still look ready to go.” He looked pointedly at Liu’s dick, which was still hard.

Liu looked at him blankly for a moment. Danny reached out and took Liu’s dick gently in his hand. That let him bypass Liu’s defenses again, and showed him a whole complex mix of emotions -- lust, confusion, and surprise. “You don’t have to do that, Danny. I’m here to serve you. I’ll take care of myself later.”

Danny let his hand tighten slightly on Liu’s dick, making sure he went nowhere while they discussed the question. “No. I may not be much of an expert on sex by Tengri standards, but one of the first lessons I learned was that you’re not done until your partner is happy, too. I don’t want to hear any arguments about it not being appropriate because you’re a professional. You’re still a person. If I’m going to trust you to teach me things this intimate and important, I want a friend, not just a disinterested professional.”

He could feel Liu’s shock, and a little bit of fear. He stopped. He had been sure Liu wanted him. Had he misread it? Why the fear?

“I’m sorry.” Danny let go of Liu’s dick and pulled his hand back. All but a trickle of the emotions he’d been sensing disappeared behind Liu’s defenses again. “If you don’t want me, I wouldn’t insist. Did I misunderstand?”

“No. You didn’t. I do want you. I’m just surprised.” Liu reached out his hand for Danny’s. “Patrons don’t worry about what we’re feeling. Our job is to worry about what *they’re* feeling. It makes me wonder what I’m getting into.”

“An under-socialized barbarian?” Danny suggested lightly. Then he sobered. “That explains the

shock. But you were afraid, too. Why?"

"Danny, you're much higher in social rank than I am. It would be easy to get in over my head if you start treating me as an equal," Liu explained. "I'm very flattered by it, but it's probably not a good idea."

He'd run into the same attitude before. The Empire was very class and rank conscious. "We're not in public. I don't care what your rank is, neither do the Dragon Guards, and no one else is here." Danny reached out to stroke Liu's hair with his other hand. "I want a friend to help me with all the things I need to learn, not an employee. "

Through Liu's hand, which still held his, he could feel a growing sense of wonder replacing the worry. "Truly?" Liu asked aloud. "If that's what you want, I'd be honored."

"It's settled, then. Now, I think I need a lesson in figuring out what a new partner wants. Can we start with some hints, since I have some catching up to do?" Danny stood up, and put his free arm around Liu, stroking his back.

Liu stretched, leaning into his hand like a cat, then stood gracefully. "Come on, then. We need a bed for this." He led Danny through another door into an elegantly simple bedroom. In its center was an immense bed. At home, Danny might have made jokes about it being suitable for orgies, but here that was probably a serious consideration. Liu drew him toward it.

Liu sprawled on the bed, displaying himself enticingly. Danny climbed onto the bed after him, straddling one of his legs and leaning over to kiss him. Liu's mouth on his was hungry, sucking his tongue in and nibbling on his lips. When he broke off to breathe, Liu smiled up at him with a feral gleam in his eye. "My turn now." He slid out from under Danny. "Sometimes I like to be the one in charge. Can we try that?"

Danny knew he should probably say no. He should at least ask what that meant to Liu. But instinct said Liu wouldn't really hurt him. And the Dragon Guards were there if things got too uncomfortable. "I think so. I'll tell you if it's not all right."

"I'll hold you to that," Liu purred. "Now, down on your stomach."

Danny stretched out full length on the bed. Liu knelt over him, straddling his hips. He was awash in a sea of lust and sex, some of it from Liu, and some from the bed itself. He sometimes got impressions from objects, if they'd been exposed to enough powerful emotion, and apparently this bed had a *lot* of experience. He was lost for a moment in sorting through the impressions. Liu grabbed his right wrist and whipped a silk rope around it, attaching it to one of the bed posts.

Danny rolled onto his side. His left hand shot out, grabbing Liu's wrist and starting to twist. He felt a stab of fear from Liu, who froze. Behind the fear was a mix of lust and watchful concern. He caught himself before he went further. This wasn't an attack. He'd agreed to let Liu do what he wanted. It was all right. Anyway, it was a good bet that neither the rope nor the bed itself would be a match for his strength if he really wanted to get loose. He released Liu's wrist, rolled

back onto his stomach. He offered Liu tacit consent by stretching out the other wrist for him.

Liu tied Danny's other wrist, then leaned over nuzzling the back of Danny's neck. "This is a new thing for you, isn't it? Don't worry, you'll like it." Liu nibbled Danny's ear, sending a jolt of pleasure down his spine. He wanted to turn and kiss Liu, but he couldn't unless he broke the ropes. He tested them gently anyway, and was surprised when they didn't threaten to give.

Liu smiled an evil smile. "Don't worry. You won't break those, or the bed. They're both magically reinforced. They'd hold a T'an Mo demon. Struggle all you want. It won't help." Liu ran both hands down Danny's sides, dragging sharply pointed nails along his ribs. Danny hissed in reaction, not quite sure if he was feeling pain or pleasure.

Danny had felt Liu's pleasure when he tested the ropes. He tested them again, rocking his hips slightly to throw Liu off balance. He was rewarded by a surge of pleased excitement from Liu. Clearly Liu liked having him resist. He wriggled again, and Liu slapped his ass hard. "Enough. Behave or I'll have to tie your feet, too."

Danny grinned. Liu's reactions gave him a pretty good idea what he needed to do to excite Liu. He snarled wordlessly in response, and twisted his hips harder. Years of martial arts made him very flexible, and Liu bounced off him, landing on his own ass on the bed. Danny pulled against the ropes on his wrists again, imagining that he was feeling humiliation, anger, and a bit of desire, and putting all his empathy behind the image.

Liu gasped sharply. "Oh, yes." He slid off the bed, then darted in to grab an ankle, and tie it down. The second one followed quickly enough. Danny wasn't really trying not to be grabbed, just making Liu work a bit for it. Panting slightly, Liu settled on the bed again.

"Oh, I'm going to enjoy this. And by the time I'm done, so are you. Whether you like it or not." Liu ran both hands down Danny's naked body, tracing his slim hips and then sliding a hand under him to cup his balls. Liu played with them a moment, sending little shocks of pleasure through Danny. Then the hands moved upward again, tracing the contours of his shoulders, and up the sides of his neck. Liu explored every inch of Danny, teasing and caressing, until Danny thought he would explode. Danny fought to hang on to the image he was trying to project, but as Liu continued to tease him, it became more and more difficult to pretend to fight.

Liu reached around beneath him to tweak a nipple, and Danny's focus snapped. He lost all pretense of fighting. He felt a sharp moment of satisfaction from Liu. "That's good, Danny. You want this. Say you do."

"Yes! I want it." Danny gasped, lifting his hips toward Liu. "Now, please!"

"All in good time. You need to practice patience." Liu chuckled evilly. "Now that I have your full attention..." He slapped Danny hard enough on the ass to sting.

Danny jerked as waves of pleasure surged up his spine in response. He smelled a musky scent, then felt something warm and wet on his ass. That was followed a moment later by a finger. He

tried to relax, to let it in, but it was hard. He was already so wound up from Liu's hands that relaxing anything seemed impossible. Liu probed gently, teasing the muscles of his asshole into letting in the finger. A second one followed it, then withdrew.

Almost before he realized they were gone, he felt the hot, hard tip of Liu's penis replacing them. He tried to lift his hips to meet it. Slowly, slowly Liu slid in. It seemed to take forever, as if he was inserting himself a tantalizing millimeter at a time. Finally he was all the way in. He paused, teasing, waiting for a reaction.

"Liu!" Danny ground his teeth in frustration. "Gods, don't tease me any more. I'm going to explode."

"Say please." Liu radiated aroused excitement. "Remember who's in charge here."

"Please." Danny snarled. "Do it now."

"I don't know. You don't sound like you mean it. Maybe I should try some more warm up first." Liu said thoughtfully, although he felt anything but thoughtful. Danny felt him beginning ever so slowly to pull out.

"No! Please, don't stop. Don't leave me like this." Danny pulled on the ropes, no longer worrying about whether he might break them.

"Ah, perhaps you do mean it." Liu stroked his hair. "I suppose I can oblige you, then." He pulled back a bit further, then thrust in hard. Danny arched his back, rising to meet Liu's thrust until the ropes stopped him. He ground his teeth in frustration, but Liu was there, thrusting again, hands on his hips holding him steady. Time seemed to stop as he focused on the thrusts filling his ass, pushing against the tight muscles and shivering across his sensitive prostate. He lost track of whether the emotions he was feeling were his own or Liu's. The tension built and built until he didn't think he could endure any more, then broke in a wave as Liu came inside him. Together they lay gasping on the bed.

After a moment the ropes slid off his wrists and ankles, apparently of their own accord. It must be nice to be a wizard at times like this. Then Liu slid off him, gently pushing him to turn onto his side. He did, still panting. Liu pulled him into warm arms, gently stroking his hair and his back. "Ah, gods, Danny. That was wonderful." He kissed Danny gently on the forehead. "Are you all right? That wasn't too much?"

Danny snuggled against him. "No, I'm... I don't know. Fine seems inadequate. That was... I was just trying to be sure you enjoyed it. I had no idea I could enjoy kinky sex that much."

Liu hugged him fiercely. "That's just the beginning. This is going to be a beautiful friendship."

Just Like Him

Dallas Coleman

"Tell them anything you want." It didn't matter.

Not anymore.

Hell, he wasn't sure it ever had, mattered, that was.

Trent picked up his duffle and headed for the door, listening to the sound of the dogs yipping up a storm in the backyard. Fucking poodles.

"But, baby, you can't just walk out. We got a life..." Cristian's fingers were on him and, truth be told, they made his skin crawl a little.

"No. You had a life. You and Nate and Rick and Steve and Jeff and Pete and all the other assholes you fucked. I had a short term bout of psychotic stupidity. I'm over it now."

In fact, he was feeling clear-headed in the extreme.

His boots crunched the petunias (or poppies or geraniums or what the fuck ever Cristian'd planted by the door) as he jumped off the stairs, landed in the flowerbed with a thud.

"You're a shitty fag, Trent! A shitty fag!"

Well, duh.

He hadn't been trying for his official queer boy rainbow merit badge; he'd just been trying to be a guy in love. He was in way over his fucking head.

Way.

His truck was waiting, Rosie wagging from the front seat, her pit face all grins until she saw Cristian. He tossed his duffle in the back and slid into the driver's seat, grinning as Rosie snarled and snapped, keeping Cristian a few feet back.

"I know, baby girl. Shit, I shoulda listened to you from the beginning." That dog'd always been smarter than him.

Always.

He let himself gun it as he left the curb, let himself have the conceit of blowing exhaust and dust up into Cristian's tear-streaked face. Fucker. The little prick wouldn't even spend tonight alone.

He grabbed his phone as soon as they'd pulled onto 290, Rosie settling down for the long haul out of Houston, and he dialed by memory, knowing that Ken would answer.

Ken always answered.

"Hey, Bubba."

"Ken."

There was silence for a long minute, then he heard the familiar sound of a Bic lighter being struck -- clickwhoosh, and Ken inhaled deep. "So, you coming home to me?"

"Yeah." Finally. He should've done it way before.

He turned the headlights on, turned the radio down, and set the cruise control. "He fucked anything that came to him, Bubba."

He could see Ken's head shake -- see it just like he was home, sitting across the porch and staring at a face that was as familiar as his own. "Oh, shit, Bubba. That sucks."

At least that wasn't "I told you so" which was what, by all accounts, it should've been. Ken hadn't liked Cristian, not from the first meeting.

"Yeah. I was careful, I mean, I never would... you know, without protection." He was in love, not stupid.

"Still, it's a shitty thing to do to someone."

Trent found himself nodding, the ache in his chest more about shame and guilt than actual hurt. After all, he hadn't been in love-love, right? He'd been...

Yeah.

Whatever.

"Too bad it's so late; you could stop in Brenham, take the Blue Bell tour, get a bite."

"I ain't in the mood for touring, Ken. I just want to be home." He wanted to be home, where the smells of smoke and Old Spice and dogs were sunk into the walls, where he could wake up in the middle of the night to go pee and know where every single stick of furniture was because it hadn't moved in twenty years and, if Ken had his way, it never would.

God, he'd been a fool, running out the door ten years ago like a scared kid, heading south. He'd worked the rigs, worked the land, worked factories and bars and highway crews. Hell, he'd learned everything Houston could teach a man -- from the being high on the hog part to the lowest part, and still, when it all came apart, it was Ken and home and the Hill country that called to him.

Still.

"You get Miss Rosie?"

"Course I did." Like he'd leave his baby girl. "There room for her there?"

Ken's snort sounded just like his. "There's always room for you and yours here, Bubba. Always has been."

Ken didn't say, "You're the one that left", but Ken didn't have to. They both knew it.

Some things you had to leave home to learn about.

"I'll be home in about four hours. Don't wait up." Like Ken would sleep.

"I will."

Trent grinned, nodded. "You want me to stop and pick anything up before I get there?"

"Milk, maybe. I went to the Wal-Mart just a couple days ago. I got dog stuff, bread, meat, smokes. I got you them Little Smokies you like."

"Okay. I'll do it." He'd pick up milk and a couple of the snacks that Ken loved but never bought because that was self-indulgent and his twin was nothing if not indulgent.

"See you, Bubba. Be careful."

"Ain't I always?"

They were both laughing when he hung up the phone.

He pulled up to the gate and unlocked it from the old key hanging on his Budweiser key chain, Miss Rosie barking up a storm from the front seat, wanting out.

It was in good shape, really. He could see where Ken'd been out to weld on the hinges. Hell, it barely squeaked when he pushed the metal gate wide. He drove through, stopped and hopped out again, this time Rosie wouldn't stay, the solid little bitch hitting the dirt with a thud.

She had herself a sniff and a pee while he closed up. His phone rang as he got back to his Dodge.
"Yup?"

"That you? Dogs're screaming."

"Yeah."

"You lock the gate?"

"You wake up with a piss hard-on?"

"Fuckhead. You bring milk home?"

"I did. A huge old bag of them waxy chocolate doughnuts, too." There was a York peppermint patty, too, just for the old man.

"We'll have breakfast then."

"Breakfast? It's one a.m."

"Yeah, well, I'm awake. So are you." Like that was *so* logical. Trent could see lights coming on in the distance, the kitchen light first, then the porch light.

He drove slow, with the door open so he knew Rosie'd follow. When the headlights hit the front yard, he stopped, watched a while. Ken'd painted the porch and one of the old ash trees were gone, Ken's truck was gray now, not red, and there were probably a couple more dogs.

Not that he could tell, with there being at least a million and a half of the damn mutts.

Ken walked out onto the front porch, the shock of white-blond hair just a little too long, just a little too shaggy. Rosie went barreling up the stairs, barking madly, tail going a million miles a minute. Ken bent, arms open to catch her as she leaped up on him. Trent thought he saw some new tattoos, some dark ink on one bare shoulder, something on Ken's belly.

Trent had armbands now, so he reckoned that was probably fair.

"You gonna stay out there all night?"

"Maybe." He slid out of the cab, shut the door and leaned, hard. "I never thought I'd be back to stay."

"No? I always knew you would."

Asshole. Trent let his hands ball into fists, let himself rumble a little. "Bullshit. Besides, I could leave tomorrow. I ain't made nobody no promises."

"I know. I never asked you for any." Ken shrugged, so fucking immovable. So fucking still.
"And it don't matter what you do tomorrow, Bubba. This is your home, just like it's mine. One day you'll be home to stay."

"Yeah, and one day you'll get tired of waiting on me." He didn't say it loud enough for his older brother to hear, but he said it.

"Come on in, huh? I made up your old bedroom."

He chuckled, shook his head. "Old woman. What, you're not letting me sleep in the big bed with you?"

"No."

That made him stop, stare, one hand on his duffle in the truck bed. "What?"

"I said no, Trent. Come on. I got coffee started."

Well, shit.

He watched Ken walk away, head into the kitchen door like it hadn't been ten years since they'd lived together, like he hadn't just come on home. That had been a sure no. One of those things that meant Ken wasn't teasing.

Trent reckoned he deserved it, but damn.

Hell of a homecoming, wasn't it?

Fucking asshole.

Fucking asshole, turned him down all those years ago, got laid by every queer bastard in Houston, came home and then...

Would he share the big bed?

Fuck him.

Ken slammed a coffee cup down on the counter, grunting as the bottom broke right out. God *damn* it.

He tossed that one, grabbed two more, and started pouring.

"You're in a good mood, Spot."

Spot. Christ.

"You know, I thought when Momma died, that nickname would, too."

Trent shook his head, then reached over, to touch the center of Ken's palm, where Momma used to draw a little blue dot in marker so she could tell them apart as babies. "Never."

His fingers closed around Trent's and his brother smiled at him and handed over the gallon of milk. He added milk to Trent's coffee, gave it over, then added sugar to his before he put the milk away.

"You want to sit in the front room?"

"Nah. Let's go sit on the back porch." Trent led the way and he followed, just easy as you please.

There were chairs there, a little table, and he'd replaced the mosquito netting after the last big storm, put little fairy light deals up, too. They'd made Gran laugh, clap her dusty, wrinkled hands.

"You've done some work out here." Trent brushed the June bugs off the chair and sat.

"Some. Don't see no reason to let it fall apart out here, huh?" He put his coffee down, plugged in the bug zapper.

"No. No, me either." Trent stretched out, sighed. "It's good to be home, Bubba."

"At least for tonight, huh?" Great. That's right, Ken, just keep pushing it.

"Shut up, Spot. You know I'm home. Shit, I been saying I'd come. Ever since I realized things with Cristian weren't gonna go."

Ken nodded. He knew.

He knew that this place, him, the whole shebang, they were a last resort. He knew.

He hated it, but he knew.

"Gimme one of them paraffin doughnuts."

He had a bitter taste in his mouth.

Trent thought, maybe, he was going to have to kill Ken.

It didn't have to be painful or nothing, but there was going to be death.

Maybe dismemberment.

He'd been home for three months and... well, shit. It wasn't like it was supposed to be, was it?

No. No, it wasn't.

He hadn't expected to, like, jump Ken's bones or nothing, although he wouldn't say no if Ken asked again because he'd gotten over the whole wrongness issue and shit and God knew Ken was what he had been thinking about in his most secret fantasies and stuff, because he knew that Ken loved him -- not wanted him or was gonna use him or nothing, but loved him -- but this weird... distance thing... Well, it was wiggling him right out. It was new and it was fucked up and it wasn't welcome.

Not at all.

Neither was the silence. Or the way that Ken wouldn't sit on the sofa with him. Or on the double swing in the back.

Now, the fucked up looks were fine. Yeah, that was Ken all over and Trent knew that Ken wanted to touch him. Knew it like he knew how to breathe in and out.

But he was home, damn it.

Home.

And he wasn't a big idiot anymore and he didn't like this whole uncomfortable thing and Ken's brain was made just like his, damn it.

Ken was made just like him and he knew it.

Trent finished hammering in another set of shingles, then looked over at his brother. "It doesn't have to be about fucking, you know?"

The roofing hammer went right through the set of shingles. "What?"

God, if his eyes looked the same when he was pissed, no wonder Cristian riled him up so much. "You and me, Spot. It don't have to be about fucking. It can be about something else. Although, if you want to, I'm willing."

There. That should make it better, right?

"Have you lost your damn fool mind?" Ken yanked the hammer out of the hole.

"I don't think so, no. You're the one acting all like I've got cooties."

"Cooties." Ken blinked again. "You've had too much fucking sun. That's what it is. Sunstroke. Go take a shower."

Ken grabbed another shingle, laid it out and started tacking it on.

"Don't you tell me what to do." Asshat. He scooted over, close enough to whap Ken, hard. "Too much sun. Shit."

Ken jerked so hard that he lost the hammer, the thing heading for the gutter.

"Jesus Christ, Bubba! Have you lost your *mind*? We are on the fucking ROOF!"

Yeah. Yeah, Ken was so pretty. Fucking amazing, all tense and mad.

"I want you, Ken. I want to make you scream like a fool. I want to know if your come tastes like mine."

Ken sat there, eyes the size of saucers. "Jesus."

"No, I'm Trent. You sure you're okay?" God, this was fun.

"You have to stop, Trent."

