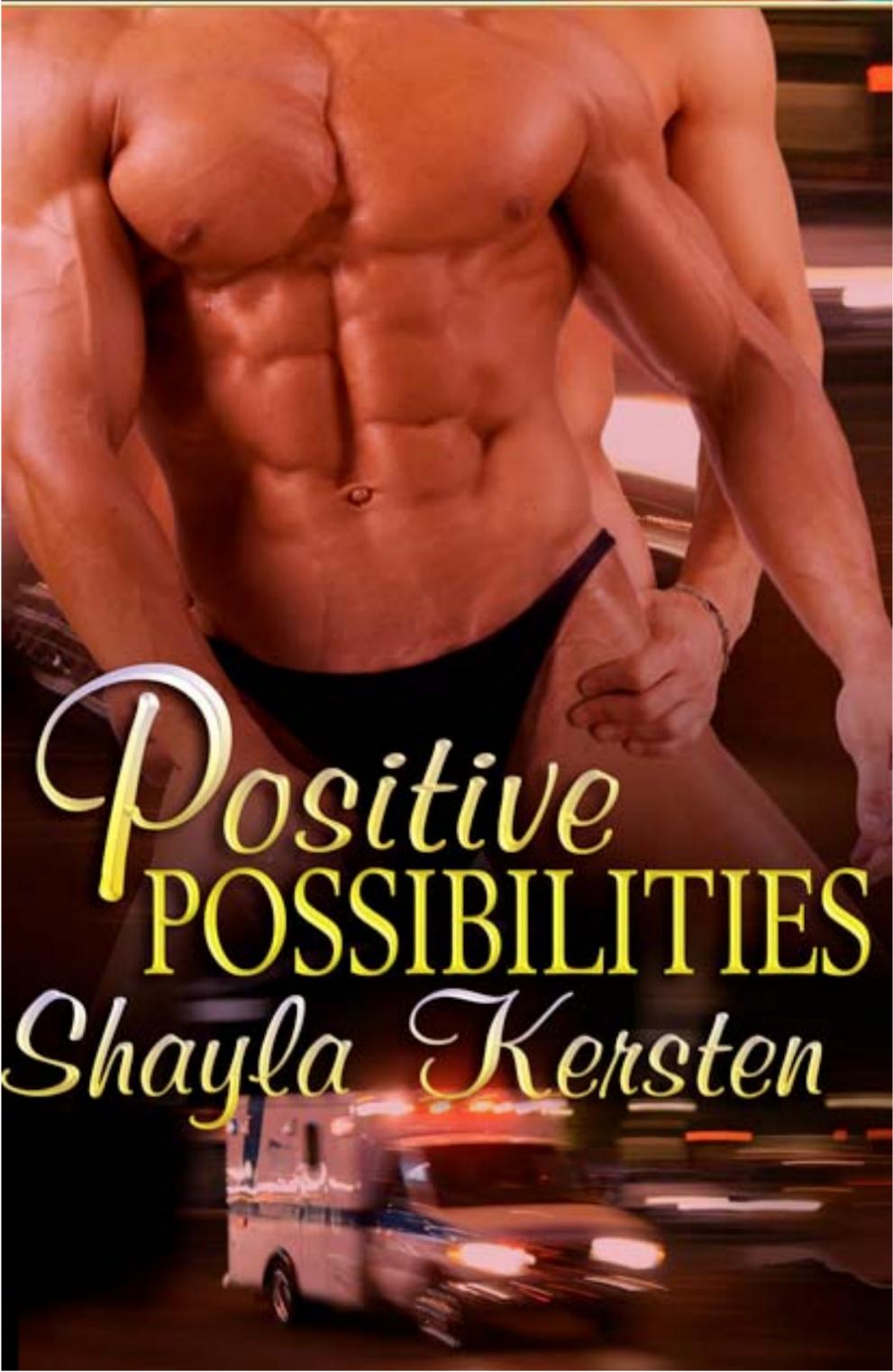


ELLORA'S CAVE *Spectrum*



Positive
POSSIBILITIES
Shayla Kersten

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Positive Possibilities

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POSITIVE POSSIBILITIES

Shayla Kersten

Chapter One

Gabe Layton switched grocery bags from his right hand to his left. Digging into his right pocket, he fished out his keys. Things had been a little stale with Lou lately and Gabe knew part of it was his fault. Gabe's free time—what little there was as a junior partner in a busy law firm—had been eaten up by an impending court date for a massive lawsuit.

Finally the senior partner in charge of the case was convinced everything was ready. Gabe was free early today. Armed with two beautifully marbled Porterhouse steaks and various fixings, Gabe planned to surprise his lover with a romantic meal and a rousing round of *very* attentive sex.

As Gabe pushed open the door, a loud groan caught his attention. "Lou?" A flare of worry raced through him with a mix of annoyance. His bad luck would be complete if Lou was ill on Gabe's first free evening in months.

Shame flushed his skin over his selfish thoughts. Then a simultaneous moan joined the next groan. A breathless "fuck" followed. A familiar slap of skin on skin...

Anger burned away the residual chill from the blustery weather. The grocery bags thudded and clattered on the hardwood floor. The vision of Lou, his naked sweat-glistening body straddling a slender blond man—a rather young one—on a blanket in front of a cheery fire filled Gabe's vision.

"Holy...shit...Gabe..." Lou's breathless exclamation didn't slow his rapid pace as he slammed up and down on the blond's cock. "Almost there..." Lou's hand abused his length with hard, fast strokes as his bouncing ass began to lose rhythm.

Blondie's hands clenched the lean flesh of Lou's hips as he steadied Lou. His body canted upward to meet Lou's erratic downward strokes.

As if Gabe's presence didn't matter, or maybe even enhanced the experience, thick, white semen spurted from Lou's dick. Long strips of come splattered across the blond's hairless chest.

Blondie's hands gripped Lou's hips then held him still as he ground upward. A long, growling moan signaled his own release inside Lou's ass.

An eternity passed as Gabe watched with mouth agape. His heart raced with fury. Cheating was bad enough, but in their home? His fists clenched with the need to hit something. Lou, for cheating. His little friend for just living. Didn't really matter at this point.

Lou rolled off Blondie then met Gabe's gaze. Without a sign of remorse, Lou shrugged. "He's a good lay. You should try him."

"Hey," Blondie ran his gaze up and down Gabe's body, "I'm always up for a threesome." His words slurred in a long Texas drawl. His hand slid between his legs then cupped his balls.

Gabe couldn't stop his line of sight from following the motion. As his brain registered Blondie's long, thick, *unsheathed* cock, his fury intensified. "Lou! You fucking asshole. You went bareback?"

Fear almost washed out Gabe's rage. He and Lou had been together for years—in what Gabe thought was a monogamous relationship. They'd given up condoms a few years ago after regular testing for STDs.

Lou pushed off the floor in all his naked glory then shrugged. "You know I don't like rubbers."

"How long? How many times?"

"Chill, dude." Blondie reached for a ragged pair of jeans. "I'm clean." Pulling the faded denim over his long legs, he glanced at Lou. "Guess we're not going for round two." He lay back then lifted his butt in the air so he could tug his jeans on the rest of the way. "Too bad. You were hot. Especially when you were yelling yeehaw." The man tucked his knees and rolled to his feet with grace of youth and a lean, supple body.

"Get out." Gabe gritted his teeth. Blondie's words made him wish for brain bleach. Nothing would rid him of the mental image those words left behind.

"Going, man. Don't be so brittle." Blondie leaned over then snagged a dingy white T-shirt from the floor. Slipping his feet in a pair of ragged sneakers, he sauntered past Gabe toward the door. "Maybe next time we can do that threesome." He grabbed a leather bomber jacket—worn with age—from the floor then slung it over his shoulders.

Gabe resisted the urge to hasten their guest's exit with a swift kick in the ass. Instead, he stared at Lou as if he'd never seen him before. Fear curled through his stomach. "Was this the first time you went bareback with someone else?"

As a kid, Gabe had watched his uncle waste away and die of AIDS. Even with all the advances in medical treatment in the last twenty years, nothing terrified Gabe more than the idea of contracting the disease.

"With..." Lou's brow creased in a frown, "him? Yes."

"You don't even know his fucking name. What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I was horny. And unlike you, he was available."

Gabe's blood boiled at the accusation. "Unbelievable. You knew the overtime was a temporary thing. You couldn't keep your dick in your pants a little longer?"

Lou leaned over and grabbed his jeans. "Like you were really here when you weren't working. Your mind's been elsewhere for a lot longer than a couple of months."

"Don't try to turn this around on me. I haven't been out boinking twinkies picked up off the street."

"Fuck off, Gabe. I don't need your shit." Lou stumbled toward the bedroom.

"And I don't need yours," Gabe yelled as Lou disappeared through the bedroom door. Storming across the room, Gabe caught the door as it swung shut. "I want you out of here. Tomorrow. I can put up with a lot of things but cheating isn't one of them."

"Whatever." Still naked, Lou shrugged. He didn't turn around or even pause. Instead of confronting Gabe, Lou entered the bathroom.

Standing in the middle of their bedroom, Gabe let his anger bubble up again. If he didn't get out of here, he'd be tempted to drown Lou in the bathtub.

Gabe turned on his heel then stalked out of the bedroom. His eyes averted from the scene of Lou's infidelity, he rushed out of the apartment.

Not wanting to wait for the elevator, Gabe hit the stairs. He didn't think Lou would come after him, not the way he was acting, but Gabe wasn't taking a chance. He needed time to cool off or things could turn ugly. With rage bubbling through his gut, he didn't think Lou would stand a chance if Gabe lost it. Slamming the door open on the first floor, Gabe ran past the doorman without speaking and into the cold, dark street.

It wasn't late but the winter nights came early. The street bustled with people scurrying from one place to another in ignorance of the grief and terror consuming Gabe. After scrubbing his face with the heels of both hands, he pressed his fingers against the ache in his eyes.

Nearly six years down the drain. And if he hadn't gotten home early, he probably would have never known about Lou's cheating. Then again, he might have found out when he was diagnosed with AIDS or some other sexually transmitted disease.

Anger burned deep in Gabe's gut, warming him against the bitter wind. "Not going to mourn the loss of him," he muttered as he started down the street toward his car. He didn't know where to go but he needed to get as far away from Lou as possible.

Gabe unlocked his car with the chirp of the remote then slid in behind the wheel. The interior held a hint of warmth from earlier. How much earlier?

A glance at his watch showed he'd parked only fifteen minutes ago. "Now what?" His mom had moved away from Chicago years ago. Sunny Florida suited her just fine. His sister's husband didn't approve of Gabe's *lifestyle*...asshole. As if being gay were a choice.

Most of his friends would welcome him in, but he didn't want to let anyone know what had happened. Not yet. Too many people disapproved of Lou – said he wasn't

right for Gabe. Maybe he should have listened to them. But for now, Gabe needed to let his situation sink in before he had to listen to a chorus of “I told you so”.

That left Dean. Best friends since grade school, Dean never questioned his lifestyle or his choices in men. Never lectured or tried to give advice. Dean just listened with a sympathetic ear and didn’t judge.

Although Gabe was pretty certain Dean wouldn’t be unhappy about him dumping Lou. Dean’s attitude toward Lou always held an undercurrent of tension. Maybe because Lou tended to flirt with Dean. To be fair, if it had a dick, Lou flirted with it. And sometimes if it didn’t. Not that there was a chance in hell Dean would succumb to Lou’s charms. His best friend was straight.

Gabe pushed aside the small rush of regret. Things might have been different if Dean weren’t.

“Shit...” Gabe banged his forehead on the steering wheel. Lou was always an outrageous flirt. Gabe hadn’t thought anything about it...until now. Guess he should have paid more attention. Then again, maybe he just didn’t want to look too close.

Gabe slipped his phone out of his breast pocket then pressed the speed dial for Dean’s number. The phone didn’t ring but went straight to voice mail.

“You know what to do...” Dean’s standard message intoned then the beep followed.

“Man, it’s Gabe. I need a place to crash tonight.” Gabe didn’t want to explain on voice mail. “Give me a call as soon as you get my message. Thanks.” Pushing the end button, Gabe stared at the windshield. The cold air mixing with his breath created the beginning of icy fog on the inside of the glass. He couldn’t sit here all night.