He sighed, but shook his head. "No. No, Spot. I cain't. I cain't stop because I have to fix this with you and me. I was scared when you asked before, scared and stupid and still working shit out. I ain't scared now."

He reached out, tried to cup Ken's jaw, but his twin jerked away, shook his head. "You might not be scared, Bubba, but I am. I'm not... It's not. I can't. Not again."

Trent watched as Ken headed for the ladder, not even bothering to fetch his hammer out of the gutter. "You finish up. I need to cool off."

"Spot..."

"Hush, Trent." And, like that was that, the green and red gimme cap disappeared under the edge of the house, leaving him all alone on the roof, with two hammers.

Asshole.

Ken turned the water on as cold as it could go, stepped in and turned his face up into the spray.

Fuck.

Fuck.

For a minute up there he'd been eighteen again -- so scared to ask for what he needed, convinced that Trent would turn him down, but believing, somewhere deep in his secret heart that Trent loved him, wanted him, wouldn't ever turn him away.

He'd been wrong.

Real wrong.

Like Trent moved away in the middle of the night and wouldn't answer his phone calls for eighteen months sort of wrong and he'd never, never be in that position again.

Not even for a second.

Trent was stupid and lonely and missing the boys in Houston and, as much as Ken would love to be able to say, 'yeah, please, fuck me', it wasn't fucking going to happen.

Not in this lifetime

God, he'd been so young, so stupid, reaching out in the middle of the night, touching Trent's belly that had been flat and hard, just like his.

I want you, Trent. Please. Please, let me.

And Trent had looked at him like he was filthy.

It was the memory of that look, more than the cold water, that killed any hint of his erection. Trent was... was the best part of him and he wouldn't ruin it.

Jesus.

He grabbed the soap, started scrubbing himself, fingernails digging in under his arms, in the join of his elbows.

"You can't stay in there forever."

He jumped, feet slipping on the tub. "Damn it! Give a man his privacy!"

He could just barely see Trent, just a dark shadow on the other side of the green shower curtain.

"I was stupid. I was young. I hurt you, Bubba, and I couldn't be more sorry."

"Shut up."

Trent chuckled. "Ain't gonna happen. I been jacking off for years, wishing I hadn't been a pussy, but I was. You're the older brother, Ken. You're the strong one."

"Stop it." He put the soap down, ran his hands through his hair.

"I want you." The shower curtain was tugged open and Trent was standing there, hard and naked and so fine. Smiling.

Bastard.

"Go away, fuckhead."

Trent stepped into the shower, turned the water warmer. "I'm right here. You're going to have to deal with it. I'm not giving up."

"Stubborn asshole."

Trent nodded. "Yup." One hand landed on his belly, soft as you please. "I want you, Ken. Please. Please, let me."

He shook his head, but he stepped forward, lips parting as their skin brushed together. He thought, for a second, that Trent was fixin' to smile, and that would ruin everything, but Trent didn't.

Trent moaned and leaned in, bringing their lips together. The kiss was soft -- weirdly soft and gentle, like Trent was afraid he'd break -- so he grabbed Trent's upper arms and dug his fingers into the ink that made them different, pulled them tight together, and kissed as hard as he could.

If there were such things as wildfires in a shower stall, Ken thought that's what they'd be in, but there wasn't, so that ache and burn that settled in his balls must have been hunger.

Whatever.

It worked.

It so worked.

Trent licked at his lips a little, touched their foreheads together as the kiss eased. "Man, our first kiss. Was it good for you?"

Asshole. "No."

One hand measured his cock, from thick base to swollen tip. "Liar. Wanna come to bed?"

Trent had the prettiest fucking eyes, Ken swore. "No."

"Liar."

When Trent lifted his head, Ken got that grin, the one that made him growl and want to beat the smug little fucker to death. There were two of them, after all, nobody'd miss it if one disappeared. "Stubborn bastard."

Trent's grin didn't fade a bit. In fact, it got wider.

"Uh-huh," he said, and those fingers wrapped around Ken's hip, drawing them closer together still, making some high-dollar promises. "I am. I get it from my brother."

Who Shall I Tell?

Marjin Delacroix

Author's note:

In Florida, in 1977, gay people were under attack by the religious right. At the urging of Anita Bryant and her followers, the Florida Legislature banned adoption of children by homosexuals, a law that still stands today.

Back then, if you valued your job, you hid your homosexuality, and every day you asked yourself a question:

"Who shall I tell and who should I not?"

"I can't believe you're fucking Bosch," Jake McGovern told Adam Beckett. "She's how old? Forty?"

"Thirty-eight."

It was seven a.m. on a foggy Saturday in 1977, and Adam, twenty-four, dribbled a basketball on an outdoor court behind a middle school. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, Adam and Jake and two other associates from Griffin & Lightfoot -- an Orlando law firm with ninety attorneys -- played half-court on their lunch hour. Jake and Adam were teammates, and lately they'd lost more than won.

The solution? More practice.

Jake raised his arms, facing Adam and guarding the goal. He told Adam, "My dad says it's risky having affairs with people from work." Jake deepened his voice a notch. "Don't put your pecker in the payroll, son."

Adam chuckled and shook his head, dribbling in place.

The sun tried fighting its way through the fog, looking like a headlight shining through a dirty window. Grass surrounding the basketball court was heavy with dew, and the only sound was the *thunk-thunk* of the ball as Adam moved along the edge of the three-point circle, keeping his distance from Jake. Pivoting, he faced the basket, bent his knees, raised his arms, and sprang into the air, launching his shot with a flick of his wrists.

The ball arced toward the basket and swished through the net, never touching rim.

Perfect, Adam thought. *Do it like that every time.*

Persistence was Adam's trademark. His supervising attorney (and paramour), Deirdre Bosch, called him "my Rottweiler" at work, but Adam looked more like a racehorse. Six foot two and lanky, he was broad-shouldered and slim in the hips. His dark hair and eyes contrasted with his fair skin. He came from a family of achievers: his dad was an engineer, his mom a high school principal, his sister a physician. And though Adam's IQ wasn't stellar, he'd still managed to finish in the top third of his law school class.

"I wasn't the smartest student," Adam told a partner from Griffin & Lightfoot when he interviewed for a job, "but I worked twice as hard as everyone else."

Now, Adam played defense as Jake approached, dribbling. Jake dipped a shoulder, then moved in the opposite direction, feet slapping the concrete, getting a step on Adam and executing a layup that ricocheted off the backboard and flicked through the net.

Jake clapped his hands and whooped. Then he asked Adam, "What's Bosch like when she's off the job?"

Just like she is at work, Adam thought. *Aggressive.*

"Nice enough," Adam told Jake, "and she's great in bed. They say a woman's sex drive doesn't peak until she's forty, and I think it's true."

Jake looked at Adam and rolled his eyes. Also twenty-four and tall as Adam, Jake was more sinewy. He owned a riot of curly auburn hair and a pair of emerald eyes. Freckles dusted his pug nose and his ears stuck out like teacup handles. He wore size thirteen sneakers and he could pick up a basketball with one hand. A native of Augusta, Georgia, Jake spoke with a syrupy drawl that was easy on the ears, but he was no hick. At the university in Athens, he'd co-edited the law review, finishing fourth in his class. Like Adam, he worked in Griffin & Lightfoot's commercial litigation department, handling building construction disputes, and Deirdre Bosch was his supervising attorney as well.

"You've got to tell me," he said to Adam, "how it happened."

Adam dribbled the ball while he spoke, moving from one side of the court to the other, looking for an opening. "We went to a hearing at the county courthouse. It was lunchtime afterward and she asked me to join her for a sandwich."

Jake said, "Go on..."

Adam drove toward the basket, but Jake blocked him and Adam retreated, dribbling. “I didn’t see it coming. We took a booth at Harvey’s, and after we ordered she touched my knee and asked what I was doing that evening.”

“That’s it?”

Adam nodded.

“How long’s this been going on?”

“A couple of months. Don’t tell anyone, okay?”

Adam faked left, then dodged right, and this time he got past Jake, performing an underhanded layup, drawing a curse from his colleague.

Adam turned and looked at Jake, his breath huffing. “I’m serious,” he said, “this stays between you and me.”

Jake nodded, a grin on his face. “No *problemo*, buddy.”

Deirdre Bosch giggled as Adam slid his index finger down her belly and into her pubic bush, his cheek resting on her shoulder. Morning sunlight entered her bedroom through a double-hung window, reflecting in Adam’s dark hair. He had just returned from the bathroom, where he’d scrubbed his teeth, and now his breath smelled like peppermint.

She reached for his testicles and stroked the smooth skin of Adam’s sac, watching his cock twitch and stiffen. They had made love only twenty minutes before, but Adam, she knew, would go another round if she wanted him to. Did she?

Adam made little circles in her pubic hair with his finger, then slipped it inside her, probing her nub with his fingertip. Deirdre shifted her hips, drawing a breath, letting it out.

Aren’t young men wonderful? she thought. So pretty, so easy to seduce, but you must never give them your heart because they always, *always*, let you down in the end. She’d learned this the hard way. The first time with a fraternity boy, a blond prince who fucked like a dream and told Deirdre he loved her, then dumped her for a twenty-year-old doctor’s daughter from Boca Raton. Another time with a Griffin & Lightfoot intern, a law student from F.S.U., a guy with a submission fetish. It had lasted all summer, the boy visiting Deirdre’s home nightly, spending weekends with Deirdre, groveling. She took him to a leather shop in Orlando’s gay district and bought him a paddle, and she’d spank his rump ‘til it was red as a stop sign. The boy was charming, he even wept in Deirdre’s arms one night, professing his devotion to her, and she thought her heart would melt.

But when the intern returned to school in August, despite his promises to visit Deirdre frequently, she never saw him again. He wouldn't even take her phone calls, and eventually sent her a note: "I've met someone else. Leave me alone, please."

The little bastard.

A mature woman, Deirdre now knew, had to be careful with young men.

Adam Beckett was, to be sure, a prize. Handsome, with an eager sex drive, he had a streak of docility Deirdre found appealing. Whenever she phoned he arrived within minutes. When she said no to something, he backed off. (She did *not* like fellatio and she'd told him so the first time he asked, and thereafter the subject never again arose.) The young man kissed like an angel, he liked to cuddle on mornings like this, and his boyish demeanor charmed Deirdre.

Adam had a kinky side, too. He liked the sting of the intern's paddle. Handcuffs appealed to him as well, and one evening, during their lovemaking, Adam confessed to Deirdre that he sometimes fantasized about sex with men. He had never acted on his feelings, he said, but he might, given an opportunity.

"Do you think I'm weird, having such thoughts?" he asked Deirdre.

She chuckled and shook her head. "I don't think there's anything wrong with two men making love. My son's gay and he's a great kid."

Now, in Deirdre's bed, Adam changed position, kneeling between Deirdre's legs and spreading them, lowering his face and exploring with his tongue, his jaw stubble rasping her thighs, not unpleasantly. Squirming on the sheet, Deirdre groaned and finger-combed his onyx hair.

"Yes," she whispered. "Just like that."

Watch out, she told herself. *You could easily fall for this one.*

"They're slob," Jake told Adam, speaking of the colleagues they had just played hoops with. Jake and Adam stood in the gang showers at the YMCA, soaping themselves in the steamy air. Their opponents had eschewed bathing and returned to the offices of Griffin & Lightfoot, shirts stuck to their backs, hair matted.

Adam shook his head. "I pity the clients they'll meet this afternoon."

Adam's eyes were closed and water pounded his shoulders. It streamed off the head of his uncut cock. Jake gazed at Adam like Adam was hot buttered toast, wondering what Adam might say if Adam knew of the thoughts occupying Jake's head.

This was Jake's sixth month of employment at Griffin & Lightfoot, and since his arrival in Orlando his love life had been nonexistent. Back in Athens he'd had a secret boyfriend, his first, an undergraduate from Savannah named Carter, an elfin lad with aquamarine eyes and straw-colored hair that grew to his shoulders. Jake missed him terribly, feeling lonely and sex-starved, but Griffin & Lightfoot was a conservative firm and Jake had avoided the city's gay establishments, fearing he might encounter someone from work, a paralegal or a secretary who might reveal Jake's homosexuality to others at the firm. The thought of this happening terrified Jake. He'd worked so hard to get this far. Why jeopardize his future?

Jake kept promising himself he'd visit another town -- Tampa or Fort Lauderdale, perhaps -- for a weekend of excitement, but his workload at the firm had precluded him from doing so. Sixty-hour weeks were *de rigueur* for Griffin & Lightfoot associates, and Jake worked most every Saturday, generating the sort of billable hours that would earn him a junior partnership in two or three years. But Jake often wondered if he could last that long. His loneliness, his longing for intimacy with another man gnawed at him day and night. He slept fitfully, suffered frequent headaches, and his appetite was poor. He had lost a dozen pounds since coming to Orlando, and dark crescents painted the lower halves of his eye sockets.

Now, he glanced at Adam's buttocks -- a pair of cantaloupes white as cream -- and his mouth got sticky. He thought of Carter, back in Athens, how the boy liked to ride Jake's ample cock, making the bedsprings wheeze. Jake missed the warmth, the sheer fun of their uninhibited sex. He had loved waking next to Carter in the morning, the two of them lying spoon-style, Carter's back to Jake. Jake would bury his nose in the boy's hair, he'd wrap his arm around Carter's chest and grind his hips against his lover's supple ass cheeks.

Now, nothing. Just a magazine, a tube of jelly, and his own right hand.

"Pass the shampoo, would you?" Adam asked, and when Jake handed Adam the bottle the two men's knuckles touched and Jake felt an electric jolt slither up his arm. He studied the dark hair under Adam's arms while Adam lathered his scalp, eyes closed. Jake gazed at Adam's cock and wondered: How large does it get when it's erect? How would it taste, resting on my tongue?

Easy, McGovern, Jake told himself. He's got a girlfriend.

Adam and Jake sat in Deirdre's corner office at Griffin & Lightfoot, on the eighteenth floor of a bank building. Afternoon sunlight entered the room through plate glass windows, reflecting off Deirdre's framed diplomas and court certificates. Her desk was cherry wood, her swivel chair black leather. On her credenza she displayed a studio portrait of her son Robert, twenty, a junior at a Florida Southeast University in Miami, a product of her only marriage that had ended two years after Robert's birth, while Deirdre was still in college.

Deirdre's ex-husband had not spoken to Robert since, at age sixteen, Robert announced to his parents that he, Robert, was gay.

Now, Deirdre sat on the corner of her desk, facing Adam and Jake. She wore a silk blouse, a wool skirt, stockings, and heels. A strand of pearls hung about her neck. Her fawn-colored hair grew to her shoulders and her makeup was minimal: pale lipstick, a bit of eyeliner, and a touch of eye shadow. She crossed her arms beneath her breasts and wrenched her lips. "I'm angry," she said. "I could eat roofing nails right now."

Neither man said anything.

"My son helped form an organization at his school. It's called the Gay and Lesbian Alliance, or GALA for short, and it's all very innocent and proper. They meet twice a month, sponsor social events, promote the gay rights cause on campus. They even fielded an intramural volleyball team."

Jake cleared his throat, rearranging himself in his chair.

"The university provides office space in the student union for any group that registers with the school and pays a nominal fee. When GALA did this, the school assigned them a room and things went along fine until the university president, a guy named Keenan O'Donnell, learned of it."

Deirdre rose and walked to a window, her back to Jake and Adam, her arms still crossed.

"It seems O'Donnell's a devout Catholic who disapproves of boys kissing boys, a devotee of Anita Bryant. He instructed the dean of student affairs to evict GALA from the union, and yesterday the dean gave GALA a ten-day Notice To Vacate."

Deirdre turned toward the two men, her cheeks coloring, her turned-up nose twitching. "Florida Southeast is a public institution funded by taxpayer dollars. O'Donnell's action is a clear violation of GALA members' First and Fourteenth Amendment rights."

Adam raised his shoulders, then let them drop. "Constitutional law wasn't my strong suit in school," he said.

"I want something done," Deirdre said, "and I think you're the lawyers for the job. This would satisfy your *pro bono* obligations for the year."

Adam crossed his knee with an ankle, his jaw working. "I don't want to step out of line, but..."

"What?" Deirdre said.

"Is this the kind of suit our firm is willing to handle?"

Deirdre nodded. "I've cleared it with David Lightfoot. He wasn't thrilled, but I convinced him it would help our image when the Lehmiller claim goes to court."

Deirdre referred to a sex discrimination suit filed against Griffin & Lightfoot by a female attorney who'd been fired from her position with the firm. Her dismissal had occurred after rumors spread that she was lesbian.

Adam looked at Jake and Jake looked at Adam, then both men looked at Deirdre.

"You're suggesting we sue the university?" Jake said.

Deirdre settled into her swivel chair. She placed her elbows on her desk and joined her hands together. "That's precisely what I'm suggesting. I want a petition for a temporary injunction filed in the federal court in Miami. I want the dean's Notice To Vacate set aside."

"We'd have to move fast," Jake said.

Deirdre nodded.

Jake looked at Adam and raised his eyebrows. "Well?"

In a Miami hotel room, Jake and Adam worked in silence, Jake seated at a Formica desk, pecking on a portable typewriter with a pencil stuck sideways between his lips, Adam with his back to the headboard of his queen-sized bed, legs outstretched, surrounded by law books and legal pads. A wall unit air conditioner stirred the drapes. It was Saturday afternoon, two days after their meeting with Deirdre. Both men wore basketball shorts and high-top sneakers. Jake wore a T-shirt with the sleeves hacked off, displaying his biceps and shoulder muscles, while Adam was shirtless. They had taken a three-mile run an hour before and the room smelled of their sweat. Business suits, shirts and neckties, and polished dress shoes occupied a closet.

By agreement, Jake and Adam had divided up responsibilities in preparing the Florida Southeast lawsuit, Adam performing research, then writing a brief to support their case, Jake drafting documents to be filed with the U. S. District Court in Miami: a Complaint, a Motion for Temporary Injunction, a proposed Order blocking the dean's Notice to Vacate.

During their jog, Adam had grumbled. "Great way to spend a weekend, eh?"

Now, a knock sounded and Jake looked at Adam.

"That must be our boy," Jake said.

Their visitor was Robert Bosch, Deirdre's son, who would serve as plaintiff in the Florida Southeast lawsuit. Slender and half a head shorter than Jake or Adam, he looked just like the portrait in Deirdre's office. He was fair-skinned, with dark wavy hair that grew over the tops of his ears. His eyes were cornflower blue; they sparkled when he smiled and shook Jake's hand. He had a turned-up nose like Deirdre's and his voice was a scratchy tenor.

When the boy stepped up to Adam and the two shook hands, Jake wondered what Robert would say if he knew Adam was screwing Deirdre. Robert sat on the room's second bed, setting his car keys on the night stand and facing Adam. He wore khaki shorts with an open-neck shirt and tennis shoes. A pair of sunglasses perched atop his head.

Jake stole a glance at the boy's crotch and his dick tingled when he saw the outline of Robert's cock snaking down one leg of the boy's shorts. *Sexy*, Jake thought.

"I've never been in court before," Robert told them. "What'll happen?"

"In this type case," Jake said, "there's no jury, just a judge. We'll ask for a pre-trial hearing on a temporary injunction. You'll have to testify, to acquaint the judge with the basic facts."

Robert nodded, licking his lips. He shoved his hands between his knees and stared at the carpet.

"It's nothing to be frightened of," Jake said.

Robert raised his chin and looked at Adam, then Jake. "I'm not ashamed of being gay -- I'm out to my friends -- but I'm guessing this'll be in the papers?"

"Probably," Jake said.

Robert puckered one side of his face and shook his head. "My dad'll shit."

Jake and Adam exchanged glances.

"Look," Adam said, "if you're uncomfortable with this..."

Robert shook his head. "I'm president of GALA. It's something I need to do."

Jake looked at Adam. "Why don't I interview Robert someplace else, so your work's not disturbed?"

Minutes later, Jake and Robert occupied a windowless conference room adjacent to the hotel's lobby, seated across from each other at a table with a dozen swivel chairs. Overhead, fluorescent fixtures hummed. Robert sipped from a soda can while Jake asked him questions, taking notes on a legal pad. When had GALA been organized? What was GALA's mission? How many members?