After starting the car, Gabe pulled onto the street. Mack’s bar was a couple of blocks from Dean’s house. Gabe could stay warm and get a drink while he waited for Dean to call him back. After his evening so far, he really needed one.

And if Dean didn’t get his message? Well, he’d deal with that bridge when he got there.

Chapter Two

Dean scanned the darkened room looking for Gabe. By the time he got Gabe's message, nearly three hours had passed. And Gabe didn't sound so good when Dean finally got a chance to call him back. A three-alarm fire at an apartment building had kept his EMT unit busy long after his shift ended.

Evidently, Gabe had spent the time consuming large quantities of alcohol.

With only a few patrons in Mack's at eleven o'clock on a weeknight, Dean didn't have much trouble finding his inebriated friend. Even with Gabe's face buried in the crook of his arm on the bar, Dean would recognize the broad set of shoulders anywhere.

From the scrawny kid Dean met in third grade, Gabe had blossomed into a monster of a man. A little shy of six foot six, Gabe towered over Dean's six two. Somewhere between tenth and eleventh grade, Gabe redefined the meaning of growth spurt. Until then, Dean had been his then-nerdy friend's main means of protection from schoolyard bullies. Now...

With a long sigh, Dean crossed the room with fast strides. "Hey, man." He ran his hand across Gabe's back. "What's up?"

"Humph. Asshole's dick. Up some guy's ass..." The muffled reply pretty much told the whole story.

"Sorry, Gabe." Dean snagged the bottom of a barstool with his foot and pulled it closer to Gabe. "Want to talk about it?" As he slid on the stool, he ran a hand across Gabe's shoulders.

"Nope." A small gulp ended Gabe's monosyllabic reply. Could be a hiccup...could be the beginnings of a sob.

"Why don't we go to my place?" Dean liked Mack's bar and really didn't want a scene.

"I'd do you..."

"Huh?" The cold outside must have affected Dean's brain. He couldn't have heard his best friend's slurred words correctly.

Gabe's head popped up from its resting spot on the dark wood bar. "I'd do you. Wouldn't do asshole's new fuck though. 'Course, he only offered 'cause he got caught." Gabe lowered his face into the crook of his elbow. "Ridin' the fuckin' twink's dick yelling yeehaw..."

Dean shook his head, trying to rid the image from his brain. Didn't need to know more. "Let's go—"

"Fucker never liked bottoming for me..." The mumbled words barely reached Dean's ears.

He kind of wished they hadn't. Dean didn't have a problem with his best friend's sexuality, but he didn't need the details. Too often his imagination supplied more than enough.

"Way too much information, man." However, Dean's cock took an interest in Gabe's words. *I'd do you...* echoed in a dark recess of Dean's brain, stirring desires best left buried.

For most of his adult life, Dean had labeled his dick as bi-curious. Anytime Gabe talked about his sex life, even in innuendos or off-the-cuff comments, Dean found his jeans getting tighter. Lately, his fantasies had drifted a little left of center. The idea of Gabe in his bed—among other places—suited his libido just fine.

"Time to get you home and into bed. You're past drunk." Waving to Mack, he asked, "How much does he owe?"

Mack nodded an acknowledgment as he grabbed a ticket from near the cash register.

Gabe's head shook with rapid jerks. "Not goin' home. Asshole's there."

"I know." Dean snagged Gabe's coat from the back of the chair then tugged Gabe's sleeve. "I meant my home. You can crash on the couch. Lift your arm."

When Gabe complied, Dean slipped the heavy wool overcoat onto Gabe's arm then manhandled the other arm into place.

The change in Gabe's size hadn't altered the basic dynamics of their relationship. When Gabe needed him, Dean was there. Like tonight.

Mack pushed a bill on the bar in front of Dean. "He really dove into the bottle."

With a shake of his head, Dean pulled a couple of twenties out of his wallet. "Thanks, Mack." Dean donned his coat. "Let's go." He held a hand toward Gabe.

When Gabe slid off the high barstool, he pitched forward into Dean's grasp. "Knees don't work..." Gabe's deep chuckle vibrated against Dean's chest.

"This is going to be fun." Dean grimaced as he wrapped his arms around Gabe's chest. Almost nose to nose, Gabe's whiskey-laden breath warmed Dean's face. A tingling in his groin roiled into a tightening of his jeans. Dean refused to think about his dick's reaction to Gabe's closeness. Or maybe it was the memory of Gabe's words.

A shudder whipped down Dean's spine as he shifted his position, catching Gabe's armpit with his shoulder. Much safer to stay on his friend's side.

"Have a good night." Mack snagged the bills from the counter with one hand and the empty whiskey tumbler with the other.

"Night, Mack," Dean tossed the word over his shoulder as he dragged his inebriated friend toward the door. A rush of cold air blasted them as he pushed through the entrance and on to the sidewalk.

Gabe snuggled into Dean's side, one hand sliding under his coat. The warmth of his touch caressed Dean's side through his sturdy uniform.

Shaking off curious thoughts, Dean focused on maneuvering Gabe toward the apartment. He should have run home and picked up his car instead of heading to Mack's from the subway. Too late now...

Almost midnight on a weeknight, the small neighborhood surrounding Mack's was tucked into bed. The wind whistled through the trees lining the avenue, stinging his face and neck.

Gabe leaned heavily against Dean as he turned north. The short two-block walk home would be complicated with his friend's stumbling. Gabe's slurred words on the phone should have made him think to get the car. Too late now.

Instead of a brisk stride to stave off the cold, Dean shivered as he hauled Gabe down the narrow sidewalk.

"Asshole..." Heated breath blew against Dean's skin.

"Me?"

"Not you..." Gabe leaned his head onto Dean's shoulder. A cold nose rubbed against Dean's neck while warm breath teased. "Lou... I should call him. Tell him he's an asshole."

Cold and heat battled to claim the shiver careening down Dean's spine. In spite of a cold blast of wind, his skin tingled with an old familiar awareness. He pushed away the feeling. Curiosity wasn't enough to risk a friendship as tight as his and Gabe's.

The idea of seeking out another man to satisfy his itchy interest didn't seem worth the trouble. Not that it would be difficult. Several bars in town had a reputation of catering to men looking for casual hookups, but Dean really wasn't interested in casual anymore – with either gender.

"You can deal with Lou tomorrow. I don't think you're in any condition tonight."

Gabe stumbled toward the curb, dragging Dean off balance.

Dean regained control before they bounced off a parked car. "Easy, man. We don't want to end up in the gutter." Dean's arm tightened around his friend. "Just a little farther."

"Where we goin'?" Gabe turned into Dean's embrace. His body blocked Dean's forward motion.

"My place, remember?" His efforts to keep Gabe vertical had tugged his shirt loose under his coat. A frigid blast of air sent another shiver up Dean's spine.

"Yeah..." A long sigh breathed into Dean's shoulder.

"But we have to walk to get there." Manhandling Gabe around, Dean pressed Gabe in the right direction. "Another block."

"Good." Gabe's hand slid down Dean's back until his fingers slipped inside the waist of Dean's pants, grazing his skin with cold fingertips.

"Shit." Dean's hiss was lost in a gust of frigid wind. The temperature would have to drop a lot more to cool the heat flowing through Dean's body.

"Wha's a matter?" Calloused fingers dipped lower until the cool tips traced the top of the crack of Dean's ass through his cotton briefs.

"Nothing." Dean reached around with his free hand. Tugging Gabe's wrist, he yanked the teasing fingers free of his pants. Pulling Gabe's hand forward, he kept it pressed tight against his waist. "Almost there."

Their slow progress put them half a block from his apartment. The sooner they reached his home, the sooner Dean could lock himself in his room and away from temptation.

The sight of his building's front light gave Dean renewed strength and he practically dragged Gabe toward it. His breath puffed steam on the cold air as Gabe's weight took a toll on him.

Releasing Gabe's hand, Dean dug into his pocket for his keys.

Freed from Dean's hold, Gabe's fingers trailed around Dean's waist. With only a hint of warning, Gabe's hand once again slid down the back of Dean's pants, this time skimming inside his underwear. "You're hot." Gabe breathed into Dean's ear.

"Nope. Not hot. Cold. It's freezing out here." Dean lurched toward the door, fumbling with his keys. "Cold. Ice cold." Icy heat ripped through him as Gabe's hand dipped lower. "Fuck."

"Oh yeah!"

"No!" Dean pulled away from Gabe and the fingers teasing along the crack of his ass. "Shit."

With Dean's support gone, Gabe pitched forward.

"Damn," Dean muttered as he caught his friend before he kissed the sidewalk. "Let's just get inside."

"Kay." Gabe leaned into Dean's renewed embrace. Fortunately, his hands didn't do any more wandering.

Dean's hands shook as he pushed the key into the lock of the security door. Although he didn't intend to let his drunken friend seduce him, the idea took firm hold in his mind – and his cock.

His length hardened, caught in a painful twist inside his pants. Dean didn't dare try to adjust his dick, not within Gabe's view. He didn't need Gabe to get the wrong idea. Or maybe the right idea.

But a fling with his best friend wasn't a good idea under any circumstances – much less when Gabe was drunk, on the rebound and probably looking to even the score with Lou. Dean was not going to be a revenge fuck. The consequences of any kind of fuck could be awkward and damaging to their friendship.

"Come on. We're almost there. Then you can crash." The lock clicked. With Gabe's weight pushing him into the door, they fell through the entrance. Dean stumbled a few steps but kept from hitting the floor.

Gabe, on the other hand, slid down Dean's side into a large puddle of drunken male. His shoulders shook as sobbing moans racked his body.

"Damn." Dean did not need this. At all. Kneeling next to Gabe, he ran his hand across his friend's shoulder. "Come on, Gabe. It'll be okay."

Turning to face Dean, Gabe's face flared red as he gasped for air between guffaws. Loud snorts punctuated raucous laughter.

Dean's chuckle started low, building until he burst into laughter. Relieved he wasn't dealing with a tearful Gabe doubled Dean's amusement. "Come on, man. A few more feet to the elevator."

As Dean leaned over to grasp Gabe under his arms, Gabe reached up. His tight embrace engulfed Dean around the neck, pulling him down. Soft puffs of air teased his neck as Gabe's laughter continued in short, strangled bursts.

Tickled by Gabe's uncontrolled laughs, Dean joined him. A deep belly laugh and the close contact with Gabe made Dean weak in the knees. Rolling around on the entryway floor with his very male best friend wasn't a great idea, but Dean's amusement didn't dampen his deepening desire.

Gabe's hands ran under Dean's jacket then rubbed circles on his back. Moist lips brushed the sensitive skin of Dean's neck just below his ear.

"Okay. Gotta go!" Dean rolled off Gabe then staggered to his feet. With his back to Gabe, he adjusted his aching cock to a more comfortable position. Not that anything would be good right now. He could hammer nails.

When he turned back, Gabe had pulled himself up from the floor and was leaning against the wall. His hair ruffled from the brisk wind, his chest heaved with gasping breaths. His face was bright with red from the cold or laughing or both. And his pants...well, Dean was sure that neither the temperature nor laughter would cause the thick bulge in Gabe's slacks.

Dean could imagine another situation where Gabe would look so mussed and out of breath. Splayed on Dean's bed...naked and willing... His imagination needed to go

on hiatus as a rush of excitement ran through Dean's veins, adding to the already tight confines of his jeans.

"Okay." Dean grabbed Gabe by the scruff of his collar and pulled him toward the elevator. No way was he attempting even one flight of stairs with his tipsy friend.

The small space of the elevator emphasized Gabe's musky scent mixed with whiskey. Dean resisted the urge to inhale deeply and savor the heated aroma. Fortunately, the doors opened on his floor and Gabe stumbled out.

Between the cold air and his laughing fit downstairs, Gabe seemed to have sobered a little. At least he didn't need help getting down the hall, although there were a few close calls with the wall.

Dean unlocked the door then held it open as Gabe stumbled into the apartment. He tossed his keys on a shelf of the entertainment center as he followed Gabe into the living room. "I have some sweats and a T-shirt you can sleep in. And I'll get you a pillow and blankets." Stripping off his coat, he tossed it on the recliner near the couch.

"Thanks." Gabe's strained tone made Dean turn around.

"You okay? Going to be sick? Need the bathroom?"