Jake was impressed by Robert's calm demeanor, by his measured responses. The boy had a gift for words and, like his mother, he expressed himself clearly. But Jake found it hard to look Robert in the eye. The kid's blasé attitude toward homosexuality both amazed and unsettled Jake.

Jake thought, *He doesn't give a crap if someone disapproves of him. Where does he find the courage?* Sweat beaded on Jake's upper lip and his hand sometimes shook as he scribbled. Might Robert suspect that he, Jake, was gay? If so, would the boy tell his mother?

After forty-five minutes, Robert said, “Can I ask *you* a question?”

Jake looked up from his legal pad and raised his eyebrows.

“Did you volunteer for this, or did my mom make you get involved?”

Jake dropped his gaze for a moment, then he looked at Robert. “A little of both, I guess. Why?”

Robert leaned backward in his chair, his eyes boring into Jake’s. “You seem skittish about something. Is it me?”

Jake felt blood rush to his cheeks. He glanced at a framed poster on the wall behind Robert, his pulse accelerating. Was his discomfort so obvious? He drew a breath and let it out. *Calm down, McGovern.*

Robert narrowed his eyes and shook his head. “You *are* nervous, aren’t you?”

Jake thought, *Look at me: I’ve got five years on this kid, I’m bigger and stronger than him, but he’s the tough guy in this room. He’s out there fighting while I’m hiding in the closet.*

“What is it?” Robert asked. “What’s wrong?”

Jake’s pulse raced. He felt dampness in his armpits when he returned his gaze to Robert. *Go on, McGovern, don’t be a chicken shit. Tell him.*

Jake opened his mouth, but before he could speak, the conference room door opened and a bellhop entered, pushing a cart with a coffee urn atop it. An aproned woman followed with a tray of coffee mugs.

“Something going on?” Jake asked.

The bellhop checked his wristwatch and nodded. “Staff meeting in ten minutes. Sorry.”

Jake swung his gaze to Robert. The boy’s head was tilted to one side and his face bore a puzzled expression.

Jake thought, *You’re a fool, McGovern, a reckless idiot. You don’t even know this kid and you almost spilled your guts. What were you thinking?*

Jake rose, feeling a sense of relief. “Come on,” he told Robert. “We’re done for today.”

Adam and Jake shared a twelve-pack of beer in their hotel room, seated on their respective beds, facing each other. The room smelled of the Chinese takeout they’d eaten for dinner. Earlier, they

had watched a college basketball game on TV, but now the set was turned off and they chatted, both wearing boxer shorts, Jake sneaking glances at Adam's crotch.

"It surprised me," Adam said, "when Bosch asked us to do this case."

Jake asked why.

"It's totally out of character for Griffin & Lightfoot. Imagine what the prayer gang will say when they hear about it."

Adam referred to a circle of Griffin & Lightfoot people -- partners and associates, paralegals and secretaries -- who twice a week met on their lunch hour, in the firm's library, for Bible study and worship. Arthur Griffin, the firm's founder, often attended. In the firm's employee handbook, Griffin had penned an introduction:

At Griffin & Lightfoot, God and work come first.

Jake asked Adam, "Are you embarrassed to be part of this suit?"

Adam studied his beer bottle, rubbing his lips together. "I suppose not, though I'm sure some people might wonder if, you know..."

"What?"

"You and I were assigned the case for a reason."

Jake nodded. He'd considered this as well. Had he made a mistake, doing this?

"I mean," Adam said, "I'd have said no if it wasn't Deirdre who asked, if it wasn't her son involved. What's he like, anyway?"

Jake raised a shoulder. "Nice kid. Self-confident."

"You've got to admire him for taking a stand. I'll bet he catches shit from kids at school."

Jake nodded, his pulse pounding in his temples, thinking, *There's nothing to admire about me, is there? I am such a coward.* The tops of his ears burned and trickles of sweat rolled down his ribs, reflecting lamplight. Jake drew a breath and felt an ache in his chest. Had the room just shrunk? Had the air had been sucked out of it? Without warning, a groan emerged from Jake's throat and his vision fuzzed. What was happening?

Adam's looked at Jake with his forehead crinkled. "Is something wrong?" he asked.

Jake looked at Adam, drawing a breath. *Go on, McGovern, tell him.*

"Can I trust you with a secret?" Jake said.

Adam looked at Jake with his eyebrows gathered. “What?”

Do it.

Jake spoke of Carter, back in Athens, and how badly he missed the boy. “Sometimes I get so lonely, especially on weekends, I don’t know what to do.”

Adam took fresh beers from the room’s little refrigerator and gave one to Jake.

“There’s a gay resort on the Orange Blossom Trail,” Adam said. “You might meet someone there.”

Jake turned down a corner of his mouth and shook his head. “I can’t risk it. People talk, and Griffin would fire my ass if he found out.”

Adam sipped from his beer and didn’t say anything.

“You’ll keep this quiet?” Jake said.

Adam nodded. “Of course, buddy. And thanks for trusting me.”

Sunday morning, Adam woke at daybreak in the hotel room. Skinny light entered around edges of the drapes, enough so Adam could see. He turned on his side and looked at Jake in the other bed. Jake slept on his back, one arm crooked behind his head on his pillow, the covers resting at his waist, his hair in tangles, his snoring barely audible over the air conditioner’s hum.

Adam hadn’t slept well. Jake’s revelation the previous evening had taken Adam by surprise, stirring his emotions. Who’d have guessed?

Adam rose and used the bathroom. Returning to his bed, he climbed between the sheets and lay on his side, gazing at Jake, thinking of the times he’d whacked off to visions of Jake’s meaty cock and his muscled buttocks. Adam wondered what sex acts Jake and his Athens boyfriend had performed in Jake’s bedroom. Had they sucked each other’s cocks? Explored anal intercourse?

Adam felt his own dick stiffen as he watched Jake’s chest rise and fall. He slipped a hand inside his boxer shorts and touched himself, wondering how it would feel to lie with Jake. Adam had never kissed a man, never touched another guy’s genitals or buttocks. How would it feel to hold Jake in his arms? And what would Jake’s cock taste like?

Go on, Adam told himself, don’t be a pussy. This is your chance; make a move.

He tossed his covers aside and rose, shivering in the cold room, his erection tenting the front of his boxers. After switching off the air conditioner, he stepped up to Jake's bed and touched Jake's shoulder. "Hey," Adam whispered.

Jake's eyelids fluttered open. He stared first at the ceiling, then at Adam, his gaze traveling from Adam's face to his boner, then back, his eyebrows gathering. "What is it?"

Adam lifted the edge of Jake's blanket. "Can I join you?"

Jake made a face. "Are you serious?"

Adam nodded.

Jake blinked, looking at Adam's erection again. He said, "Sure, but let me use the toilet first."

Moments later, the two men occupied Jake's bed, lying beneath the covers. Jake had flicked on the night stand lamp and its glow reflected in Adam's dark eyes. Adam lay on his back, head in the pillows, while Jake lay on his side, facing Adam, one arm crooked, head resting against his hand.

"I've never done this," Adam said.

"Why me?" Jake asked. "Why now?"

"I've thought about it many times, but I didn't know you were gay, not until last night."

Jake nodded, then a crease appeared between his eyebrows. "What about Deirdre? I thought you liked women?"

Adam shrugged. "I do -- I plan to marry one day -- but this is something I want as well; I'm not sure why." Adam dropped his gaze, then he looked at Jake. "Can you show me how?"

Jake grinned. He brought his mouth to Adam's and their lips parted and Jake's tongue explored Adam's mouth, rubbing against Adam's tongue while their chin stubbles rasped. Adam's heart thumped when he felt Jake's body heat. He smelled Jake's skin, a blend of sweat and soap. Jake stroked Adam's temple, then toyed with his ear while the two men kissed, their lips smacking.

Kissing Jake's not like kissing Deirdre, Adam thought. She's delicate, like a flower. Jake's more like an animal, one with the power to overwhelm me.

Jake changed position and brought his mouth to Adam's chest, sucking one nipple while he pinched the other, drawing a groan from Adam.

"You like that?" Jake asked.

"Mmmhmm."

Jake switched nipples, sucking and pinching while Adam's chest rose and fell and his breath whistled in his nose. Down below, Adam felt Jake's erection nudge his thigh. How big was it? When would Jake allow him to touch it?

Jake seized Adam's wrists and pinned them on either side of Adam's head, in the pillows, then he lay atop Adam, their hipbones meeting, erections rubbing. Jake went to work on Adam's armpits, sniffing their musky scent, licking and nibbling the dark hairs, making Adam squirm. Jake stuck the tip of his tongue in Adam's ear and twirled it about and Adam's belly fluttered.

Adam thought Jake's hair smelled like freshly mown grass.

Jake rolled off Adam and rose to a sitting position on the mattress, tossing aside the covers. Reaching for the waistband of Adam's boxers, he looked at Adam with his eyebrows arched. "Can I?"

Adam nodded, blushing while Jake dragged the boxers to Adam's ankles and pulled them over Adam's feet before tossing them into a corner. Adam's cock, rigid as PVC pipe, lay against his belly, twitching with his pulse. Jake reached for it and retracted the foreskin, baring the bullet-shaped glans, teasing it with his thumb and coaxing a drop of pre-come from the slit.

Adam lowered his gaze and his mouth went dry when he saw Jake's circumcised cock poking through the opening of his boxer shorts. Long and thick as a cucumber, the head looked like a stick shift knob. Adam touched it with a fingertip and the penis jerked like a nervous cat.

"You dick's a whopper," Adam whispered. "Ever fuck your boyfriend with it?"

Jake looked at Adam and grinned, flickering his eyebrows.

"Ouch," said Adam, wincing.

Jake chuckled. "It doesn't hurt if it's done right. You'll see."

"Will I?"

Jake said, "Sure, why not?" He raised his hips and slid his boxers down his legs, then over his feet. His dick bobbed as he moved and Adam couldn't keep his eyes off it. What a monster. What a beautiful thing it was, adorned by Jake's auburn pubic bush.

Jake gave Adam a lesson in cocksucking, Adam seated on the edge of the bed, Jake kneeling between Adam's thighs, peeling back Adam's foreskin and taking Adam's dick into his mouth, applying pressure with his tongue and lips, bobbing his head. Adam's heart chugged, his hand resting on the back of Jake's neck. How warm and soft Jake's mouth felt. How sensual.

They traded places and Adam's mouth watered as he lowered his face to Jake's groin and took Jake's swollen cock between his lips, feeling them stretch. Adam went cross-eyed as he tasted

dick flesh for the first time, almost gagging when the bulbous head of Jake's erection nudged the back of his throat. Adam buried his nose in Jake's pubic hair, smelling Jake's groin sweat, a musky aroma Adam found stimulating.

"Keep your teeth covered with your lips," Jake said. "Work the underside of my dick with your tongue and bob your head. Yes, like that..."

Adam's pulse raced as he sucked and slurped. He thought, *Unbelievable. Jake's cock is in my mouth, all of it. Strange that Deirdre doesn't like doing this. I could blow Jake for hours.*

Jake laid a hand on the crown of Adam's head, his fingers sifting through Adam's dark hair. "Keep it up," he told Adam. "It feels great."

Adam's lips smacked in the silent room, his breath huffing in his nose as he worked, until Jake seized a handful of Adam's hair and halted the action, removing his cock from Adam's mouth.

"Lick my nuts," Jake whispered. "One at a time."

Jake's sac was shaved, the skin there was smooth as a grape's. It tasted salty to Adam as he bathed it with his tongue, the sound of his slurping filling his ears, his hands resting on Jake's hairless thighs. He took one testicle into his mouth and rolled it about with his tongue, drawing a sigh from Jake. Then he moved to the other. Jake's balls were big as walnuts.

Adam's oral worship of Jake's genitals had Adam's pulse pounding, his dick leaking pre-come. How good it felt to service Jake, to submit to his will. Adam thought of the intern's paddle. Too bad it wasn't available. The hot, stinging sensation the device imparted might add spice to their lovemaking.

"Enough," Jake whispered, pushing Adam's forehead away, looking down at Adam's shiny lips and chin.

Adam's chest heaved as he caught his breath. Looking up at Jake, he raised his eyebrows. "What now?"

Jake poked the mattress. "Up here, lie on your back, head in the pillows."

Adam did so, Jake sitting beside him, toying with Adam's swollen cock, working the foreskin and telling Adam what lay in store.

"Ass-fucking's a beautiful, sexy thing, once the guy underneath learns to relax."

Adam shifted his hips. "That's me, right?"

Jake nodded. "Don't worry, I'll loosen you up. I'll be gentle."

From his suitcase, Jake produced a tube of jelly and placed it on the night stand. He raised Adam's legs until Adam's knees touched his shoulders, exposing Adam's pucker, a rose-colored button Jake stroked with his fingertip, then penetrated with his lube-slicked middle finger. Adam's sphincter contracted, fighting the intrusion, but Jake kept his finger in place, working it in and out, the knuckle stretching Adam's hole.

Adam broke into a sweat and the sheet beneath him dampened. His jaw was set and he stared at the ceiling, holding his legs aloft with his arms.

"Take deep breaths," Jake whispered. "You'll relax soon enough."

Minutes passed. The squishing of jelly and the two men's breathing were the only sounds in the room. When Jake felt Adam's hole loosen, he withdrew his finger and joined it with his index finger. Coating both with lube, he penetrated Adam anew and Adam squirmed on the sweat-soaked sheet.

"It hurts," Adam whispered, his sphincter going into spasms.

"Stay with me," Jake said, while he worked his fingers in and out. "Breathe."

Adam had lost his erection, but Jake's cock was stiff as a broom handle. Fingering Adam's anus, feeling the warmth of Adam's rectum, was exquisitely sexy, and the thought that he would steal Adam's cherry, had Jake's pulse racing. Jake thought, *What a beautiful guy Adam is, so handsome and sweet, so submissive.*

More time passed and, again, Adam relaxed, Jake's knuckles stretching him, making a smacking sound as they plunged in and out of Adam's hole.

Jake's gaze met Adam's. "Think you're ready?"

Adam swallowed and his larynx bobbed. "I guess."

Jake coated the surfaces of his cock with jelly, then stuffed a dollop of lube inside Adam's pucker, Adam shivering at the coldness.

Jake knelt on the mattress before Adam. He lowered his face and kissed Adam, their lips parting, tongues rubbing, chin whiskers rasping. Jake pulled his mouth from Adam's and looked into Adam's eyes. "Remember to breathe," he whispered.

Adam bobbed his chin.

The head of Jake's cock nudged Adam's anus and Adam cleared his throat. Jake eased his hips forward and Adam's hole began to stretch by degrees, Adam drawing breath through clenched teeth. As Jake's member bore into him, Adam's pucker went into frenzied contractions. The entire head of Jake's cock got inside Adam, followed by the shaft, advancing in increments.

Adam closed his eyes and winced. His chest heaved and sweat rolled from his armpits, the scent of it heavy in the room. Above him, Jake sweated as well, his skin reflecting lamplight, his forehead shiny. A chill ran up his spine when Adam's ring of muscle flexed. Adam squealed as the thickest part of Jake's cock stretched him open, Jake thrilling to the act of Adam's submission.

Jake thought, *he's my fuckboy now; I own his cherry.*

Jake reached beneath him for Adam's cock. He worked the foreskin, then stroked Adam's sac until Adam was fully erect.

Jake put his lips to Adam's ear. "Your asshole feels great, like silk."

Adam kissed Jake's cheek while Jake toyed with Adam's erection, Jake's cock fully inside Adam, his pubic hair tickling the cleft of Adam's buttocks.

Jake kissed the tip of Adam's nose, then he looked into Adam's eyes. "Ready for a ride?"

Adam nodded while, down below, his pucker burned, squeezing the base of Jake's cock.

Jake drew back his hips, then he drove forward, impaling Adam, making him squeal afresh. Jake repeated the process three or four times, his hips slapping Adam's buttocks, Adam grunting. "You're poking something inside me," Adam said, gasping for breath. "It feels good."

Jake grinned at Adam, plunging in again. "It's your prostate, buddy. It's why men like getting fucked."

A smile crept across Adam's sweaty face when he looked up at Jake. "Fuck me harder, then. Do it faster."

Jake increased the frequency of his thrusts, his sweaty skin slapping against Adam's, the headboard drumming the wall. Adam grunted and squealed like a frenzied animal and his eyes appeared to have lost focus. Jake's hands were joined behind Adam's neck now, his cheek was pressed to Adam's temple and Jake smelled Adam's hair. Little shock waves of pleasure coursed through Jake's limbs. His balls felt electric, his cock warm and alive inside Adam. Each time Jake thrust, Adam arched his back in response, almost as though he were dancing with Jake.

Jake closed his eyes, thinking, *How I've missed this. What a beautiful moment.* His cock throbbed and he cried out, his voice echoing in the room. A buzzing sounded inside his head while he flooded Adam's rectum with his seed, his body jerking each time he spurted.

Jake reached for Adam's erection and seized it in his fingers, working the foreskin, a smacking noise sounding as pre-come leaked from the head. Adam groaned deep in his throat, his hole flexing against Jake's dick, his hair matted with sweat.

“Go on,” Jake whispered, “shoot with my cock inside you. Show me how much you like getting fucked.”

Adam looked at Jake and grinned. Jake thrust inside Adam several more times, then Adam’s chest heaved and he shouted Jake’s name while his cock flung semen onto his chest, a trail of white opals reflecting lamplight. Adam gasped for air while his body jerked. His lungs pumped and his heart hammered against his rib cage.

Jake stayed inside Adam while the two men’s breathing slowed, while sweat trickled from their armpits and their scalps. An odor of sex hung in the air, pungent and strong. Jake’s forehead rested on Adam’s shoulder, Jake’s breath whistling in his nose. His mind was devoid of complex thought, he felt no hunger or thirst, no desire for anything except this intimacy, this closeness. He didn’t want to leave Adam, to withdraw from his body. He felt as if he could remain in this room forever, the two of them holding each other and breathing.

I can’t do without this, not any longer, Jake told himself. Something’s got to change in my life.

A breeze from Biscayne Bay lifted Robert’s Bosch’s bangs from his forehead while he, Adam, and Jake descended the steps of Miami’s federal courthouse, the lawyers toting briefcases, Robert clutching a court order that nullified the Notice to Vacate served upon GALA. Robert loosened his necktie and fixed his gaze upon an American flag. It was big as a bed sheet, fluttering atop a pole on the courthouse lawn.

Sunlight reflected in Robert’s teeth when he smiled. “Today,” he said, “I’m proud of my country.”

Adam looked at Jake and winked.

Jake glanced at the flag, then turned his gaze to Robert. “Would you mind,” he said, “if I called you sometime?”

It has been twenty-eight years since the law firm of Bosch, McGovern & Beckett opened its doors for business. Specializing in building construction litigation, the firm employs eighteen attorneys, occupying two floors of an office building in Coconut Grove, Florida. Senior partners Deirdre Bosch and Adam Beckett are married to each other. They have five children, the oldest a boy named Jake, a lance corporal in the U. S. Marine Corps.

Senior partner Jake McGovern and his lover, Robert Bosch, have lived together twenty-six years, in a Key Biscayne bungalow where they have raised three boys, all adopted from China. The oldest son’s an associate at Bosch, McGovern & Beckett, his name is Adam. He works sixty-hour weeks.

Twice a year, Adam Beckett and Jake McGovern rent a villa in Chubb Cay, in the Bahamas, for a week. They bonefish in the morning and make love in the afternoon, and no one knows about their sex except Jake and Adam.

“Our little secret,” is how they refer to their bi-annual intimacy.

When Bosch, McGovern & Beckett hires someone -- a lawyer or paralegal, a secretary or bookkeeper -- the newcomer's given an employee handbook. It outlines staff benefits and provides job descriptions, dress codes, and so forth. Jake McGovern wrote the introduction on the inside cover. Here's what it says:

At Bosch, McGovern & Beckett we value our clients and we all work hard. But our loved ones -- whoever they might be -- will always come first.

File Gumbo: A Roughstock Story

BA Torjuga

Sam's bullrope hit the wall with a satisfying fucking slap.

God damn it.

He'd made the short go and ridden fucking well.

Better than well.

And then those motherfuckers had scored TJ Martin a fucking ninety three point five?

Because the bastard had a following?