"I'm fine." Gabe moved slow but steady to the couch. "I don't need anything." He plopped down in the corner of the couch. "I'll be fine. You don't have to babysit me." His words slurred but amusement had deserted his tone. After struggling out of his coat and suit jacket, Gabe balled up the expensive material and hugged it against his stomach like a security blanket.

"I'm not babysitting. I'm being a friend. You know, like we've been to each other for the last twenty-some-odd years?" Dean worried about Gabe's seesawing mood. Moving to the couch, he sat next to his friend. "Everything will be better in the morning." He chuckled a little. "Well, except for maybe the hangover you'll be sporting."

"You're a good friend..." Gabe's head ducked as his voice trailed off.

Dean frowned, lowering his head to see if he could spy Gabe's expression. "Sounds like there's a 'but' in there."

For someone who'd downed half a bottle of strong whiskey, Gabe moved surprisingly fast. Dean sank into the couch, encouraged by his six-foot-something friend's weight straddling his thighs. Gabe's coat slithered to the floor.

Strong fingers dug into Dean's scalp. Limp with surprise, Dean allowed his head to be angled back, his face tilted up. "Gabe—"

A hot whiskey-flavored mouth stopped his protest. When Gabe's tongue brushed Dean's lower lip, he thought about pushing his friend away—for all of three seconds.

The ache in his groin intensified tenfold. Electrical thrills coursed through Dean's body as his tongue met Gabe's. Instead of pushing him away, Dean wrapped one arm around Gabe's waist, pulling him closer.

Gabe's bulging package pressed against Dean's aching cock. Gabe's kiss went from hesitant to forceful as Dean ran his other hand around Gabe's neck then weaved his fingers through Gabe's short hair.

Dean's mind screamed "stop" as his body cheered "go". Desire curled through his stomach then rode a wave past his groin and into his cock.

Each touch, lick or kiss burned hot and bright, blinding Dean to reason. Need welled up and pushed Dean over the dam holding back hidden feelings. Truth echoed through his mind as he finally admitted that more than curiosity fueled his current situation...and had for quite awhile.

Even as he accepted the desire he felt for Gabe, Dean knew he needed to back away. His reasons for not getting involved were still valid. Gabe was on the rebound—vulnerable. He might consider getting back together with Lou—asshole or not, they'd been together for years. Add to the situation Gabe's current drunken state, now was definitely not the time to let things get out of control.

Dean's fingers closed on the back of Gabe's shirt with every intention of pulling him away. Instead, Gabe's large, strong hands clenched Dean's back, pulling him tighter.

"God, you feel good." The feverish kiss barely paused long enough for Gabe's words to slip past Dean's lips. Gabe's hips undulated against Dean's crotch.

Each stroke fogged Dean's reason until his logic fled, leaving behind only the heat and aching joy of Gabe's body against him. His hands scrabbled with Gabe's shirt until he pulled the material free of his slacks.

Tracing a trail of muscles up Gabe's broad back, Dean reveled in the warm flesh. Soft groans of approval vibrated against Dean's mouth.

Dean's hands circled around under Gabe's shirt. Combing his fingers across the thick fur on Gabe's chest, Dean paused to tweak a peaked nipple. He slid his hands up, pushing Gabe's shirt until it scrunched up under Gabe's arms.

Pulling away from the wet thrill of Gabe's lips wasn't easy, but Dean needed more. More to taste, more to feel. Licking a path from chin to throat, Dean relished the grating stubble and Gabe's heady, musky taste.

Gabe's mouth tried to follow but came to rest on Dean's head. Muffled moans snuffled through Dean's hair. Hands clenched Dean's shoulders then the back of his neck. Dean's moans vibrated against Gabe's skin as he mouthed his way through the coarse chest hair until his lips found the sharp peak of a nipple.

Tonguing the small morsel of flesh caused Gabe's fingers to dig into Dean's flesh. Encouraged, Dean raked his teeth across the sensitive nub.

Gabe's grip tightened, pulling Dean tight against his chest. "Fuck...Dean..."

Although he knew Gabe's words were a mere reaction and not an offer, Dean's cock jerked at the idea. All his half-formed fantasies flooded his brain. His body flew on a high of sexual endorphins, throwing his common sense out into the cold night.

"Yes..." Dean whispered against Gabe's skin. His arms snaked around Gabe's broad back.

His balance compromised by drink, Gabe went over on the couch easy enough. Dean followed, twisting until his body covered his friend's. Hands pulled and plucked at his shirt. Buttons either gave way or popped under Gabe's anxious fingers.

His shirt open, Dean pressed against Gabe. His mouth sought the wet heat of Gabe's kisses. Large hands cupped Dean's ass, pulling him closer, tight against the thick bulge in Gabe's slacks.

One of Gabe's hands slid up to the waist of Dean's pants. Cool fingers trailed across Dean's lower back before slipping under his waistband, under Dean's briefs. After teasing a flush of heat across Dean's ass cheek, Gabe's fingers dipped into the crack of his ass.

Squeezing a hand between their bodies wasn't easy but Dean managed. He pulled his belt loose then worked his fly open. Dean sighed with relief as his pants loosened.

With extra room to play, Gabe's other hand joined the first. Fingers kneading hard teased Dean's anus. A flurry of fantasies raced through Dean's mind as Gabe slid a finger between his cheeks.

Dean arched up, trying to meet Gabe's prodding. With his weight balanced on one hand, his other pushed his pants down on one side.

Even in his drunken state, Gabe caught on to Dean's actions and helped by shoving the other side down. The base of Dean's cock pressed against Gabe's slacks while the crown rubbed across the rough edge of Gabe's belt. Not exactly the pressure Dean was looking for.

Dean reached between their bodies again then pulled Gabe's belt free. With a grunt of growing frustration, Dean worked on Gabe's fly. The button gave quickly but the awkward position made the zipper difficult. "Damn!"

Rising up on his knees, Dean used both hands to open Gabe's pants. Yanking the fly open, Dean pushed Gabe's briefs down then wrapped his hand around Gabe's long,

hard flesh. Using the back of the couch for support, Dean leaned far enough forward to capture his cock in the same hand as Gabe's.

"Oh yeah..." Gabe moaned as their flesh made contact.