Motherfuckers.

One hand landed on his shoulder and Sam Bell spun around, ready to beat the living shit out of somebody.

Beau didn't even duck. Little Cajun bastard just stood there, staring him down.

"What?" He didn't need any fucking shit.

"You want a piece of me? Go ahead. I was just checking on you." That puffy little chest blew right out, like a frog defending its piece of swamp.

"I'm fine. Sorry." He backed off, went for his fucking rope. Last thing he fucking needed was to fight with Mr. World Champion. Hell, he could do that and then go punch deSilva.

After that he'd go hunt Ace's ass with a shotgun.

"No, you're not."

He wasn't sure if Beau meant he wasn't fine or wasn't sorry.

"I'm not what?" His knuckles creaked around the rope, damn near screaming.

"Fine. You're sore as a boil." The man grinned at him. Grinned, crookedy teeth and all.

"Fucker. I'm pissed off. Some of us ain't got followings. Some of us don't get given extra points for having buckle bunnies hanging on."

Beau nodded, serious all of a sudden. "It was a good ride, Bell. A damned fine ride."

"Yeah."

That would get him a paycheck, sure, but it wouldn't get him the event win, wouldn't get him into the finals. Wouldn't get him a motherfucking *following*, would it?

"Come on, man." Beau cuffed him on the shoulder. "I'll buy you a beer, huh?"

"Yeah, okay." He nodded. Hell, he'd spend the evening looking at that perfect butt on top of those tiny little legs. "Let me get my shit, man, and I'll be ready to go."

He could hear the hollering and congratulating as TJ headed down for the locker room. Fuck. His jaw went tight and he reminded himself that it wasn't TJ's call, but the judges.

Right?

Fucking right.

Just about the time he wanted to turn around and punch TJ in the jaw, bursting in and bragging like he was, Beau stripped out of his riding jeans, giving Sam a view of heavy muscles and tight boxer-briefs.

Oh, fuck him raw.

He got to changing himself, whistling under his breath, keeping his head down.

By the time Beau LaFitte looked like just another pocket cowboy without his uniform on, Sam figured he was back under control. He also figured Beau was dreaming if he thought people wouldn't recognize him, no matter what he wore.

TJ wandered over, grinning like a new-born fool. "So, LaFitte, you want to come out with us? There's a big party down at this club called the Ranch House."

"No thanks, Teej. I've got other plans." Beau nodded, real polite like, but that was it.

Sam grabbed his gear, pushed his hat down a little deeper on his head and counted to thirty while Beau got his own shit together. TJ looked at him, nodded once.

"That was a good ride you had, Bell."

"Thanks." Thirty one. Thirty two. Thirty three. "You, too."

"Well, come on, boyo. Let's go celebrate." Packer clapped TJ on the shoulder before nodding at Sam and winking, leading the kid off.

"Saved his life, I bet," Beau said with a grin.

Beau had no idea.

Sam looked down at his riding hand, the fingers clenched so tight the knuckles were white.

"You drive over?" He hadn't. He'd caught a ride with the bullfighters. Everyone knew you could catch a ride with one of 'em.

"Yeah. Yeah, I didn't want to have to chance Adam getting a piece of something." Adam Taggart and Beau was good friends, but man, Adam got laid more than anyone on earth.

"You mind if I come with?" Him, he wasn't much on the getting laid these days. Not for lack of offers, he guessed. He was sorta... holding out for the big dog, even if the big dog was kinda teeny and looking at pickup men and all.

"Well, I asked you to, didn't I?" Those clear eyes glinted at him from under stubby lashes.

"Yeah. I was givin' you an out, if you wanted it, man." He almost grinned. "C'mon. I fucking need a beer."

"Shit, yeah." They both shouldered their bags and headed out, ducking the reporter chick that worked for the network.

Beau had him a good-looking truck, a pretty, shiny new duallie. Sam approved. You couldn't trust a cowboy that drove one of them sport car deals.

Took three tries for the banty little rooster to climb up in it, though. Sam had to hide the smile.

"You know, they got a little step stool deal..." It wasn't that he was but a scant inch taller than Beau. It was that his legs were four inches longer, easy.

"Shut up. Knock you into the middle..." He could hear the muttering, but Beau's voice was muffled as he finally vaulted into the cab. Least he could reach the pedals.

He grinned over, meeting Beau's look. "Now, now, don't go all Cajun on me..."

"Shit, Poot. I'm Cajun all the time, even if I don't look it." The truck roared to life, and he had to admire that sound, too.

"You do got the cowboy look." So did he, but he was from the Piney Woods, Texan to the bone.

"Well, I grew up that way, yeah?" Beau kept sneaking glances at him. "So, uh, where to? I got no idea where I'm going."

"Only bar I know is over to the hotel, but there's a beer store at that big grocery..." Thank God it was a Saturday event. It sucked to not be able to buy beer on Sunday

"Sure. We could find a quiet place and hole up." Beau turned off toward the highway, looking more confident.

"That suits me to the bone, Beau."

He could stand a nice sit and a chat. It'd give him some shower thoughts.

"Cool." Some zydeco song came on the radio, and Beau started drumming on the steering wheel, singing along.

Sam let himself lean on the truck door and watch, knowing it was late enough, dark enough, that Beau wouldn't know.

They pulled into the parking lot at the grocery, and Beau killed the engine. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I mean, shit. I'm pissed, but... I ain't ever gonna be what y'all are. I fall on my damn head too much." He let himself jabber to hide the fact that what he'd been thinking on was Beau Lafitte and that fine damn jawline.

Beau gave him an incredulous look. "Poot. You got more talent in your little finger than I got in my whole body. May not get you the championship, but you ought to be damned proud."

He grinned sorta, feeling like he was a hundred years old, all of the sudden. He didn't need to have sunshine blowed up his skirt. He knew what was what. "Come on, man. Let's buy some beer and something to munch on."

"You know, I could stand some pork rinds."

Oh, man.

"Sure. Pork rinds. Hot Cheetos. Beer."

"Pickles," Beau agreed. "Dry roasted peanuts."

Sam chuckled. "Beef jerky and Nutter Butters."

"Oh, you're a man after my own heart." Beau slapped his butt on the way into the store, and he about jumped a mile. Beau was awfully familiar all of a sudden.

They grabbed a cart and started shopping, ending up with the weirdest assortment of food -- grapes and Funyuns, Cornnuts and a big assed bag of Hershey's Kisses.

Time they got to the beer, they were laughing hard, both of them tossing things into the basket. How the box of condoms appeared in there, he'd never know.

He didn't ask, though, he just tossed them up like... like it was nothing.

Damn it.

Beau gave him a sideways kind of grin, one that warmed his belly, deep down. He was just gonna ignore that, too.

Fine motherfucker.

Fine, little, short, evil motherfucker.

Somehow or another, they ended up with birthday candles and a Cosmo magazine, too. Jesus, what was the little Cajun up to?

Sam helped lug it all to the truck, not asking a damn thing.

Hell, it was too fun just to wait, wonder.

Beau started singing again, whapping his leg and making hand motions for him to sing along. The truck barreled for the hotel, fast as anything.

Sam chuckled and sang, loud. Shit, it was hard to be blue with Beau. Damn hard.

By the time they hit the hotel, he was laughing his fool ass off.

Even seeing a couple of TJ's friends in the lobby couldn't change his mood back to bad. Not with them loaded down with bags and beer. Now they just had to decide whose room to go to.

"Who you roomin' with?" He was stuck with Max and Handy and Lon, Jesus love him.

"Uh." Beau grinned, just the bottom of his crooked tooth showing. "No one. I asked for the presidential, and they gave it to me, comp."

"Fucker. I'm coming up with you, then." Jackass little banty rooster fuckhead. Sam grinned, shook his head. "Fuckin' president butthead Cajun."

"Yeah, yeah. I was jokin' when I asked, but if they're gonna do it, so be it." There was even a code that Beau had to put in the elevator.

He shook his head, nodded. "Still, pretty damn cool, man. Is it neat?"

"It's not bad. It ain't the Ritz, you know?" No, it was just a mid-rate expensive place. Good thing they got a discount.

"Well, you know us bullriders. We're all fancy-pants and shit."

"No shit." They got in, and it was a real suite, with a front room and a bedroom and one of them sunken baths in the restroom. Nice. The couch even looked comfy.

He put the bags down, then plopped onto the sofa. Lord, he was wore.

"You want a beer? I got a little fridge to keep the rest cold." Beau started unpacking shit.

"Sure. You want help?"

"Huh? Oh, no. I got it." Except Beau started handing him stuff. Funyans. Doritos. Weird Little Debbie cakes. The birthday candles.

"Uh, Boug? What're the candles for? We setting something on fire?"

"They're for the cakes." Beau raised a brow. "Cake's got to have candles."

"Is it your birthday?" Sam raised his own eyebrow in return.

"Nope. But it's bound to be somebody's." Each little cake got opened, a twisty colored candle pushed in and lit. "Blow."

Cajuns were weird damn critters.

Sam sorta liked it.

Maybe more than sorta, even.

He puckered up and blew.

Beau blew, too, and the candles flickered out. "Did you make a wish?"

"Yeah. You?" Damn, Beau had the prettiest damn eyes.

"I sure did." Grabbing a cake, Beau bit into it, licking frosting off his upper lip.

He hooted, grabbed one for himself, licking the frosting off the top before starting on the cake.

When he finished, he glanced over to find Beau staring at him, mouth open a little, but not enough to be gross or nothin'.

"Do I got cake on me?"

"Nope." Beau blinked before licking his lips again. "Gonna make the beer taste sour, ain't it?"

"Prob'ly. You want some more?" He couldn't quit looking. He just couldn't,

"Uh-huh." They stared at each other 'til it got a little awkward. Beau's cheeks went red.

"'kay. I'll... Here. There's another piece, huh? I'm gonna hit the head." His prick was as hard as Chinese algebra. All he'd need was two minutes with his hand and he'd be fine.

"Sure." Beau never even so much as glanced away, watching him all the way to the bathroom.

He shut the door behind him without even turning on the light. Jesus.

God had a sick fucking sense of humor, giving someone as fine as Beau Lafitte the jones for tall, lanky pickup men that didn't want him while he was right here, wanting bad.

He jerked his zipper down and grabbed his prick, pulling hard and fast, looking to get it over with so he could be with Beau again, go laugh and joke and drink and shit with this stupid fucking need riding him like a bad habit.

"You're missing the Funyans!" Beau called through the door, near making him jump out of his skin.

"D...don't..." He cleared his throat, knowing that he sounded husky and hoarse. "Don't eat 'em all."

"You need a hand?"

No. Surely Beau hadn't just asked that.

"God, yes." He just barely whispered the words, knowing Beau couldn't hear. Oh, fuck. More than anything at *all* he wanted.

"Poot?" Beau was just outside the door, now. He could hear the difference in the distance of the man's voice.

"Yeah?" He leaned his head back, too far gone to turn the light on, much less move away from the door.

"You're hiding from me, man."

He groaned, going up on his toes. "Gimme two minutes, Boug. I'll be done."

"Okay." Beau moved away from the door, and he had a little peace and quiet, just for as long as he needed.

He let his hand roll over the tip of his prick, hard-hard, but damn it. Damn it, it wasn't enough. Jesus, come *on*. He thought of Beau, of those laughing eyes, of pushing that solid, compact little body against the wall of the shower and pushing into that perfect fucking heat. "Oh, fuck. Beau..."

The door swung open, and Beau stood there, hands on his hips. "Jesus Christ, Sam. If you're gonna call my name like that, the least you could do is let *me* hold your dick."

Sam stared for half a second, trying to make sure he'd heard what he heard, and when Beau didn't run screaming or try to hit him, Sam went for it, moving his hands from his hard, aching cock, letting it all hang out.

"Okay."

Or possibly please.

"Well, that's better." Stepping up like a baseball player to the plate, Beau grabbed Sam's cock and started pulling.

He sorta shorted right the fuck out, hands landing on Beau's shoulders, hips jerking like a fucking dog's. "Oh. Oh, damn. Yes."

"Uh-huh. God Almighty, Sam. You're hung." Beau was grinning like a fool, watching him jerk and dance.

"Can... you gonna hit me if I kiss you?" He wanted to, bad.

"Nope. Kiss away."

Oh, thank God. Some guys hated that. 'Specially the ones who were just having some relief on tour while they waited to get back to their girl.

Sam pushed closer, his mouth crashing down on Beau's. God knew he wanted to take his time and shit, but he couldn't. Not now. Not this time. Not with Beau's thumb digging in against his slit before those fingers closed around him and slid down to the base, bumping his balls.

He pushed his tongue into Beau's lips, tasting sweet for about one heartbeat before he shot so hard his bones rattled.

Beau held on, rode it out, kissing him silly. That little bastard was strong.

He managed to catch his breath, to focus on kissing back instead of melting into a puddle. He reached out, hands finding that solid chest, flat belly. Beau moaned for him, mouth open and hot under his. Hard hands gripped his arms once Beau let go of his cock, pulling him close.

Oh, fuck. Yeah. Yeah. He nodded, gathering them together so he could tug Beau's undershirt out from those Wranglers, touch him some skin. The skin under there was pale, dusted with blond hair, and layered over solid muscle. Barrel-chested little man.

He wanted to touch every inch, see what made Beau twist, scream. Pinching the tiny, almost-pink nipples made Beau jump. The slide of his hand down the bumpy spine made Beau moan, rock.

"This room got a bed?" This would be easier if they were both naked and horizontal.

"Uh-huh. Big one. Come on." Beau whirled and almost clocked himself on the half open door, but managed to get them to the suite's bedroom.

He lost his shirt on the way; Beau had his boots off and his watch on the bedside table about the same time.

It sorta escalated fast. Beau tugged at the rest of Sam's clothes, cussing them, that Cajun accent really coming out.

"I been watching you." Sam shoved Beau's jeans off, hands dragging up them short, little legs.

"Yeah? I woulda never known, Sammy. I swear to God, you're thick." Beau jerked at Sam's jeans.

"Shut up, butthead." He pinched the inside of Beau's thigh. "It ain't easy, wanting."

"No, it ain't." Beau spun him around, pushed him to where he was bent onto the bed, and grabbed his now bare ass. "Been wanting this for months."

Jesus, the little fuck was strong, and those hands made him ache. "It's all yours, Boug. Every inch."

"Promise?" Beau rubbed and squeezed, like some sort of erotic massage. Jesus. He could just explode, all over again.

"I swear it." He fucking meant it, too. He'd be Beau's right hand man, swear to God.

"Then you ain't as thick as you seem." He felt Beau's heat on his skin before he actually felt that thick cock rub up against him.

"Thick." His eyes rolled and he pushed back, rubbing like nothing going. His own cock was making a great little come back.

"Huh?" Thumbs spreading his ass, Beau loved all up on him, cock leaving a damp trail on his skin.

"Nothing. 's good." Oh, damn. This was like a fucking wet dream.

"Mmmhmm. Damn. I'll be right back, Poot." Beau left him kinda hanging there, the air cold on his skin.

He rested his cheek on his arm, trying not to think or nothing, not to worry.

Just about the time he was feeling real stupid, Beau came back, dropping a pack of condoms on the bed. "Got the slick, too. Figured it was better to interrupt now."

"Always said you was a good planner, Boug."

"I try." One of Beau's square hands pressed against his ass again, squeezing the muscle a little. "Finest ass in bullriding, Poot."

Oh, now, that made him blush a little. "There's lots of asses in bullriding."

"Not like yours. It's hard and high and tight, and I been looking at it for years."

"You can do more than look, Beau." He leaned hard, letting his butt cheeks rub against all that warm skin.

"Good. I thought I wasn't ever gonna get the chance." Slick fingers spread him wide, one pushing in, making his toes curl. Wasn't no pussyfootin' with this man.

He let the moan out, let Beau know that he was right there and liking it.

More than liking it.

And Beau, well, the man was all over him like white on rice. Inside him.

He'd never been with someone who knew his rhythm and shit, who knew how he rode. Beau, though? Shit. Beau knew. Beau was with him.

Two more fingers slid right inside him, stretching him until his skin tingled, until he cried out. "You want it like this, or you want to get comfy and all?"

He looked back, panting a little. "Want to watch, huh? This time."

Because there'd be more, if it was good.

"This time," Beau agreed easily, pushing him up on the bed, letting him get spread out on his back. Then Beau settled between his legs, cock straining up against that flat belly.

Jesus, was this real?

Sam grabbed his knees, pulled them up and back.

Beau's eyes went paler when he was all het up, not darker. It was fascinating. So was watching the condom roll down over that fat cock. Sam licked his lips, watching the rubber stretch, shiny and slick.

It slid into place, and Beau met his eyes, hand coming to rest low on his belly. "You ready?"

"Yeah. You?" His hand covered Beau's, for like a second or two.

"Oh, yeah." Beau grinned, and for a moment it was like they was behind the chutes, just jawing. Then Beau muscled in close, the tip of Beau's cock against his hole.

That wasn't like 'just' anything. He pushed up on his elbows, brought his face close to Beau's as his ass let Beau in that first little bit.

Beau grunted, hands landing on Sam's hips, pulling. Inch by inch, Beau slid inside him, and then Beau was seated deep and kissing him like they were the last two cowboys on earth. He could feel every fucking inch, buried deep, making him want to jerk and move, but he held on, waiting for the right time.

A deep breath swelled Beau's chest, and then those compact hips started to move, Beau pushing in and out. Sam had ridden and been rode and loved and fucked and... Beau was fixin' to ruin him for life. Beau wasn't like a machine. He was like a frickin' bull, pushing Sam to the very edge of what he could hang on to. Damn.

He did though, he fucking held on, staring into them pale eyes and doing his damndest not to scream.

They rocked the bed, the mattress banging up against that fake headboard for all it was worth. Beau lost the rhythm in a few short minutes, skin going a deep red, breath heaving in that barrel chest.

"Come on. Come on." Sam reached out, tweaked one pink-pink nipple.

"Shit! Sammy..." Beau stared at him, going still for an endless second. Then Beau rocked deep inside him, coming hard for him.

He reached down, jacking his cock quick and hard, going for round two, easy as you please.

"Sammy..." Moaning. Beau reached over to help him, hand closing around him and pulling.

"Yeah. Yeah, Boug. Oh, fuck. Just..." He humped a couple of times, Beau's cock still filling him, before his balls let loose.

"Look at you." Beau jerked a couple more times, like he was having sympathy spasms.

They slumped back a little, staring at each other.

Damn.

Just, damn.

Beau patted his cock. "You all right, Poot?"

"Better than. You?"

"Shit, I might live." Beau slid out of him, holding the condom on until he pulled away. Once it was gone, Beau flopped down next to him. "I been thinking I wasn't ever gonna get a chance."

"I been watching, but... there's always somebody, huh? Watching too?"

"Yeah." Snuggling up, Beau hummed, pressing against him. Warm. Like a little log burning stove. "Well, I got smart, yeah?"

"Yeah? 'Cause... you know, Boug. I ain't easy, but I got your back 'til the end of damn time."

He got him a fierce kiss. "That's all I need, Sam. I swear. I need someone just like you. I can count on you."

"Yes, sir. I swear it."

"Then we're good to go. Want to stay in the fancy-pants suite with me tonight?" Beau chuckled. "Maybe every night?"

"Shit, Boug, I'd stay if it was just in the back of my truck."

"Yeah?" The slow, easy kiss Beau gave him may have been better than all of the hard and desperate ones a few moments before. "That's good, because we still got Funyans."

"Nutter Butters, too. Hell, we still got cupcakes and candles. There could be wishes."

"Wishes are damned fine things, Poot. Especially when they come true." Beau patted Sam's belly. "Hell, you come home with me, I might even make you a pot of gumbo."

Alpha Male, Beta Male

Taylor Lochland

My cell phone rang, jerking me out of a light sleep. I blinked and glanced at the clock: ten-twenty-two. I must have fallen asleep watching television. I yawned and reached for the phone, disturbing Dorian, my gray cat, who'd been fast asleep on my lap. Glancing at the display, I saw that it was somebody from the Beckett family farm. I cleared my throat to try to get the sleepiness out of my voice and flipped the phone open. "This is Dr. Aaron Herschel."

"Hi, Doctor." A nervous voice said. "This is Nathan Beckett."