"Want this...want you..." Dean mumbled as he stroked both their cocks.

Gabe pushed up as his hands grasped Dean's ass. Dean lowered his body on Gabe's. Releasing their lengths, Dean sighed as the tight pressure of their bodies replaced Dean's hold. "Yes..." With a gasping moan, Dean buried his face in Gabe's neck. Fumbling for a handhold, Dean slid his arm under Gabe's neck.

Frantic lunges pressed their bodies closer. Once again, Gabe's fingers trailed down Dean's ass. A brief fluttering touch teased Dean's anus.

"More!" Dean didn't know whether to arch up and chase Gabe's fingers or press harder against the firm, muscled body beneath him.

Gabe made the decision for him. Rough hands gripped Dean's hips, yanking him down until Dean's cock was caught tight between them. Fingers ran down Dean's crack until one nudged Dean's opening.

Dean's closely held fantasies raced through his mind. The thought of Gabe's thick flesh poking at his ass instead of a blunt finger sent an ecstatic thrill through his body. Heat radiated out from his lower stomach. Come spread between their bodies, slick and warm.

Gabe's moist lips nuzzle down Dean's jaw then his neck. Soft kisses and sharp nips alternate back and forth on the tender skin. A hum of words faded into Dean's flesh as Gabe's body leapt in small, jerking motions. "So good..."

Then Gabe went limp under Dean.

"Gabe?"

A long breath exhaled ended in a soft snore.

“Fuck.” Dean knew things had gone too far. Maybe Gabe’s alcohol-soaked brain wouldn’t remember in the morning. But Dean would never be able to forget the intensity of his best friend’s kiss or the feel of his body. “Fuck.” What had he done?

Chapter Three

Gabe's head pounded with the hard beat of a multitude of drums. His mouth tasted as if he'd eaten sand—felt like it too. His eyes were glued shut. The smell of food—toast, maybe eggs—turned his stomach, but the aroma of coffee forced his eyes open.

Daylight peered through a set of narrow blinds. One crooked slat let a single ray pierce the dim room and add a sharp pain to the thrumming beat inside his head. With a soft groan, Gabe pushed up from the couch. His head spun like a Linda Blair wannabe. "Oh shit..." His stomach joined the dizzy dance with a wave of queasiness that threatened to roll up into his throat.

A soft hum drifted into the living room. Dean's living room. Memory supplied fragments of recollection.

Lou...and his boy toy. Renewed anger sent his blood boiling and pounding through his aching skull. The asshole hadn't even appeared ashamed. He kept right on riding the twink's cock as if he'd done nothing wrong.

Gabe's throat clenched with a mix of outrage and sadness. He'd known things weren't good between him and Lou for a while, but he didn't realize cheating was part of the problem. He should have ended it a year ago when he realized he was happiest spending time with his best friend instead of his lover.

Maybe it was Gabe's fault things had gone sour with Lou. His lover wasn't stupid. He must have realized Gabe's feelings had shifted. At least Gabe had never acted on his.

Another fragmented snip of memory hit him. "Oh fuck." Well, evidently he had acted on his attraction to Dean. Last night. And Dean had responded... Or was it a dream?

Gabe lifted his hand to his lips. The hard kiss, hand curled around his head, arm on his waist. Maybe a dream brought on by wishful thinking. He ran his hand across his face. Was that beard burn? Or wishful thinking? Shaking his head caused the drummer in his head to ramp up the beat. With a long sigh, Gabe decided it was probably a dream. He didn't remember more than a kiss—granted a hot kiss—and he'd slept on the couch with all his clothes on. Kind of. His slacks were open but his briefs were in place.

"God, I stink." His underwear stuck to his skin with a faint trace of come. "Uh-oh..." Wet dream or something more? But there didn't appear to be much residue. If he'd come it wasn't much.

"Gabe?" Dean's voice wasn't much more than a hoarse whisper.

"I'm awake." Gabe swung his feet off the couch. The world twisted with the quick motion. "Need a shower. Coffee." He ran his hand through his hair.

"You know where the bathroom is. Get a shower. Coffee will be waiting for you." Dean disappeared back into the kitchen.

Dean seemed normal enough, not as if he'd been sucking face with Gabe last night. Definitely his imagination or a dream. Damn good dream from the evidence left behind. Been a long time since he'd had a wet dream.

Gabe rose from the couch, slow and steady. His head accepted the change in elevation without an increase in dizziness or pain. A hot shower would sort things out.

The image of Dean's face—a mix of desire and surprise—kept taunting Gabe as he stumbled toward the bathroom. And the feel... Gabe ran a hand over his mouth. He was almost sure he felt the faint sting of beard burn.

"Nah..." Not possible. Dean was straight. Even if Dean were interested, he wouldn't take advantage of Gabe while he was drunk.

As Gabe flipped on the bathroom light, the image of Dean's face zoomed out like the lens of a camera. Dean, on the couch with Gabe straddling his muscled thighs. Whoops.

Who was taking advantage of whom?

“Shit.” Gabe had some apologizing to do. Big time.

Thankfully, Dean was good-natured about Gabe’s sexuality. Although Dean feigned squeamishness at some of Gabe’s remarks, Gabe knew it was just an act. And Dean never backed away from their friendship. In junior high school, when Gabe first came out to Dean, he was sure the other boy would run for the hills screaming – or beat Gabe to a pulp. He’d had the first reaction from a couple of so-called friends. The second had been his dad’s.

Gabe still believed his dad left because of him, although his mother swore it wasn’t true. Sadness swept over him as he propped his hand on the edge of the sink then leaned toward the mirror.

His reflection testified to his state last night. His face had gone past pale and settled on a rather creepy shade of gray. A shudder of nausea discouraged him from looking too close.

If he could get rid of the awful taste of stale whiskey and morning mouth, he knew he’d feel better. Since he left his apartment with nothing but the clothes on his back, a toothbrush was too much to ask for. As good a friend as he was, Gabe was pretty certain Dean wouldn’t want to share.

Pulling open the medicine chest, he searched for mouthwash. As he grabbed the bottle of green liquid, he noticed a new toothbrush, still wrapped in plastic.

“Thank God.” He broke open the package then snagged the toothpaste from a cup on the edge of the sink. With a huge dollop of the green gel on the bristles, he plunged the brush into his mouth. The taste of mint wasn’t the best idea considering the weak state of his stomach.

Gabe twisted around to the toilet just as the bitter bile gagged his throat. The fast spin accelerated the sick feeling. Bending over the porcelain goddess, Gabe prayed...hard, fast and with a surprising amount of volume considering his only sustenance last night had been liquid.

Gasping for air between heavens, Gabe knelt on the floor then wrapped his arms around the bowl. The cool tile floor seeped through his slacks, helping to ease the heat pulsing through his body. Sweat broke out on his forehead as a second wave of vomit struck.

"Damn, Gabe. I thought you were in the clear when you didn't ralph last night." The sound of running water muffled Dean's voice.

Gabe reached up and hit the flush handle. "That bad, eh." The acrid taste in his mouth almost gagged him.

Dean's hand brushed the sweat-damp hair from Gabe's forehead. A cold, wet rag eased across Gabe's brow. "You were...pretty fucked-up."

"Do anything really stupid?" Gabe kept his gaze glued on the toilet in front of him. He didn't think he was ready for Dean's expression of anger...or disgust.

"Nope. Just got falling-down drunk." Dean kept bathing Gabe's face as his soft voice soothed Gabe's anxiety. "Any aches and pains outside the normal hangover symptoms? You took a little tumble in the entryway last night."

"I don't think so." A florescent-lit memory glanced across his brain. Gabe on the floor laughing like an idiot—skunk-drunk idiot at that. And Dean, laughing with him. "So no hard feelings?" Hard kisses, hard muscles, hard dick?

"No. Just concern."

The reality of Gabe's thoughts—too much for just a weird trick of the mind—sent a thread of desire weaving through his body. In spite of the splitting headache and less-than-happy stomach, the idea of straddling Dean and lip-locking him wouldn't go away.

"You think you can get up now? A shower will help." Dean pulled the washcloth away but his hand returned to Gabe's hair. Fingers combed through the tangled damp mess.

"Yeah, I think so. The toothpaste didn't agree with me." He lifted the almost-forgotten toothbrush still clenched in his fingers.

Dean laughed then with a gentle parting caress, he backed away and out of the bathroom, leaving Gabe confused as well as hungover.

* * * * *

Dean leaned against the closed bathroom door with a long sigh. Listening for any sign of renewed illness, he waited for the sound of the shower. Dean had cleaned Gabe up as much as he could without waking him. He hoped it was enough to hide the evidence.

Awkward didn't cover the feeling gripping Dean. As much as he enjoyed last night's little episode, Dean had no desire to lose his best friend over an itch. Letting things go as far as they did was as much a betrayal as Lou's fucking around. Even worse, as far as Dean was concerned.

His opinion of Lou had never been very high. Dean always thought it was just a matter of time before the asshole hurt Gabe. But he was rational enough to know Gabe wouldn't listen to Dean's gut feeling. Gabe needed more logical proof—something concrete. It was the damn lawyer in him. Evidence made the case.

Well, he had his evidence. Unfortunately. Now Dean had betrayed Gabe's trust as well. Although Gabe didn't act as if he remembered anything.

"It can't be that easy," Dean grunted as the shower started. "Nope. Even if Gabe doesn't remember, I will." Even the memory of the short encounter set Dean's blood racing south and his temperature rising.

Pushing away from the door, Dean headed for the kitchen. Good thing he was off rotation for the next couple of days. His brain couldn't focus on simple things much less an emergency.

Dean stopped in the middle of the kitchen. He had to clear his head of erotic thoughts. Peering out the kitchen window, the gray winter day didn't seem very

inviting. Rain bordering on sleet slashed at the glass. A perfect day to stay inside and hibernate.

Curled up in bed. With Gabe wrapped around him.

"Fuck." Didn't matter where he tried to guide his thoughts, everything came back to sex. With Gabe.

Nearly a year had passed since Dean had been with a woman—his last girlfriend couldn't handle the crazy hours he kept as a rescue worker. The demand for EMTs was insane. Since then, he'd had a few chances but passed. He really wasn't into casual. Given the choice of a one-night stand or his right hand, he chose his hand. At least he knew where it'd been.

"Hey. Where's that coffee you promised?" Gabe's voice intruded on Dean's reverie.

Dean's face warmed with a flush of guilt. He kept his back to Gabe as he grabbed a coffee cup from the cabinet. "Have a seat. I'll get it."

"Thanks." A chair scooted across the vinyl floor. "For everything."

"That's what I'm here for." Dean poured the steaming black coffee. A slow, deep breath steadied him before he turned to face Gabe. "It's what friends are for, right?"

"Yeah. But sometimes you go beyond the call of duty." Dressed in Dean's dark robe, Gabe hunched over in the chair. Matching dark circles ringed under Gabe's eyes.

Dean's pulse thrummed at the pulse point on his neck but he kept from turning away. "You're usually worth the trouble." A change of subject was sorely needed. "So what are you going to do about Lou?"

Gabe ran a hand through still-damp hair. "I told him last night to get out. Don't know if he took me serious."

"Have you ever told him to leave before?" Dean didn't think the relationship had deteriorated that much. Gabe hadn't said anything if it had.

"No. But then I never caught him before." Gabe's hand shook as he lowered it to the table. His fingers clutched around the coffee mug. "He fucked the guy bareback, Dean."

A shock of fear overrode the desire strumming Dean's body. "Don't you play it safe?"

"Not for a few years now. I *thought* we were monogamous." Gabe's dark eyebrows crooked toward the middle of his brow. "I don't think this was the first time."

"Shit." Dean pulled a chair over closer to Gabe then sat. His hand wrapped around Gabe's fingers still closed on the mug. "You need to get tested. As soon as possible."

"Yeah. I know." Gabe shook his head. His index finger slipped free of Dean's grip then meshed with Dean's fingers. His nail teased a featherlight touch on Dean's knuckle. "I never thought... I mean, I know he's an asshole. And no, I don't know why I stuck with him." Pulling his hand out of Dean's, Gabe clasped his hands under the table. "Afraid of being alone, I guess. Too much trouble to kick him out..." Gabe shrugged. "Stupidity? But I never thought he'd take that kind of chance. He's so fastidious with everything—his looks, his body, even the apartment. You'd think his health would fall in there as well."