My heart started to beat a little faster. Nathan was the family's only son, and back when I first met him, he immediately caught my interest. Based on the way he'd smile at me and watch me work from a distance, I had a feeling the attraction was mutual. However, I never pursued anything, since I didn't want to jeopardize my professional relationship with his mother and father. There was also the fact that he was several years my junior. "Hi, Nathan. What can I do for you?"

"Um, my dad said I should call you. You know our mare, Misty? Well, she's foaling. And something's wrong. She's struggling, but nothing's happening."

"Okay." I sat up and combed my fingers through my hair. "I can be there in about a half hour. Are your parents around?"

"No, they're not. My cousin Margaret's getting married, so they're visiting her out of state. That's why Dad told me to call you."

"No problem." I was a little surprised both parents would leave when a mare was getting ready to foal, but then again, Nathan was in his early twenties and overdue for some experience taking care of things on his own. "I'm on my way; call me back if anything happens before I get there." I hung up the phone and gathered up anything I might need, trying to think about pregnant horses instead of a black-haired, blue-eyed farm boy.

When I arrived at the farm a half hour later, Nathan ran out to greet me before I was even out of the car, a lantern in his hand illuminating his face. His features were marred a bit by his concern, but nothing could detract from his good looks and well-toned physique made strong from physical labor. I got out of the car and smiled at him, trying my best not to stare.

"Thanks for coming so quick, Doc." He fidgeted and returned the smile. I wasn't sure if his anxiety was because of the horse or because of me. Maybe a combination of both. "Well, it's this

way.” He gestured with the lantern and started to walk to the stable. Of course, I already knew the way, but I didn’t have the heart to point that out. It also gave me an excuse to follow him, letting me watch the movement of his hips and backside as he walked.

Once I saw the mare, I forced my attention off Nathan and onto her. She was lying on her side in the usual birthing position and it looked like her water had just broken. I gave her a brief examination, but I couldn’t find anything wrong. “Everything seems okay. Still, if she’s struggling, we can assist her.” I took off my jacket and rolled up my sleeves. “I need to wash up. You should, too. I want you to help.” I told myself that I wanted him to help so he could get the practice. In reality, I just wanted an excuse to get close to him.

Nathan smiled a little and nodded. “Okay, Dr. Herschel.”

“You can call me Aaron. Your parents do.”

“Sure, Aaron. If you don’t mind.” His smile widened and remained on his face while we washed up. By the time we returned to the mare, the foal’s front feet were visible.

“She managed to get started on her own. That’s a good sign.” I took a cloth out of my bag and handed it to Nathan. “You’ve helped out with foalings before, haven’t you?”

“Of course, but my dad always does most of the work when there’s a problem.”

“I think you’ll do just fine.” I crouched right behind him, close enough to feel his body heat. “Grab hold of the feet with the cloth.” When he did, I put my hands over his arms and helped him pull down toward the mare’s hind hooves. I knew he probably didn’t need my help, but he didn’t seem to mind it. A moment later, the foal’s head and shoulders appeared.

Nathan’s face lit up with joy, and he suddenly looked even more beautiful.

I couldn’t help but laugh at his reaction. It was amazing to me that someone who grew up on a farm could get so excited by the birth of an animal. “All right, now pull straight out.” I guided his arms again, stopping him when only the foal’s rear feet still needed to come out. “She should be able to do the rest by herself.” I reluctantly let go of Nathan and moved back to give him room.

We sat side by side on the hay and watched the rest of the process. Everything went smoothly, and soon mother and foal were resting. “He should be up on his feet and walking in an hour or so. You did well.” I turned to him and, without thinking, patted his knee. Once I realized what I was doing, I dropped my hand and tried to pretend it hadn’t happened.

“Thanks.” He looked at his knee where my hand had been. It was hard to tell for sure in the dark, but I think his face turned a little pink.

After a moment of awkward silence, I felt the need to say something. “You almost looked like you’ve never seen an animal birth before.”

"I've just never been quite *that* involved, since you don't have to do much when things go smoothly." Nathan turned to me and smiled. "Besides, seeing a new life is one of those things that never gets old, you know?" "

I returned his smile and tried to remember the way I'd felt when it was all still exciting to me. "Yeah, I know."

We made small talk until the foal was up on his feet, and I was careful to keep my hands to myself. I gave both horses a quick examination, and, satisfied that they were healthy, picked up my bag. "Everything looks fine, so I'll be going now."

"You can stay here tonight if you want, it's after midnight," Nathan said after a moment's pause.

I was tempted. Very tempted. However, sleeping in the same house with him, and only him, would likely get me into trouble. "Thank you, but I'd better get home. I have to be at the clinic early."

"Oh, if you're sure." There was another awkward pause. "Do you think you can stop by tomorrow sometime? To make sure the horses are okay?"

I knew I shouldn't. I really shouldn't. "Sure, I'll come by."

The next evening, I closed the clinic, stopped by my house to feed the cat, and headed out to the farm as promised. It didn't take long for me to confirm that both mother and foal were just fine.

"I named him Rain," Nathan said proudly as we headed back to the house.

"Misty and Rain." I followed behind him. "That's cute."

"You think so?" He glanced at me out of the corner of his eye and smiled. "It just seemed to fit."

"It does. Anyway, if you need anything else..." I made to leave, thinking a quick escape might be a good idea.

Nathan held up his hand, cutting me off. "Aaron, at least let me give you something to eat for your time. You came all the way out here two days in a row, after all. I can make killer omelets. Farm fresh eggs and everything."

"Nathan, I really shouldn't." I said the words, though there wasn't much conviction behind them.

"Why not?" He put a hand on my arm, just below the shoulder. "When was the last time you had an honestly farm fresh meal?"

His touch and my growling stomach won me over. "All right. I'll stay for an omelet."

The grin spreading across his face was almost as wide as the one he'd worn when the foal was born. "Good. I promise you won't regret it."

I could only hope he was right.

As we headed back to the house, I followed him, watching the rippling of his muscles through his tight T-shirt with the thought *I'm in trouble* running over and over through my mind.

A short while later, I took a bite of one of the tastiest omelets I'd ever had. "You were right, you're a good cook."

Nathan's cheeks turned a little pink. "Glad you like it. Though, to be honest, this is one of the few things I can cook." He shoveled half of his dinner in his mouth.

"Well, better to be really good at a few things than to be mediocre at many things."

"I like that thought." He smiled again and wolfed down the rest of his food.

Once we were finished eating, I insisted on helping him with the dishes. He didn't object. We had barely started when our hands brushed as we both reached for the same plate at the same time. "Sorry," he said quickly.

My cheeks felt warm. "It's nothing."

We both stopped working on the dishes and stood still, looking at each other out of the corners of our eyes. After a few heartbeats, our lips locked together in a desperate kiss. I'm don't think either one of us knew who initiated it. Our wet and soapy hands were all over each other -- I felt his mostly on the sides of my face and the back of my neck, while mine slid over his back and sides. Several minutes passed before we came up for air.

"Well, now. That was something." Nathan grinned at me and pulled away. "Ever been with a farm boy?"

"No, I haven't."

"It's about time then." He took one of my hands and kissed it. "Just so you know, I don't hit on every guy that comes around, but I like you. And I felt we really bonded yesterday over Rain being born."

I knew I should at least put a superficial effort into resisting, even though I had no desire to. However, there was that business relationship to the family to think about, as well as Nathan's age. "How old are you, Nathan?"

"I'll be twenty-three in two months."

“I’m almost ten years older than you.”

“I don’t care.” He looked me in the eye. “Anyway, I saw the way you were checking me out earlier, so I know you like me, too.”

Damn it. Busted. No point in resisting any further. The rest of the dishes entirely forgotten, we kissed again, even more passionately than before. Our tongues darted past each other’s lips and our hands explored lower, our breath coming in sharply through our noses when sensitive spots were brushed.

“Your parents aren’t coming home tonight, are they?” I asked, pulling away a little and looking at him through half-closed eyes. “I don’t think they’d be very happy to come home and find the vet fucking their son.”

Nathan raised an eyebrow, a mischievous glint in his eye. “No, they’re not coming home tonight, but what’s this about *you* fucking *me*? I took you for a bottom.”

I laughed. “I thought the same about you. I’ve never bottomed before.”

“Me neither.”

I wasn’t necessarily against the idea, I just hadn’t yet been with anybody who could or wanted to top me. Giving Nathan another look, I decided I was interested, though my pride wouldn’t let me just roll over and expose my belly so easily. “Well, there are alternatives.”

“Nah. I wanna go all the way with you.” Nathan thought for a moment. “I got an idea. Let’s go out back and see who can overpower who.”

It was as good an idea as any. I nodded. “Sure. Sort of like when animals see which one’s the alpha male.”

Outside, we stood across from each other with our gazes locked; neither one of us seemed willing to make the first move. He was clearly more patient than me, because he remained still while I started to slowly circle him, anxious to get things going. I stumbled just the slightest bit, but it was enough to give him the opening he was waiting for.

After a few minutes of grappling, I found myself on my back looking up into Nathan’s blue eyes, my body pinned under his. He held my wrists tightly in one hand, stretching my arms over my head and pressing them into the ground. “Do you surrender to me?” He kissed my throat. “I’ll make it worth your while.”

I thought about it. It had already become obvious my chances were slim. I wasn’t a weakling by a long shot, but Nathan was definitely stronger. It seemed strange to me and it hurt my pride to admit it, but I found myself getting excited at the thought of being taken by him. Still, I wasn’t ready to concede just yet.

"No." I turned a hand around, freeing it from his grip. The action distracted him just long enough for me to twist out from under his body. "You have to do a little better than that." I got back to my feet and eyed him, trying to look defiant.

He shot me a wicked grin in response. "I plan to, Doctor."

"I told you to call me Aaron."

"But I like calling you 'Doctor.' It seems naughtier."

"I'm a veterinarian. That makes it seem a little..." I barely managed to dodge his lunge. "...wrong. By the way, charging at me like that when I'm speaking is cheating."

"I'm just taking advantage of the situation."

"I still call it cheating." I sprang at him, but he effortlessly avoided my attack and grabbed my arms, twisting them behind my back.

"Do you surrender now?" he whispered, his mouth close enough to my ear for me to feel his breath.

I leaned against him, tilting my head, exposing the side of my neck to his lips. While he was busy kissing it, I shook my head and suddenly dropped my weight, trying to knock him off balance. It worked, but I knocked myself off balance as well, and we both tumbled to the ground.

He quickly regained himself. Before I could even think of standing up again, I was face-down in the grass, his body stretched out on top of mine. "How about now?" He brushed my ponytail off to the side, and I felt his lips sucking on the newly exposed skin hard enough to leave a mark.

It was clear I'd lost the fight. A part of me wanted to continue since I was enjoying being so close to him while we both worked up a sweat. However, there were even more pleasurable ways of being close to and sweaty with somebody. I wanted him badly by then, and yes, I wanted him to take me, to hell with my pride. I closed my eyes and nodded.

"I want to hear you say it." He lightly pressed his lips behind my ear. "Tell me you surrender to me."

"I surrender to you."

"Unconditionally?"

"Unconditionally."

"Excellent." He got off me, giving my ass a squeeze as he did so. "Don't worry, I'll be gentle. Unless you ask me to be rough, that is."

I rolled over onto my back, able to breathe much easier now that his weight wasn't pressing down on me. "We'll play that by ear." I sat up and accepted the sun-browned hand he offered. "I confess that I *almost* wanted to give in right at the start."

"Then, why didn't you? We could've saved ourselves some energy." He helped me to my feet, then suddenly grabbed my tie and used it to pull me close. The fact that I should have taken off the tie before our match barely had time to register in my brain before he claimed my mouth. His tongue forced its way past my lips -- not that it really had any resistance -- and his free hand cupped the side of my face as we kissed, his thumb lightly rubbing my cheek. As he pulled away, his fingers slid down the side of my face and caressed my chin, giving me a slight shiver.

"If you'd started with that, I might have."

"Then again, the wrestling was good foreplay, don't you think?" He pulled the rubber band out of my hair and shook my ponytail loose.

I ran my fingers through my hair in an attempt to straighten it and remove any dirt or other foreign objects I may have picked up while we were rolling around on the ground. "True." I leaned against him and rubbed my groin against his hip. "Anyway, now that our dilemma has been solved..."

He gave me another quick kiss and pulled away. "I have to go inside for a minute and get a couple of things. Wait here."

"You mean we're doing it outside?"

"Sure, why not?" He flashed a grin at me and disappeared into the house.

Alone, I checked out the immediate surroundings. At least the farm was secluded enough that the odds of us being spotted or heard were low, and the weather was good. If Nathan wasn't concerned about being outside, I shouldn't be either. He knew the area better than me, after all.

He returned several minutes later carrying a backpack over his shoulder and pillows and blankets in his arms. Once he reached me, he dumped everything on the ground.

"What's in the backpack?" I could guess at a few of the contents, but the bag seemed a little full for just condoms and lube. "Besides the obvious."

"Just a couple of those citronella lanterns. You know, to keep the bugs away."

I wondered why I felt a little disappointed. Laughing at myself, I helped him arrange the blankets and pillows into a sort of bed.

"What's so funny?" He opened the backpack and took out lanterns, lighting the candles inside before setting them down.

“Nothing. The lanterns, I guess.”

“You wanna smell like bug spray? Or get covered in bites? I can tell you from experience, getting a mosquito bite in one of those delicate areas ain’t fun.” He lay down on the blankets.

I settled down next to him, somehow managing to avoid laughing at the mental image Nathan’s comment conjured up. “No. I was just sort of hoping for something a little more exciting.”

“Oh really?” He raised an eyebrow and pulled me to lie on top of him. His hand dipped into the back of my pants, his finger teasing the cleft between my cheeks. “You’re probably going to be sore enough as it is. But I’ll remember that for next time.”

“Maybe *I’ll* top *you* next time.”

“You’re gonna like having my cock up your ass so much you won’t want to switch. I’ll make sure of it.”

I laughed, though the idea intrigued me. “But you just said I’d be sore.”

“Well, yeah. But sore can be good.”

“Hmm.” An evil grin spread across my face. “Sounds like you’re setting an awfully big goal for yourself. To make me like it that much the first time? I don’t know.”

He quickly pulled his hand out of my pants and rolled me over onto my back. Supporting himself on his elbows, he locked his eyes with mine. “That sounds like a challenge.”

"Perhaps it is."

"Then I accept." He untied my tie and dropped it to the ground. I kicked off my shoes and lay still as he slowly unbuttoned my shirt, pushing the fabric back to expose more of my body with each button. The evening breeze cooled my skin, but Nathan's hands and mouth warmed it right back up. Once my chest and belly were bare, he picked up the pace, unfastening my belt and unzipping my pants with so much haste I thought my clothes would rip. He piled my discarded clothing off to the side of the blankets and returned his attention to my naked body.

"Look at all those goosebumps," he said, running his fingertips across the upraised hairs on my thigh.

Giggling, I squirmed away from the touch. "That tickles."

Instead of stopping, he gave my other thigh the same treatment, making my leg kick. "Sorry about that. I couldn't resist."

“Oh, I think you can make it up to me.”

“That I will. But first...” He got up, stripped and stood in front of me.

I shifted to a kneeling position so I could see him better. He was even more handsome naked than he was wearing clothes. I sat there admiring him for a moment, then started to stand up to join him. However, a hand on my shoulder kept me on my knees. “Could you stay there for a minute?” he asked with a wink. “If you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind at all.” I kissed the tip of the hard organ in front of me, tasting the salty drop of pre-come. My tongue slid down the underside of the shaft, paused to tease his balls, then worked its way back to the head, running a circle around it. I pulled back just a little and watched his thigh muscles tense before finally taking his entire length into my mouth. I sucked on it hungrily, feeling his hips moving a little in time to the motions of my head. He moaned softly and stroked my hair, which brought the goosebumps back. I’d always liked the feeling of another man’s hands in my hair, which was the sole reason I kept it long.

For a moment, I lost myself in the act, and my fingers crept toward his ass purely out of habit. They were stopped when he lightly touched my arm.

“Watch where you put those fingers, Aaron.”

I glanced up with what I hoped was an apologetic look, and was relieved when he just smiled at me and returned his hands to my head, affectionately massaging my scalp.

A slight chill was in the air, as the sun had just set. I shivered. I felt him shiver too, but for a different reason, I think. “You can stop now,” he said, touching my face with the back of his hand. “Can’t come quite yet, can I?”

I very slowly pulled away from his cock, sucking gently as I did so, taking pleasure in the way it made his breath hitch.

Nathan helped me to my feet and hugged me, pressing our bodies as close together as was possible. It warmed me back up almost immediately. He moved away just long enough to get a small tube out of his backpack. “Ready for more?”

“Ready.” I felt nervous, but that was nothing compared to my desire for him.

He handed me the lube and held out a hand, spreading his fingers. “I-I kind of like it when somebody else puts it on me.” He sounded a bit embarrassed, so I just smiled and did as he requested, massaging his hand and fingers as I coated them with the slick substance.

Nathan pulled me back into his arms and kissed me deeply. While I was preoccupied with our tongues and lips, he slowly and carefully pushed a finger inside me. It didn’t hurt, but I felt myself tense around it.

“How’s it feel?”

“O-okay.”

“I hope so. It’s only my pinky.” He squeezed my rear with his free hand. “Relax.”

I thought of how many times I’d said that word to my own partners. I breathed deeply and willed my muscles to loosen.

“Good.” He nibbled at my earlobe and switched the pinky for a larger finger. A second later, my legs went out from under me as an unfamiliar but extremely pleasant sensation coursed through my body.

“Holy shit.” I gasped.

He smiled and gently guided me to the ground, his finger still inside me and touching that spot. “You like that, huh? Maybe you should’ve been a bottom all along.”

“Mmm. Ah, ma-maybe.” I clutched at the blankets and squirmed helplessly on my stomach. I knew my reaction was a little undignified, but at that moment, I didn’t really care. It felt better than I ever imagined.

He chuckled and inserted another finger. “You’re almost making me want to try it. Not now though.”

The second finger stretched me almost to the point of pain, but once I relaxed again, the stretching became pleasant rather than uncomfortable. The increased pressure on my prostate helped as well.

Just as I started to think I’d be content to let him do that to me all night, he removed his fingers. I rolled over onto my back and he immediately fell upon me. He kissed me all over, pausing to use his tongue on my more sensitive spots, leaving thin trails of saliva around my nipples. When my cock was weeping pre-come in anticipation, he pulled away to get a condom out of the backpack. He handed it to me along with the bottle of lube.

Easily figuring out what he wanted me to do, I tore open the wrapper and placed the rubber over his erection, then proceeded to cover it with a generous amount of lube. I added some to my ass for good measure before I recapped the bottle and put it aside along with the empty wrapper.

“Why don’t you stay on your back?” he asked when I started to turn over. “And raise your hips for a second.” When I complied, he slipped a pillow under my lower back to give me a bit of support.

“I figured somebody who lived on a farm would want to do it doggy-style.”

“No.” He shook his head. “When you see that as much as I do, you really want to separate yourself from the animals. Besides, I want to be able to see you.”

My cheeks felt hot, but I didn't object. I'd felt similar sentiments in the past, and I wanted to see him, too. With the sun gone, it was getting dark, but the lanterns provided just enough light. I took a deep breath. "I'm ready when you are."

"Good, because I'm about ready to burst." Nathan got into position between my legs and slowly pushed inside. My eyes watered and I clutched the sides of the pillow as my body adjusted. Once he was all the way in, he bent down and pressed his lips to my forehead. "You okay?"

There was definitely some discomfort, but it was no worse than I had anticipated. "I'm fine."

He nodded and started to move, slowly pushing in and out. "Just tell me if it gets to be too much." Thankfully, he maintained the slow pace, giving me a chance to get used to it. He changed his angle slightly every time he moved. After a few attempts, he hit my prostate just right, prompting me to let out a moan. The look of concentration he'd been wearing turned into a smile, and after that, he took care to hit that spot with each thrust.

Nathan's gaze eventually left my face and moved to my neglected organ. "Why don't you, um, touch yourself?"

"Can't you do it?"

"I want to, but for me to get you in the good spot, I need to support myself on my arms." He continued thrusting slowly as he spoke. "I can't do it for long on one arm. I'd rather watch you do it, anyway."

I understood the appeal of watching, and it didn't take me long to decide I'd rather jack myself off than risk losing that incredible sensation of his cock hitting my insides just right. I wrapped my fingers around my length and started to pump, trying to keep time with his thrusts.

Nathan gradually sped up his pace, and I sped up my hand to match. His attention alternated between my face and the hand doing the pumping, while I studied his face, my gaze occasionally traveling down the length of his body. When our eyes met, the sensation wasn't merely physical. There was something hypnotic about the way he looked at me, and I felt a simple emotional pleasure from the knowledge that I was giving myself to him. I guess he was right -- I should have been a bottom all along. Or maybe it was just because I was with somebody I'd been secretly attracted to for years.

Now that we had a connection established and were comfortable in our rhythm, we both let ourselves go. I rocked my hips to assist him, and finally let out the moans and other sounds I'd been biting back due to our outdoor location. He grunted and groaned even louder than me, and his features started to show signs of an animal-like hunger. His thrusts grew stronger, and I clutched at his hip with my free hand as if to pull him even deeper inside. With our passion loose, it didn't take long for my body to find its release. I practically screamed out Nathan's name as my body arched and shuddered, my seed spilling out on my hand. It was definitely one of the most intense orgasms I'd ever had.

A moment later, Nathan closed his eyes for the first time since we'd gotten started. "Aa-Aaron..." He moaned, and I felt him pushing as hard against me as was physically possible; his hips and legs twitched and his face contorted into an expression of sheer pleasure. Spent, he collapsed on top of me, his sweat mixing with mine.

"Think we disturbed the animals?" I asked, still gasping a bit.

He laughed softly and pulled out. "They'll be fine. How's your ass?"

"A little sore, as you predicted. But not bad."

He nodded and pulled off the condom, a huge grin spreading across his face. "So, it sounded like you had a good time."

I returned his smile. "That I did."

"Think you can stand up?"

I managed to get to my feet, but discovered I was a little wobbly. It didn't matter, because Nathan put an arm around me for support and started to walk back inside.

"What about the rest of the stuff?" I asked, looking back at our makeshift bed and pile of clothing.

"I'll come back out for it once you're settled in. Oh, I forgot to mention, you're staying the night tonight. No excuses. It'll hurt too much for you to drive."

It really didn't hurt that badly, but his tone allowed no room for argument. To be honest, I wanted to stay. "That's fine. Anyway, Nathan, I was wondering, what happened to the shy and sweet farm boy I knew?"

He turned his head and kissed me. "I didn't take you until you agreed to it, did I?" Once we got inside, he settled me down on the bed. I got under the blankets, and he immediately joined me. "The stuff outside can wait 'til tomorrow."

I woke up the next morning to the smell of frying bacon. I was alone in the room, but there was a clean robe folded neatly on the foot of the bed. Assuming it had been left for me, I stood up and put it on. It was warm and smelled faintly of Nathan.

"Good morning," I said as I entered the kitchen. "You're up early."

"Of course. I had to feed the animals." Nathan turned off the stove and set plates of bacon and toast on the table. "Anyway, go ahead and sit down." He held out a mug of coffee with one hand pulled out a chair with the other. There was a pillow on the seat.

I laughed as I sat on the pillow and accepted the coffee. "My ass isn't feeling too bad, but thank you."

He grinned and sat down across from me. "I put it there just in case." After we ate in silence for a moment, he spoke again. "Aaron? I have a confession."

"Go on."

"When I called you, um, Misty had just gone into labor. There wasn't any problem. I just wanted an excuse to get you to come out, and since Mom and Dad were gone, I figured it was my best chance to spend some private time with you."

"Really?" I raised an eyebrow. ""That explains why I couldn't find anything wrong." I sipped at the coffee and gave him a long look. "So, you're saying you've been interested in me for awhile?"

"On and off ever since you first came out to the farm with Dr. Snyder."

"That was four years ago."

"Yeah. It wasn't a creepy obsessive thing like in the movies, but I always thought you were hot, and you seemed like a nice guy." His face turned red, and I caught a glimpse of the shy farm boy from the other day.

"Alphas aren't supposed to blush."

"I guess not." He rubbed at his face as if that would erase the redness. Of course, it only made it worse.

"I have a confession, too. All those four years? The feeling was mutual, but I just figured I was too old for you."

"Too old." He rolled his eyes, but he was grinning from ear to ear. "Anyway, I kinda figured it was mutual when I saw you staring at me the other night."

I got up and resettled myself on his lap. "You know, my wandering eyes usually get me into trouble, but right now, I'm grateful for them."

He smiled and ran his fingers through my hair, combing out the morning tangles. "Me, too."

Different Strengths

JL Merrow

“Hell, *never*? You kidding me? Hell, boy, we gotta pop that cherry of yours!”

It’s not as bad as it sounds. Rufus T. Earle, III isn’t *actually* threatening to relieve me of my virginity, therefore I don’t have to throw myself off the nearest skyscraper, which, this being Hicksville, Alabama, isn’t actually all that near. And anyhow, I managed to lose my virginity some dozen years ago. I’m not *that* bad looking. Well, I didn’t use to be, anyway. You know how some guys grow into their looks? I kind of grew out of mine. No, Rufus T. just wants to take me to a strip joint. One with girls, in case you were wondering if this is one of those progressive small towns that caters to guys like me.

I know what you’re thinking. I should just tell him I don’t swing that way. And if this was back home, and he was just some guy I’d met, that’s what I’d do. Probably. Okay, maybe I’d just tell him I had to get back home to feed the cat. But he’s a client, and a damn wealthy one at that. And if I keep quiet about liking guys, I don’t have to find out Rufus T. is a raving homophobe, and then I don’t have any qualms about doing business with him. Don’t ask, don’t tell: the office edition.

Plus, I don’t get the shit beat out of me. See? It’s a win-win situation.

“You’re gonna love these babes, boy. One hundred percent natural, home-grown beauties. They don’t breed ‘em like that in the cities no more.” He leers at me. “And most of ‘em are amenable to providin’ a little personal service, if you get my drift.”

Oh, I get it all right. Dear old Rufus T. If there’s a prejudice he hasn’t got, it’s only because he’s never heard of it. Right now he’s busy buying into the popular belief that if you work in IT and wear glasses, you never get laid, at least not without paying for it. The fact that he might be right in my case is neither here nor there.

See, part of the trouble’s my height. I’m six-four, which puts a lot of guys off to start with. I like a guy with a bit of muscle, someone who can take care of himself. Someone who’ll make me feel safe. But have you ever looked at the guys who hang around gyms? I got one word for you: Sylvester Stallone. Okay, that’s two words, but you know what I mean. He’s short. You can bet your bottom dollar he only started working out because he got picked on for being small. Sad to say, he’s not the exception. For every Dolph Lundgren or Steven Seagal, there’s a hundred Jean-Claude Van Dammes. Don’t get me wrong, the films are cool, but you’ve gotta admit he’d look kinda dumb walking around with my skinny frame towering over him. Yeah, I’m skinny. I run. It’s a useful life skill to have.

So, the only guys who hit on me are the ones who look at my height and get the wrong impression, while the guys I like are all off romancing some cute blond twink. Did I mention I'm not blond, either?

Some days it sucks to be me.

So anyway, I let Rufus T. drive me to the strip joint. Back in the city, a place like this would be hidden in a back street, but they don't have a whole lot of back streets around here, so instead it's out of town a ways. You could almost mistake it for any other roadhouse, if it weren't for the neon advertisements outside, presumably so no church-going types mistake it for the kind of place you can go into for a quiet beer. You wouldn't want them to drive on by to some more obvious sleaze-pit.

Rufus T. leads me to a table by the stage -- it figures he's the kind of guy who likes to get up close and personal. The waitress introduces herself as Missy and takes our order. She's decently clad, if by decent you mean not showing much more flesh than the average hooker, which come to think of it she probably is if all of Rufus T.'s talk of "extra services" isn't just hot air. (Does that sound sexist to you? People, by which I mean female people, often tell me I have kind of old-fashioned ideas about women. Listen, you sit through your grandma's ranting over hussies who were "no better than they ought to be," whatever the hell that means, every night at supper for close on a decade, you tend to pick up an attitude or two. And no, you don't get to say a word about my grandma. In other ways she was pretty damn forward-thinking, God rest her soul.)

The show starts just as we get our drinks, which is a mercy since at least I can hide behind my glass. Although right now I'm wishing I'd claimed Irish ancestry and ordered a Guinness, as I can still see way too much of the action through my beer. The girl on stage is wearing a Stetson and not a whole lot else, and I resign myself to a long evening.

With all of this female flesh on display, I figure there's got to be some muscle around somewhere to make sure the clientele stays in line, so I look around between acts, given that if I don't have my eyes glued to those titties while they're out there, sooner or late Rufus T.'s going to ask me why I'm not watching the show, and then I'll have to tell him. And trust me, I've been there before, and it ain't pretty.

Anyhow, my eyes stray to the bar and there *he* is in all his glory, faded blue T-shirt having to do some serious work to stretch over the best pair of pecs I've seen in a long while. He's wiping a glass while his eyes are coasting around the joint looking for trouble.

I check to make sure my tongue isn't hanging out because I'll be damned if this guy isn't going to keep me in fantasies for weeks. Months, maybe. Hell, years even; I don't get out a whole lot. It's not immediately apparent until the waitress goes up to the bar just how damn big this guy is. He's so in proportion he just looks like a normal (okay, damn fit) guy until then. But when little Missy struts her stuff up to him in her four-inch heels that have got to be giving her hell by the end of a shift, you suddenly realize this guy is *huge*. For half a moment I expect Missy to be dragged into orbit around him.

He's blond, too. Some guys have all the luck.

As I look at that clean-cut face and that lazy smile, I'm thinking he seems a little familiar somehow, which makes me freeze for a heartbeat or six -- see, I didn't always live in the city. Up until age fourteen I grew up in a town not ten miles from here. Mom and Dad moved out to the boondocks when they were expecting my eldest brother, figuring the country would be a better place to raise kids. Well, I guess it worked for the other three.

Anyhow, like I said, my heart kind of stutters for a moment and then reality comes riding to the rescue, telling me straight that if there had been a guy like that in my past I'd have remembered him. Hell, he's just a type, that's all. Your stereotypical, good-looking, All-American boy. Goes to church on Sundays and is kind to his momma. They're a dime a dozen in the kind of magazines I like to read one-handed.

I feast on him just a little longer, and then I drag my eyes away. Self-preservation? I could write a book.

Another act starts up and I realize Rufus T. is the kind of man who gets louder the more he drinks. He's getting kind of frisky, too, patting Missy on the ass as she brings him another beer. She just smiles around her gum. I guess she's angling for a tip. The girl on stage starts doing something with a feather boa that's making me feel kinda queasy, so I lean forward and tap Rufus T. on the shoulder.

"Listen, Mister Earle, I gotta take a break."

"Didn't I tell you to call me Rufus, boy?"

"Sure. Rufus. I'll be back in a minute."

Rufus T. leers at me. "No need to hurry, boy. Takes a lot of young men that way, their first time in a place like this."

Oh, my God, he thinks I'm going to the restroom to jerk one off. And hell, maybe I might have been tempted, seeing as how the way to the men's room is past the bar and will put me within three feet of sex-on-a-stick, but picturing Rufus T. picturing me with my hand on my cock cools me down quicker than a cold shower on a beach in winter.

I can't help glancing up at him as I walk past. The guy at the bar, I mean, not Rufus T., whose eyes are now back firmly on those titties. Damn if the guy isn't even taller close up. And wider. Did I mention how wide he is? If he puts another inch on that chest measurement the management are going to have to get the doorways enlarged special. Then his eyes meet mine and I have to look away fast.

I get to the restroom, do what I have to do, and then I figure Rufus T.'s not going to miss me so I head on out the back door to get some fresh air. Nothing much out here but the garbage. It's

times like this I wish I smoked; you don't feel like such a dork outside a bar with a cigarette in your hand. Hell, maybe I could get a pack and just use them as props. Or I could get a life. You decide.

"Not your scene?" a deep voice says behind me, and it's a good thing I've already used the facilities since that voice would have scared the crap out of me otherwise. It's him. Bar guy.

Now, a query like that could mean one of two things. It could mean the guy's also not into titties and is checking me out, which, given my luck with guys, is kind of unlikely. On the other hand, it could mean he's just making sure I really am a fag before he beats the crap out of me. And guess what? You don't get to find out until you answer which of those two it is. See, I told you running's a useful life skill.

"Uh, not so much," I tell him, making sure my feet are ready to get me the hell out of Dodge. I don't have my sneakers on, but I'm pretty damn fast in loafers, too.

He smiles, and lets his eyes roam all over me. "Me either. I'm just helping out a friend."

Guess the shoe leather's going to live to fight another day. "So you, uh, don't work here usually?" My sex life, on the other hand, is in the last stages of terminal illness, caused by my total lack of snappy pick-up lines and my habit of stating the obvious.

"I'm just hanging around here while I figure out what to do next. Had a job in Missouri, but it didn't work out, so I came back to stay with the folks awhile."

"Oh, you're a local?" There I go again. If I'm really lucky, he'll start talking in words of one syllable, seeing as how normal conversation is obviously beyond me.

"You're kinda jumpy, ain't you?" He grins. Did I mention this guy is the stuff wet dreams are made of? Well, when he smiles you can double it. Quadruple it. Hell, you could market that smile. Package it up and sell it to all the losers like me who can't talk to a guy without tripping over their tongues.

"Yeah. You got a problem with that?" I also get defensive when I'm nervous. It's an attractive combination, I think you'll agree.

He's still smiling. "Nope, I got no problem with that at all. Although I'd sure like to help you relax some. Figure you can lose that guy you're with? Name's Kyle, by the way. Kyle Delaware."

Okay, my brain kind of seizes up right around "I'd sure like to help you relax" and there's no way on this earth I'm coming up with anything to match that so I go with the safer option of telling him my name. "Uh, Michael. Frazer."

"That Frazer Michael, or Michael Frazer?" It's a lazy drawl I could listen to all night.

Hell, he can call me anything he wants to as long as he keeps smiling at me that way, but I figure he'll probably stop if I don't give him an answer sometime soon. "Uh, the second one. Michael Frazer."

"Well, Michael Frazer, the guy I been covering for's turned up, so how about we go someplace a little quieter?"

I manage to stop myself looking around the yard for the other Michael Frazer he's got to be talking to. "That'd, uh, that'd be great."

When I get back to the bar, it's clear Rufus T. hasn't missed me one bit. A couple of his cronies have turned up and they're taking it in turns to stuff dollar bills into a pair of pink satin panties that are all the current act is wearing. I make a mental note to call sales -- if Rufus T. believes those titties are one hundred percent natural, chances are we can persuade him he needs our whole damn range of products -- and yell in his ear, seeing as it's gotten kind of noisy in here, that I'm taking off. He doesn't ask who's giving me a ride back to town so I don't say. I just tell him I'll see him at the office in the morning.

Kyle's waiting outside in a beat-up pickup truck that brings out the color of his eyes. Yeah, I can be sappy as well as cynical. "So, where to, Michael?"

"Uh, I'm staying at the Carlton in town."

"That's cool, or we could go to my folks' place." He laughs at my expression. "I don't stay in the main house when I'm there. They got a converted barn that's been mine ever since I graduated from high school. Plenty of privacy."

So we could go to the barn for our roll in the hay? Relax, I didn't say it. I do have some self-censorship. "That sounds, uh, cool." I tend to pick up the speech patterns of whoever I'm with. My therapist tells me it's a defense mechanism. She also gets pissed as all hell when I do it with her.

"So, how long are you in town for?" Kyle asks. He's obviously realized that if he wants to have a conversation, he's going to have to do all the work.

I consider telling him it's not worth it, but decide that would make me sound like even more of a loser than I actually am. "Uh, just to the end of the week. I'm helping Earle & Sons break in a new software system." See that? I volunteered information there. Go me.

"Cool. So where's home?"

"Atlanta. Uh, Atlanta, Georgia, because obviously there's more than one place called Atlanta in the States. Fifteen, actually, I think, although I'm not sure if that's counting the one in Canada." Okay. That bit about possessing some self-censorship? I lied, obviously.

Kyle gives me a broad, sexy smile. "I'd tell you you're cute when you're nervous, but hell,

you've been antsier than a Mormon in a sex shop ever since I first saw you, so I guess I'll have to settle for saying you're cute, period."

For the record, I am not cute. Some guys'll say anything to get in your pants.

The smile gets wider. (Don't they have regulations about these things? Smiles: maximum permitted breadth thereof.) "And I'm not just saying that because I want to get in your pants."

"Uh, revealing your mind-reading abilities isn't going to help me relax any," I tell him.

He laughs. "No? Guess I'll have to go with some other way to relax you, then." Again with the innuendo, although does it really qualify as that when I'm pretty damn sure it's the literal truth? I'm saved from having to dredge up some really witty comeback because his hand moves over to rest on my thigh, and if that's not an excuse for temporarily losing the power of speech, I sure as hell don't know what is.

It's not far to Kyle's folks' place, which is good, since every time there's a break in the conversation I get to wondering what the hell I'm doing here, going home with a guy I met no more than a half hour ago. My dick seems pretty ready to jump up and answer that one for me, however. Anyhow, it's not so much that I don't do casual hookups, it's more that I don't often get the chance. I believe I mentioned I don't get out a lot.

"Well, this is it," Kyle tells me, although I'm only half-listening on account of being mesmerized by the way the muscles in his arm flex as he pulls on the hand brake. I'm relieved to see his barn is set a ways from the main house, since it strikes me Kyle's just the sort of guy who'll have a mom who insists on bringing around snacks for his guests, and if there's anything I'm planning on snacking on tonight, it sure isn't home cooking.

The door sticks a little. Kyle gives it a kick like he doesn't even have to think about it, and then he's waving me inside, real polite all of a sudden. I figure I'm expected to check the place out so I don't try to hide it as I have a good look around.

"This is... kinda cool, actually," I tell him. I hope he can't hear the surprise in my voice. When he told me about the converted barn, I figured he meant some outbuilding that had been gutted and turned into an apartment, but this place is the real deal, a proper old-fashioned barn, hayloft and all, just with the ground floor turned into a big-assed living room and, I'm guessing, a bed up the ladder.

"You like it? My dad and I did the work together, most of it, although we had to get a guy in to do the electric and plumb it in. There's a bathroom in the old tack room, behind that door." He smiles real slow. "You wanna see what's up the ladder?"

Damn. I can feel myself blushing. "Uh, yeah, that'd be, uh, cool."

"You are so cute when you do that!" he chuckles. "After you."

I raise an eyebrow. I can do that. Sometimes it even impresses people. “That so you can check out my ass as I go up the ladder?”

“Baby, I’ve been checking out your ass since the day I met you,” he tells me, still laughing.

There’s something kind of odd about what he just said, but for some reason all the blood in my brain seems to be heading downhill rapidly, so I just start on up that ladder. At least this way maybe we’ll actually get to the bedroom before I jump him.

“You like it?” Kyle asks, coming up behind me. And yes, he’s close enough to me that I can tell something’s sure as hell making him happy.

“Yeah, I like it. It’s...”

“Cool?” Kyle suggests, laughing at me.

“Asshole.” I do like it. No doubt it’s hot as hell in high summer, but right now, it’s pretty damn near perfect. There’s a window pointing straight at the setting sun, and the light’s bathing everything in warm, rich tones. The bed’s covered with an old-fashioned quilt, the kind my grandma used to have and the whole effect is plain, but homey. I like it a lot.

I like it even better when Kyle snakes his arms around me and pulls me back against his chest, his erection digging into my ass and those arms looking like the branches of an oak tree wrapped around me. He’s just the right height to lean down and kiss me on the neck, his stubble scratching against my skin, making me shiver.

“You cold, baby?”

“Hell, no,” I tell him, pressing back against that hard length. “Getting warmer by the second.”

“I guess we’d better get some of these clothes off, then.”

It’s kind of weird watching those hands, so different from my own, unbuttoning my shirt, pulling it out of my pants. Weird but good. Some people think big guys can’t do delicate work, but those fingers are as dextrous as mine ever are, slipping the buttons through their holes and then, when the shirt is open, spidering across my chest. I gasp as they reach my nipples.

“Mmm, you like that, do you?” From the way that iron rod’s pressing into my ass, I’m guessing he likes me liking that.

Then one of those hands moves downward and suddenly I’m in serious danger of liking it way too much, way too soon. It nearly kills me to do it, but I twist in his arms until we’re facing each other, so I can get to work on him while I can still think straight.

Those beautiful eyes are dark as midnight and the intensity makes me catch my breath. He’s looking at me like I’m something special, something he’s been waiting on for a long while.

Maybe it's just a reflection of the look in my own eyes, but for a moment I'm dreaming that just maybe this might be more than a one-nighter, and it doesn't help when he leans his head down to kiss me. His lips are rough against mine, his stubble's grazing my chin, and his tongue seems to be on a mission for world domination, one mouth at a time.

I don't know if it's lack of air or just the kiss itself that's making me lightheaded as I break off, panting slightly. I'm pleased to note that Kyle's chest is rising and falling a little rapidly, too, and I decide I'd kind of like to see that better, so I push up his T-shirt and he takes the hint, pulling it off with one easy motion. Then he pulls me back toward him and God, we're skin to skin now, the heat of him almost burning me as he kisses me once more, on my lips, on my neck, on my shoulder...

Kyle's panting too as he stops for a moment, resting his forehead against mine. "Jesus, Mikey..."

And that's it. I feel like he's wrapped one of those big hands around my heart and squeezed it until it's fit to burst, because I realize now why he seemed kind of familiar, but I wasn't able to place him. I hadn't known him that long when it happened. Hell, I didn't really know him at all, but he was in my class at school. His folks had just moved into the area, and he'd hit it off real quick with the jock crowd even though in those days he was just your average kid, didn't have anything like the build he's got now. Hell, in those days he was smaller than I was, as I recall.

I don't have a lot of upper-body strength, not compared to guys like him, but the pain in my chest gives me an edge and he isn't expecting it, so when I shove him away as hard as I can, he staggers off backward and falls on his ass.

Neither of us laughs.

"Nobody's called me that since I left Rockdale," I tell him. My voice sounds kind of funny, but it's hard to tell with the blood rushing in my ears. I don't let anybody call me that anymore, because that's what *they* called me, those guys who'd been waiting for me to finish up in the computer room at school. *Mikey*. Like it was another word for *fag*. They called me that, too, and a whole lot of other things besides. "You were there. You fucking hypocrite, you were *there* when that bunch of assholes beat the crap out of me!"

"Baby..."

"Six weeks! I was in the hospital for six fucking *weeks*! What the hell is this, anyway? Figured you'd get yourself laid before you finished the job, that it? Or is this some twisted way of making amends? Give Mikey a happy, that'll make up for all the broken bones!"

His face... hell, I don't ever want to see another face looking like that. Like someone's just ripped the heart out of the guy's chest and left him raw and bleeding. "Michael, will you just listen, baby? Yeah, I was there. And I'm real sorry I didn't do nothing to stop those assholes beating on you. You think that hasn't weighed on my mind ever since? But hell, Michael, who do you think called 911? I did what I could, Michael, okay? It should have been more, I know that. I guess I always knew that. But back then... hell, Michael, I'm sorry. I was just too fucking

scared they'd turn on me if I spoke up."

He sits back on the bed, fingers combing through his blond hair, mussing it all up. And damn if I don't want to go smooth it back down for him. I don't, though.

"I think... I think I'd better go," I tell him, more shakily than I'd intended. I can't believe I forgot him. I thought the face of every single one of those bastards was etched in my memory by a thousand screaming nightmares, but he's right, he didn't do anything to me. Just watched a while. And then he was gone. To call the cops, I guess. And even now, thinking of the boy in my mind, it's hard to match him up to the man in front of me.

I think I still want him. This is so fucked up.

I pull my shirt back on up over my shoulders and start doing the buttons up. I'm a little slow. My fingers aren't too steady.

"Will you trust me to drive you back, or should I call you a cab?" Kyle asks. His voice is flat. It makes me ache a little.

"You don't have to..."

He cuts me off. "Will you let me?"

And maybe I owe him that much. Do I? Do I owe him anything? I'm fucked if I know. Am I making too much of this? It was fourteen years ago, and he called the cops.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I ask him before the thought's even gotten all the way through my brain.

"That I knew you?" He kind of laughs, but not like anything's funny. "Hey, Mikey, remember me? Last time we met my friends were kicking the crap out of you. Helluva pickup line, ain't it?"

I frown. "Why pick me up, anyhow?"

Kyle just stares at me like I've said something stupid. I don't know whether to rephrase the question or just take it as some weird-assed kind of compliment.

"You don't know, do you? You're an incredible guy, Michael. You're clever and you're funny and you're cute as all get out."

Hell, put it like that and *I'd* probably want to pick me up. Chances are I'd just turn me down flat, though.

"I never forgot you, Michael. Seeing you again today... hell, I knew I couldn't let you just walk out of my life a second time." He laughs again, and almost sounds amused this time. "Hell, you

never even guessed, did you? I was so damn scared back in school that someone would notice the way I looked at you. That was half the reason I hung out with the jocks, so no one would think I was a fag. I dropped those guys, after that,” he adds, and for a minute it doesn’t register.

“What?” While my head’s telling me I don’t want to stand around listening to this asshole justify himself, it seems my mouth hasn’t gotten the message.

“I decided I wasn’t going to waste my life hanging around with jerks anymore.” He laughs. “Ended up with a lot more time on my hands, which is how come I started working out. Well, one of the reasons, anyhow.” He looks up at me. “I never forgot that night. I never forgot the way you just stood there, not begging or crying none, just waiting there like you didn’t give a damn about what they were going to do to you. Because you knew you were stronger than them, where it counts. I guess I knew I’d never be that strong.”

I just stared. “I wasn’t strong. I got ten kinds of shit kicked out of me that night.” And afterward, when I was well enough to leave the hospital, I ran. Ran all the way to Atlanta and hid behind my grandma’s skirts because I was too damn scared to go back to school in Rockdale. “I’m not strong,” I repeat, but it comes out like a whisper.

“No? Are you out, back in the city? Hell, Michael, did you *ever* lie to anyone about what you are?” Kyle’s voice sounds bitter.

I have to think about it. “No,” I tell him at last. “I don’t tell everyone, but if they ask, I don’t lie to them. I just figure if they’ve got a problem with it, screw them. All the people I care about know I’m gay, and they accept that.”

Kyle’s smile is crooked. “See, me, I lie about it all the time. Hell, I work in security. How many guys do you reckon are going to hire a fag for security? How many guys are going to want to work with me if I come out?”

Well, the gay ones, for a start, but I appreciate it’s kind of hard to tell which those are from the job descriptions. “I... it’s kind of not a problem in IT,” I tell him. At least, in my experience it hasn’t been. I give him a wry smile. “Most people seem to assume all I’m getting is cyber-sex anyhow.” It’s a pretty accurate assumption for the most part, as it happens.

Our eyes meet right when I realize I’m talking about sex with a guy I just almost had sex with. Kyle’s the first to look away, which I guess is some kind of victory on my part but somehow I’m not feeling the urge to celebrate. He grabs his T-shirt and pulls it on over his head. “Come on, I’ll get you back to your hotel.”

I’m not disappointed. Why would I be disappointed? I follow him down the ladder and we get into the truck. I’m guessing there won’t be any hands on my thigh this trip.

It’s almost fully dark as we pull into the hotel parking lot. And although we didn’t talk much on the way back into town, like we had nothing more to say to each other, somehow I don’t want the evening to end this way. “You could come up for a coffee or something,” I blurt out to the

dashboard.

The dashboard doesn't reply. Neither does Kyle, for a minute or two. In fact, I'm about to open the door and get the hell out of there by the time he answers. "You sure?"

"I asked you, didn't I?" Snappish and defensive. Real inviting, Michael.

But there's a hand on my leg, and when I look at Kyle he's smiling at me, though it's a little hesitant. "Yeah, you asked. So I guess I'm accepting." He looks at me for a minute, that hand of his burning a hole in my pants and my dick doing its best to leap out and meet it, and then he leans over and kisses me, right there in the parking lot where anyone could see. If, you know, it wasn't dark and there was anyone actually there. But it kind of feels like a line's been crossed, anyhow.

The bleached blonde at reception doesn't look up from filing her nails as we walk into the hotel. Either she's seen it all before or she doesn't have the imagination to wonder why I'm taking a guy up to my room. I'd wonder about it myself, except my dick keeps taking it upon itself to remind me, just loudly enough to let my better judgment forget for the moment that it's been advising against this ever since the thought crossed my mind to take to bed the guy who watched his friends half kill me all those years ago. Then my conscience gets in on the act, asking me if I'd like to be reminded of all the less than heroic things *I* did when I was fourteen, and how damn brave was it letting Rufus T. take me to a strip joint anyhow?

What with both of them ganging up on me like that, basically, I think I'm screwed. May as well make it literal.

"You're kinda quiet," Kyle says as we get to my door. He gives me a searching look as he asks again if I'm sure about this and suddenly it's not a lie to tell him I am. My hand doesn't shake as I turn the room key in the lock. I'm kind of proud of that.

"Listen, we could just drink that coffee, talk a little if you want..."

It's my turn to interrupt. Seeing as how I'm never too good with words when I'm with a guy I want this badly, I just grab his head and kiss him.

It works.

Kyle freezes for a moment and I like the feeling that I've surprised him. Then he's kissing me back, even harder than back in the barn, and his tongue's in my mouth and it's found the off switch for my brain. I think I'm moaning into his mouth, but he doesn't seem to mind, and next thing I know he's pushing me backward and I land on the bed with him on top. I'm a little winded for a moment -- he's no lightweight -- but hey, oxygen is overrated. Especially when a cock that big and that hard is pressing into me like it wants to poke right through and out the other side.

"Baby," he says hoarsely. I'm inclined to agree.

Kyle rolls off of me, and it feels like a part of me has gone with him. I'm about to complain about it when I feel his hands on me, undoing my shirt for the second time tonight. He's slow, and gentle, and I'm wondering if it's possible to die from impatience so I get my hands to his belt buckle and start working fast, hoping he'll get the hint. Seems like I've shot myself in the foot though, since the minute I open up his jeans his fingers start to fumble. I guess what I'm doing is kind of distracting. As it seems the rest of the buttons aren't going to be coming undone any time soon, I move back a little so I can pull my shirt off over my head. Kyle smiles up at me.

"Damn, you look fine with that off," he murmurs.

I grin. "Reckon you'll look a hell of a lot better without those jeans."

Keeping his eyes fixed on mine, Kyle hooks his thumbs into his jeans and pushes them down, lifting up his hips to get them over that rock-hard ass. I figure it's only polite to help, so I pull them off the rest of the way, letting them fall to the carpet on top of the shoes he must've kicked off when I wasn't looking.

"Now yours," he tells me.

"Who said you could give the orders round here?" I counter, but it's not too convincing, since I'm already working my khakis open as I speak. Kyle doesn't stop watching me for a moment, but he sits up and pulls off his T-shirt and then his hands are on me, tanned skin on pale, and I swear I can feel the heat of the sun still in them. I kick my pants off and there we are, me in my boxers and him in his cotton briefs, and I can't take my eyes off the growing patch of moisture at the tip of that huge bulge inside them.

"Everything. Take everything off," Kyle growls.

Luckily my mouth's too dry to speak, since all I can think of to say is "I'll show you mine if you show me yours." I figure that's probably in the plan somewhere anyhow. I pull off my boxers, my dick catching in the waistband and then bouncing right back up again like an excitable puppy that's finally gotten let out for a run in the yard.

"Oh, baby, you are beautiful," Kyle breathes. He kneels up on the bed and grabs me by the shoulders, and then he's kissing me again. I remember how good it felt to have that chest against mine, so I lean forward until we're pressed together, and damn if it doesn't feel even better with my pants off and my dick rubbing up against his briefs. Which, by the way, ought to be gone by now. I let my hands fall to his hips, and I can't help running them over that incredible ass before I get my thumbs under the elastic and I push those briefs down, lifting them carefully over the head of his erection and holy shit, he is big.

Most big guys are kind of disappointing down there -- let's face it, if a guy's broader than average, then an average-size dick is going to look kind of small in comparison, like they ran out of material when they got to that part. But Kyle is in perfect proportion. And I mean *perfect*. Long and thick, the head of that fine cock is shining red and pointing straight at me and hell, I'm

only human so I scramble down on the bed and, holding it with one hand to make sure it doesn't make any sudden moves, I plunge it into my mouth.

Kyle tastes of salt and musk and sunshine, and he fits in my mouth like we were made to be together. He's so damn big it's kind of hard to suck, but I do what I can. Kyle sort of groans and his hips jerk a little, so I figure he's not complaining any. I pull back a ways and run my tongue around the head, licking him like a Popsicle.

"Baby..." he says again, kind of ragged this time. "We should use..."

"Condoms, yeah," I agree reluctantly, pulling off altogether. I look up at him. I've never been to Egypt, but I read once how the pyramids were all built at a precise angle so that when you go up close, they kind of loom over you like brooding giants. I figure they made Kyle from the same mold. It's a treat for the eyes, but then he pulls me on up and kisses me again, long and slow, and our dicks hump together like a couple of dogs in heat.

"Condoms," he reminds me, which is fortunate as I've forgotten what we were just talking about.

"Yeah." I have to think about it. Hell, I didn't come here expecting company, did I? "Uh, in the bathroom. I'll get them."

Kyle gives me the kind of look that makes me wonder why my skin doesn't just burst straight into flame as I climb down off the bed and stagger to the bathroom. My razors go flying into the tub as I root through my shaving kit hoping like hell I've still got some condoms in there. I'm in luck, so I grab them and get the hell back in the bedroom.

I kind of stop dead in the doorway, as Kyle is lying down on the bed, stroking himself really slow and easy, and suddenly my throat's dry and my dick's so hard it hurts.

"I hope," and I have to clear my throat before I can carry on, "I hope you weren't planning on finishing without me."

"Hell, no," Kyle drawls. "Although I was starting to worry I should send in a search party."

God help me, all I can think of is Kyle bending me over the sink in there. "Next time, maybe you should," I tell him, sounding kind of hoarse.

"Well, baby, are you going to get your ass over here, or do I have to come over there and get you?"

And don't think I'm not tempted to stand my ground and make him fetch me. But there's only so much a guy can take, and I've about reached my limit. I need to touch him, now. So I climb on up that bed until I'm straddling his hips and our cocks are pressed together again, just how they like it, and I kiss him and let the heat of his body fill me up with warmth. Then I scoot back down again, rip open a foil packet and roll the condom on that glorious dick, and then I take him back in my mouth. I miss the taste of his dick, the saltiness of his pre-come, and I'm worried it

won't feel so good for Kyle but he groans straight off, a huge, shuddering sound, so I figure he's not suffering too badly.

I've never been too good at deep-throating (and hell, a monster like that, I'm not even sure it's *possible*) so I keep one hand wrapped around the base of Kyle's cock while I suck away at the head, breaking off to lick around the crown every now and then.

"Baby... oh, baby, that's so good!" he moans. "Touch yourself. I want you to come when I do."

Well, my dick's pretty happy with that idea, too. I'm kinda concerned I might not be able to wait much longer, but it turns out I don't have to as soon Kyle's jerking and writhing and gasping out "Baby, gonna... *baby!*"

I can feel the come pulsing through his cock as the condom fills in my mouth and there's no way in hell I'm not going to join him. I gasp around his cock as my climax hits me like a freight train and I shoot my load all over Kyle's legs, and then I let him slip out of my mouth as he pulls me up bodily for some more of those kisses he does so well.

"Damn, you are incredible," Kyle breathes into my hair as I lie on top of him, my come smearing between us, sweat slick between our chests, feeling so high I don't reckon I'll ever come down again.

We're lying there in bed afterward, the streetlamp outside the window giving enough light so I can make out those arms around me, just in case the feel of them isn't enough to tell me how big and strong they are. When I turn over to face Kyle, I can see his hair and his face shining in the faint illumination. His lips aren't that clear so I trace them with my finger, which he captures between them, spitting it out again a while later so he can speak.

"Remind me -- how long are you staying in town?"

"To the end of the week, working," I tell him. "Then I'm headed over to my folks in Rockdale for the weekend. Figured I might not survive it if Mom found out I was down this way and didn't visit. How 'bout you?"

"I'll be here the rest of the week. After that, I was thinking I might see if anyone's hiring up Atlanta way. If you reckon that'd be a good idea," he adds.

It's not sensible, I know, to get too excited about this. I've had one night with the guy -- okay, one fucking incredible, totally amazing night. But it's not enough to know a guy. He doesn't know me either -- sure, he remembers me as the boy he inexplicably had a crush on way back, but he doesn't know who I am now. So I don't know why I'm grinning like an idiot when I tell him yeah, I reckon that'd be a great idea.

And lord alone knows why he grins too, and kisses me.

The next day at Earle & Sons, Rufus T. is clearly a little the worse for wear, but then I'm really not in a position to throw stones here. Although a dime'll get you a dollar I had a better wake-up call than he did this morning. He tips me a wink as he comes over to my desk.

"Well, boy, enjoy yourself last night? Have we got some beauties here, or have we got some beauties here? I tell you, boy, you don't need to go to the city to get yourself an education, if you know what I mean."

I seem to be smiling, so I give him the answer he's clearly expecting. Hell, it's true enough. "No, sir, you truly don't."

Rufus T. leans over my desk, giving me a grandstand view of the bits he missed shaving this morning and his nasal hair. "We popped that cherry good, didn't we, boy?" he leers.

And damn it, I have to agree.

Graduation

Sean Michael

Bobby stood at the red door, looking at the number.

232.

Stupid fucking number for a place.

Stupid fucking color for a door.

Stupid fucking apartment.

Hell, it was graduation night. Neil probably wasn't going to be here. Neil was probably at some party with some guy, humping like mad or something. And that was assuming Neil remembered him at all. God.

God.

Okay, he was just going to leave. Really.

The door opened suddenly, Neil standing there, blinking at him. The guy looked just like Bobby remembered -- messy, dirty blond hair and blue eyes, lean and rangy.

"I. Hey." Fuck. He didn't know what the fuck he was going to do now.

"Hi." Neil frowned and tilted his head, and then his eyes widened. "Bobby?"

"Yeah. I. I heard you graduated. Congrats." He turned to go, to salvage something of his pride.

"You searched me out to say congrats because you heard I graduated? And now you're turning tail and running. I guess some things never do change."

Asshole. "Oh, fuck you, man. I searched you out because I can't fucking stop thinking about you." Oh, fuck him sideways. "Did I say that out loud?"

Neil chuckled and relaxed against the doorway. "Yeah, man. You did."

"I... Shit." He rubbed the back of his neck, swallowed hard. The fact was, after the kiss, the pass Neil'd made at him when they were roommates... Hell, he'd had these... thoughts.

"You wanna come in?"

"Well, I mean, if you aren't going somewhere..."

"Nowhere important." Neil stepped in side and made a sweep of his arm, the universal sign for "come in."

The apartment was nice -- simple and small, but nice. Bobby was living with five other guys in a shitty little house near campus. Or he had been. Tomorrow he'd be the last one left, looking for his own place.

"You want something to drink, Bobby? I've got beer and Coke. And milk."

"I'd take a beer, yeah." Because God knew he needed to have his tongue loosened.

Neil went into the little alcove that housed a half fridge and an oven, so it had to be functioning as a kitchen, and pulled two beers out of the fridge. He twisted the caps off and handed one over to Bobby. "Sit. I won't bite. Unless you ask me to."

He didn't answer that, but his cock did, going hard and hot in his jeans. When he sat, he put his cold beer in his lap, trying to get things to deflate.

Nick sprawled out on the easy chair across from the couch, legs spread, bottle hanging from two fingers over the arm of the chair. "So, you're telling me that you've been thinking about me for four years and only now got the guts to come see me?"

"It hasn't been four years." It'd been three and some. "I just... I feel bad about the way things happened and sorta wanted to, uh, make shit right."

Was that a good excuse?

"Make shit right? There's a lot of ways that could be interpreted. Given what happened the last time we shared a room, maybe you should tell me just what you mean by that."

It might have been his imagination, but he thought Neil's cock was getting hard. Not that he was looking. Because he wasn't.

"I mean, I wasn't fair to you, and I was eighteen and fucking scared to death and never even... I mean, I'd never thought about..." And now it was all he fucking thought about and he couldn't get it up with a girl without thinking about... Yeah.

Neil smiled and came over to sit next to him. "You never thought about kissing a guy before, huh? I am sorry, man. I swear, though, you *still* ping my gaydar, just like you did back then or I would never have made that pass."

"I wish you hadn't, man. I... I can't... It's made stuff hard. Difficult. Difficult."

Neil frowned. "Difficult how? It was one kiss -- it's not like I besmirched your honor or anything."

"No. That's not what I mean. I mean, I can't... you know. With a girl. Without thinking about you."

"Oh..." Neil grinned. "So I wasn't wrong -- you are gay. And, if I may say so myself, you have very good taste."

"Don't laugh at me, man. I wasn't gay. I wasn't. I dated lots of girls in high school." He sighed, rubbed the back of his neck. "God, this is fucked up."

"Think about it, Bobby. All those girls, and then all it took was one kiss from me and now you're gay and you don't like girls anymore. That doesn't mean I turned you gay, it means you were all along, you just hadn't admitted it to yourself yet."

"I didn't say I don't like girls. I just can't get it up with them." He definitely didn't like Neil.

Much.

"So you don't like girls sexually -- did you really come all this way to play semantics with me? Or to make shit right? Or did you come hoping I'd make another pass?" Neil was suddenly close. Very close.

"I came..." He sighed again, muscles going tight. "I came because you're about to go and I needed to see you." God, what was wrong with him?

Neil held out his arms. "Here I am. You've seen me. Now what?" Neil's eyes were intense.

The options were to knock the asshole right in the mouth or kiss him. Bobby leaned in, kissed Neil without hesitation, hard and quick. Then he got up and headed for the door.

Neil got there first, back to it, facing him. "Let's try that again."

"Huh?" Neil still looked good -- preppy and a little frat boy, but scruffy enough to be hot.

Hands sliding onto his hips, Neil drew him closer. "I said, 'let's try that again.'" Then Neil's lips were on his and this kiss was almost as hard as his, but slow, careful.

Bobby thought he might die, but it felt so good, he didn't want to. He stepped closer, let Neil draw him in, eyes focused on Neil's. Neil's tongue slipped right into his mouth, the move more aggressive than he was used to -- he was usually the one leading the kiss. It felt so good, though. It felt like he'd imagined it, over and over, but better. Better and hotter and so much more real.

The hands at his waist tugged and suddenly he was pressed right up against Neil. He could feel the hard, angular lines and the hard, hot bulge. He knew that Neil had to feel his need, too, had to know how much he wanted this. He groaned, his hands landing on either side of Neil's head.

The hands on his waist moved, sliding back to cup his ass, to tilt him and rub them together.

"Oh, God. Please, I wanted to know..." He moaned the words against Neil's lips. He didn't have the right to ask; he knew that.

"I've got you, baby." Neil's tongue delved back into his mouth: hot and wriggly and making butterflies flutter inside him.

All these sounds were pouring out of him and his cock was so hard it ached, the zipper biting into him. Neil made sounds, too, little grunts and groans. The hands on his ass tightened, pulled him in closer. Oh, Jesus, this was hot. Burn him to the ground hot.

Drive him out of his fucking mind hot.

Neil turned them suddenly and pushed him up against the door. The hard body rubbed against his. His hands wrapped around Neil's shoulders, dragged the man in closer as he rubbed back. This. This was what he'd been dreaming about.

Neil's lips tore away from his, but their lower bodies didn't part, even a bit. "Gonna cream in your jeans for me, Bobby? You want me that much?" He wasn't given a chance to answer, Neil's mouth slamming back onto his. He'd never been this hot -- not ever -- and if this was the only time he was going to get it, he wanted more. Now.

One of Neil's hands managed to get between his ass and the door. He was cupped in Neil's palm and dragged up. The heat of Neil's cock against his was unbelievable, even through the layers of their jeans.

Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck. His balls drew up, his cock jerking as he shot.

Neil growled, biting his lower lip as their lips parted. "Smell that. Nice."

He groaned, praying that this wasn't where Neil tossed his ass out.

"That's not all you came back for, though, is it?" Neil pushed against him, so he could feel the still very hard cock. "You want a piece of this, don't you?"

"Yes. Yeah, I want." He wanted bad.

"Come on, then, Bobby. It's graduation day." Neil grabbed his jeans at the waist and tugged him along.

Oh, thank God. Thank God.

He wanted to ask where they were going, but he didn't want to screw anything up, didn't want to remind Neil that maybe he didn't deserve this. Neil led him down a tiny hall with two doors. The one they went into proved to be the bedroom. They didn't stop, Neil taking him right to the bed. It wasn't a twin like in the dorms, either. This was a full bed.

He wasn't going to run this time, either. He wanted this.

The tugging only stopped when they were next to the bed, and then Neil began to undo his belt. Those blue eyes met his, Neil smiling. "You ready for the next step?"

"As long as it doesn't involve you throwing me out the door naked."

Neil frowned for a half second and then laughed. "No, I'd much rather fuck you than fuck with you."

"You're not pissed at me?" He reached for Neil's arm, hands sliding up along it, learning how it felt.

Neil shrugged. "You were in denial, man. The point is that you came back." The top button of his jeans popped open under Neil's fingers.

"I'm messy." His cock was making a dramatic comeback.

"I've got tissues." His zipper was drawn down and then Neil switched to his T-shirt, pulling it up over his head.

He stood there, letting Neil look, letting Neil see whatever he wanted.

"Nice." Reaching out, Neil tweaked one of his nipples.

Electricity shot down to his knees and he stepped back, gasped. "Damn."

Neil grinned, the look a little wild. "You like that." Neil tweaked the other one.

Jesus. "I. That's. Damn." His cock sort of bobbed.

"You're a nipple man. Not all guys are, but it makes things better." Leaning in, Neil licked his right nipple this time.

"Are. Are you?" His hands fisted. Fuck, that felt good.

Neil stopped licking his little tit and pulled off his T-shirt. "Why don't you find out for yourself?"

He reached out, fingers sliding up along Neil's ribs, counting them, then stroking both nipples at the same time. Neil's mouth opened on a soft moan.

"Oh, that's pretty..." He touched again, a little harder this time, pinching a little. They hardened right up beneath his fingers.

Bobby groaned and stepped closer, pulling and tugging those little nubs of flesh.

"Fuck, yes." Neil reached for him again and started tugging his jeans down.

His prick was hard again -- hell, he didn't know if he'd gone soft. All he knew was that he wasn't soft now. Neil went to his knees to pull the jeans right down. Neil's cheek brushed along his prick.

"Oh, fuck." He went up on tiptoe.

"Any of those girls you were with ever suck you off?"

"One did, yeah. Once." He was long, she'd said.

Neil stayed on his knees, grinning up at Bobby. "Was it the most amazing thing ever?"

"I thought so, at the time."

That grin became wicked, Neil's tongue darting out to touch the tip of his cock. "And now?"

"Shit, I don't know anything anymore. Nothing except I should have apologized a year ago."

"No. You should have apologized the next day." As if to underline the point, Neil opened up and took the head of his prick right in.

"Oh, fuck." He went up on his tiptoes, throat working like he was the one doing the sucking. He could see Neil's cheeks hollow and could feel how that was like something was pulling at his cock. Then Neil's tongue slid over the head, playing his slit.

He was going to die. That was the only answer.

Then Neil's head started to bob, taking more and more of him in each time. His head fell forward, eyes on that mouth, on the way it slid up and down on his prick, over and over.

Neil's lips seemed to get darker, swollen, and his prick shone with spit. The best part, aside from how it felt, was how it looked like Neil was enjoying himself, too.

"You're gonna... I'll shoot again."

Neil kind of nodded, and the sucking got harder.

Oh, God. Oh, fuck. Oh, hell. He was. It was. He... Bobby jerked, slammed back into Neil's mouth, entire body screaming in pleasure.

Neil kept sucking through his orgasm, and it felt like it went on forever and ever. Neil was swallowing, too, which made his throat go really tight around Bobby's cockhead. By the end, Bobby was almost screaming, his heart beating so hard he could barely breathe.

When Neil finally pulled off, he nearly fell. He would have except Neil must have been anticipating it, because he wrapped his arms around Bobby's legs.

"S...sorry. Sorry. I. Wow." Okay. God.

Neil laughed. "Man, don't apologize after a guy gives you awesome head."

"No? Does thank you work?"

"Oh, yeah, thank you works real well." Neil slowly stood and licked his lips. "So does, 'now fuck me, you big stud.'"

"Does it now?" He reached out, fingers trailing down Neil's belly, the skin there warm, damp.

"It does." Neil sucked in said belly, giving him room to get his fingers beyond Neil's waistband.

"I might try it. Fuck me?"

"Yeah. There's condoms and lube on the bedside table." Neil encouraged him to open the tight jeans.

"How bad's it gonna hurt?" It might kill the mood, but he needed to ask.

"Huh? It doesn't hurt, man. Not if you do it right."

"Okay." So far, Neil'd never lied. Bobby didn't see a reason not to trust him.

Neil's hand wrapped around his hips, tugged him back in close, mouth coming down on his again. It was hot and sweet and there was no way he'd get it up again, but he was going to see this ride through to the end.

Neil got his jeans off, cock hard and leaking at the tip. Bobby had to touch, so he did, fingers running up along the shaft.

Groaning, Neil pushed into his touch. "Careful, I'm close."

"Okay." He eased up on his touches until his fingers barely brushed Neil's prick.

"Come on. Bed. Now."

"Okay." He stepped out of his jeans, his sandals, headed for the bed.

"Oh, I remember that ass."

"Is that bad?" His cheeks heated.

Neil snorted. "Not at all. It's why I made that pass."

"I freaked out. You scared me."

"No. You liked it and that scared you." Neil came up behind him, warming his back. "You want to do this face to face or hands and knees?"

"I don't know."

"Hands and knees is easier. Up you get." Neil shifted and his cock slid along Bobby's ass.

Oh, God. That was... real. His butt cheeks clenched.

Neil's hands slid around to his chest, fingers finding his nipples, playing with them. That made him shiver and soon his hips were rocking, rubbing back against Neil's warmth.

Neil groaned. "You're a natural, man."

"I just... I have to." He couldn't stay still.

"Nothing wrong with that." Neil's hands continued to slide over his body awhile, and then finally Neil pushed a little, urging him onto the bed. He settled on hands and knees, thighs parting a little, making an offer.

"Oh, yeah, Bobby." Neil climbed onto the bed behind him and warm hands slid over his ass.

"I don't know what I need to do."

"Don't worry about it; I'll be doing all the work." Neil slapped his ass, not hard, but definitely a slap.

He gasped, scooted forward. Neil's fingers followed, warm and teasing along his crack. His buttocks clenched again; it just happened. Neil kissed his left asscheek. "If you don't want to, you can suck me off or something." He could feel the heat of Neil's cock blazing against his upper thigh.

"I want to. I want to know." He maybe needed to know.

"Okay, then you need to relax, huh?" Neil's fingers were back at his crack, only slick now, moving easily on his skin.

He chuckled a little, his breath catching in his chest. "I'm trying. How did you know to kiss me?"

"Told you. Gaydar." Neil's finger rubbed over his hole again and again.

"I guess I don't... uh... have that." His asshole tightened and relaxed, moving over and over.

"Have you ever looked at guys before? I mean really looked at them, to scope them out?" Neil's fingers began circling instead of rubbing back and forth.

"Sometimes." He could admit that, now. "I like a guy with nice shoulders."

Like Neil.

"So you scope 'em out, and some of them, you just know." One of Neil's fingers slipped inside him. Inside him.

His body clenched down, squeezing Neil's finger. Neil wiggled the finger, pushing it a little deeper, bringing it back out again.

"That feels weird."

"It'll feel good pretty soon." Neil pushed in another finger, stretching him wider.

His breath chuffed out of him slightly and his toes curled. Oh. Oh, damn. Then Neil's fingers pushed against something inside him.

He shifted forward, cried out. "Fuck!"

Oh, God.

Oh, damn.

"Gotcha!" Neil laughed softly and hit that spot again.

His arms started to shake, and he started to push back, rocking toward Neil's fingers. Bobby almost didn't notice when Neil worked a third finger into him. His arms buckled, and he rested his forehead on his forearms as he panted.

"You okay?" Neil asked, fingers slowing and then pulling out altogether.

"Uh. Uh-huh..." He thought so.

"Okay, good." He heard crinkling and then felt heat at his hole. Heat coming from something that felt huge.

He bit his lip, refusing to whine or fuss about this. He'd wanted it.

Needed it.

"I'll stop if it hurts." Neil's voice sounded strained, though, like he really didn't want to stop.

"It's okay." The pressure burned and he couldn't quite catch his breath.

Neil grunted, hands landing on his hips and holding him still as the hot cock slowly but surely worked into his ass. Bobby started panting, sweat dripping off his nose, his heart pounding.

Finally, Neil stopped moving. "Oh, fuck. Baby. You're so tight."

"So full. Is it. Is it good?"

"Uh-huh. Amazing. And I gotta move now, okay?"

"Okay? I need... something. Shit. I don't know. Please, Neil."

Neil's hand slid around his hip and grabbed his cock as Neil started to move.

"Yes..." Half-hard and aching as he was, the touch made him grunt, made his hips shift.

"Yeah. Yeah." Neil's cock slid almost all the way out, then pushed back in.

Bobby grunted and his hips rolled with it, with the bald, overwhelming heat and pressure.

"Fuck, this is good. So good." Neil kept pushing into him over and over and over.

His prick was thinking, very seriously, about making a comeback. Fuck. Neil's hand was warm around it, holding him lightly as they fucked. He started moving, pushing into each thrust, deep sounds leaving him.

Groaning, Neil's tightened the hand around his cock, the thrusts becoming harder.

Then Neil's cock hit that place inside him and lightning shot up his spine. "Oh."

"Right there, huh?" Neil shifted a little and kept hitting that spot.

"Oh. Oh, fuck. Don't stop. Neil. Neil, please." His eyes rolled back in his head, his throat working.

A snort came out of Neil's mouth. "Wanna come, not stop."

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh." He could feel himself ramping up again, his entire fucking body going tight.

"Fuck!" Neil suddenly moved faster, pounding into him as the hand around his cock squeezed tight.

His belly burned as he shot for the third time. Neil laughed, the sound wild and full of pleasure. Then he was jerking, cock pushing into Bobby and staying there, buried deep.

Bobby rested his cheek against his hands, panting, eyes closed, feeling a bit lost, really. Different. The cock inside him slid away, and Neil threw himself down next to Bobby. One hand slid over his shoulder, then petted.

He should go.

He should get up and walk away.

He should.

He opened his eyes, met Neil's. "Wow."

Neil grinned at him. "See?" Neil kissed his nose and cuddled close. "You should have come back a long time ago."

"I should have. Did. Do you think I waited too long?"

"Nope. I'm still in town, aren't I?"

"Yeah. I am, too. I got another little bit on my lease."

"So there's a chance you'll be back?"

He met Neil's eyes. "Is there a chance you'd like that?"

Neil grinned at him. "You do remember that I'm the one who hit on you, right? Yeah, I'd like that."

"I would too. I just... I wanted to see you again. I'm glad I did."

"Me, too. You gonna stay? We could order pizza in a bit."

"Sure. There's a cooler with beer in my truck."

"Works for me. This first, though." Neil draped an arm and a leg over him, eyes beginning to drift closed.

He nodded. "Happy graduation, man."

"Uh-huh. You too." Neil kissed him softly. "Now hush, after fucking comes napping."

"Right. Fucking. Napping. Pizza." Then maybe, if he was lucky, fucking again. He was figuring this thing out.

"Shh." Neil's hand patted his back.

Bobby nodded, sighed, feeling like he belonged in his own skin for the first time.

Feeling like he'd graduated.

At the top of his class.

Contributors' Bios

Dallas Coleman

Dallas Coleman grew up in Deep East Texas. She survived. She escaped. She has, thus far, resisted her daddy's attempts to reclaim her. She writes because it's cheaper than therapy.

Martin Delacroix

Martin Delacroix writes novels, novellas and short fiction. His story, *Fuck Me...Please* appears in the *Bend Over, Big Boy* anthology published by Torquere Press (July 2008) and his story *Passion Play* was published as a stand-alone piece by Torquere Press during January 2009. He lives on Florida's Gulf Coast.

Kiernan Kelly

Kiernan Kelly lives in the wilds of the alligator-infested U.S. Southeast, slathered in SPF 45, drinking colorful tropical, hi-octane concoctions served by thong-clad cabana boys.

All right, the truth is that she spends her time locked in the dark recesses of her office, writing gay erotica while chained to a temperamental Macintosh, drinking coffee, and dreaming of thong-clad cabana boys.

Sigh.

Kiernan's webpage is: <http://www.kiernan-kelly.com/>

Taylor Lockland

Taylor has been writing for fun for years. She started with fanfiction, but soon realized that creating her own characters was more fun. In 2009, she decided to try for publication. She has had short stories selected for various anthologies, and hopes to eventually try to write something longer. When she's not reading or writing, she can be found playing with her cats, sewing, looking at the night sky, watching baseball or hockey, or going to anime conventions. Look her up on LiveJournal at: <http://taylor-lochland.livejournal.com/>

JL Merrow

JL Merrow is a martial arts loving, very English mother of two who finds writing the only way to stay sane. Since she has only been writing since 2007 this rather begs the question as to what state her mind was in previously. She is firmly of the belief that you don't have to be conventionally good-looking to be attractive – although she would be prepared to put aside her principles if, say, Orlando Bloom happened to pass her way.

Sean Michael

Often referred to as "Space Cowboy" and "Gangsta of Love" while still striving for the moniker of "Maurice," Sean Michael spends his days surfing, smutting, organizing his immense gourd collection and fantasizing about one day retiring on a small secluded island peopled entirely by horseshoe crabs. While collecting vast amounts of vintage gay pulp novels and mood rings, Sean

whiles away the hours between dropping the f-bomb and pursuing the kama sutra by channelling the long lost spirit of John Wayne and singing along with the soundtrack to "Chicago." Check out Sean's webpage at <http://www.seanmichaelwrites.com/>

Mallory Path

A dedicated daydreamer and overeducated underachiever born in Manhattan, Mallory Path now lives across the bay from San Francisco with two special needs dwarf hamsters. In addition to Torquere, Mal's fiction has seen light of day with or is forthcoming from Dreamspinner, eXcessica, MLR Press, Paper Bag Press, STARbooks Press, and half a dozen online literary magazines. Vistors are welcome to <http://mallorypath.com>.

Kathryn Scannell

Kathryn Scannell makes her living doing database management, programming, and general IT support for an environmental consulting firm. She has a BA in German, a BS in Computer Science, and a head full of facts about odd things. She lives in NH with her wife Beth and their nine cats. When not writing or reading, she participates in the Society for Creative Anachronism and a variety of role playing games. Lessons is her first short story sale.

Julia Talbot

Julia Talbot resides in the Texas and has quit her day job. She has a penchant for blank books, gay porn, and big, ugly hats. She can most often be found in coffee shops and restaurants, scribbling in her notebook and entertaining other diners with her mutterings.

Julia cut her reading and writing teeth on purple-prosed romance novels, and as a result decided that boys were much more interesting with boys. Intense study of her subject and as much firsthand research as possible figure heavily in her writing adventures. Historical and fantasy settings are Julia's favorites. Her novels include Manners and Means, Jumping Into Things, and Mysterious Ways.

BA Tortuga

BA Tortuga enjoys indulging in the shallow side of life, with hobbies that include collecting margarita recipes, hot tub dips, and ogling hot guys at the beach. A connoisseur of the perverse and esoteric, BA's days are spent among dusty tomes of ancient knowledge, or, conversely, surfing porn sites in the name of research. Mixing the natural born southern propensity for sarcasm and the environmental western straight-shooting sensibility, BA manages to produce mainstream fiction, literary erotica, and fine works of pure, unadulterated smut. Visit BA at www.batortuga.com.