"Fuck his health." Anger twisted through Dean like a bolt of electricity. "What about risking you? That stupid son of a bitch had no right—"

A loud trill from the pocket of Gabe's robe interrupted Dean. Gabe rolled his eyes as he reached for his cell phone. "Looks like he's starting early." Gabe stood as he flipped the phone open. "Hello." His tone was flat and cold. His voice dropped to a low murmur as he walked down the hall and out of Dean's hearing.

Dean suppressed the desire to follow—to yell at the phone, at Lou—hell, at Gabe. Dean never thought Gabe would risk AIDS. He knew the hell Gabe went through with his Uncle Brent. Watching Brent suffer through his disease was one of the reasons Dean became an EMT. The idea of helping people in need fixed in him back then and never left.

"I don't give a damn. I want you out." Gabe's voice growled as each word grew louder than the last. "No, you made the decision to leave when you brought your trick into our apartment—*my* apartment."

Dean almost fell out of his chair as he leaned toward the hallway, hoping to catch more of the conversation.

"You're damn right. My name is on the lease, I pay the fucking rent so, yes, it is my apartment. Why don't you go find your Texas twinkie and see if he'll let you mooch off him for the next six years!" Gabe's voice grew closer.

"You go, Gabe..." Dean whispered. He jumped up from the chair then moved to the window. Satisfaction welled up at Gabe's hard attitude as Dean tried to appear nonchalant. Instead, a giddy feeling of relief threatened to burst out as a long, hard laugh. The idea of no more Lou made his heart light and his body tense with a growing sense of desire.

"Fine. You have until tomorrow morning. After that, I'll throw your shit out on the sidewalk." Bare feet slapped the vinyl floor as Gabe stormed into the kitchen. The snap of his cell phone closing let Dean know the conversation was over.

Turning, Dean suppressed the smile trying to curve his lips. Lou wasn't right for Gabe, but Dean didn't need to show his elation so blatantly. An elation Dean didn't want to examine too close at the moment.

"Stupid son of a bitch." Gabe tossed his phone on the table next to his coffee cup. "Claims I can't throw him out because he has nowhere to go." He flopped down on the chair. The robe slid open, revealing muscular thighs.

Dean silently urged the material to fall a little more and reveal the thick flesh he'd gripped far too briefly last night. His throat clutched at the thought and his heart skipped a couple of beats.

"I hate to ask but can I crash here again tonight? I can get a hotel if it's too much trouble."

Having Gabe here for another night could prove difficult. Dean needed time to think about the feelings and desires running rampant through his mind and body. But this was his best friend. He couldn't turn him away now. "Of course you can stay."

The steady, pounding rain became a clatter of sleet. The idea of Gabe and a warm bed sent tendrils of heat rushing through his body.

Dean could control his desires for a day. Couldn't he?

Chapter Four

Gabe kicked back on the couch in his borrowed sweats. The pant legs were a little too short and the material stretching across his ass was more than a little snug. Fortunately, Dean liked his shirts baggy so Gabe could pull a little extra material down over his crotch. A real necessity since his body had suddenly decided Dean was fair game and there definitely wasn't enough room in the sweatpants to hide a boner.

The television droned on with some obscure college basketball game—the joys of a gazillion channels of sports. The patter of rain mixed with sleet ticked against the window. Not going anywhere today. And Lou probably wouldn't either.

"Fuck..." Last night everything seemed so clear. Kicking Lou out was as simple as ordering him out. Now Lou claimed he needed time, the weather was conspiring against him and Gabe couldn't seem to stop lusting after his best friend.

Flashes of memory kept slipping out of the fog surrounding last night. A hot kiss...lots of kissing...a strong grip. A flush of heat warmed Gabe from his head to his feet.

Dean strolled into the living room with two mugs. As he sank onto the couch next to Gabe, he held out a steaming mug of coffee. "Here."

"Thanks." Gabe accepted the drink with a shiver as his fingers grazed against Dean's.

"You cold?" Dean asked.

Gabe cast a sideways glance toward Dean. "A little." A lie, but Gabe couldn't tell the truth.

Rising from his seat, Dean moved to the thermostat. "The weather report says the sleet should move out soon and the temperature is already rising a little."

“Good. Maybe Lou will actually do something about getting out of my apartment.”

Dean cleared his throat as he resumed his place on the couch. “And then what are you going to do?”

“Get on with my life. What else?” The question annoyed Gabe without him knowing exactly why. “I’m not going to fall apart if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Are you going to get tested?”

“Of course.” Gabe slammed his mug on the coffee table. Some of the dark hot liquid sloshed over the rim. Springing from the couch, Gabe paced the small living room. “I don’t really want to think about that right now.” As if he hadn’t been mulling it over in his mind since last night.

Fear chilled his blood and sent a shiver down his spine. His residual hangover throbbed in his temple, but the ache deep in his gut had nothing to do with alcohol. As terrified as Gabe was, he didn’t want Dean to know. His world was crashing around him. The only thing keeping him sane at the moment was the rigid control he exercised against his demons.

Although other things simmered on the edge of rigid—his cock continued to fixate on Dean’s lean body. Gabe suppressed a snort of laughter. He couldn’t blame his dick when his mind kept flashing brief visions of Dean trapped, thighs straddling thighs and hot tongues tangling in desperate need. And yet he couldn’t decide if it was a dream or if something happened last night. Dean wasn’t clueing him in either.

Gabe tugged his borrowed shirt lower, curling his hands into the hem to stretch the material over his crotch. “I need to go by the apartment. I need some clothes.”

“I’ll go with you.” Dean rose from his seat.

“You don’t have to—”

“I know, but if I’m there, Lou will be less likely to start something.” Dean grabbed the two mugs from the coffee table then headed to the kitchen.

Gabe's gaze lingered on the tight denim-covered ass for a few seconds. Retreating to Dean's bedroom where he'd stashed his shoes and coat, Gabe sighed with relief. A little activity – even if Dean insisted on accompanying him – was a welcome distraction.

* * * * *

Gabe huddled in the passenger side of Dean's SUV. The heater struggled to warm the large interior. Fortunately, the heat blasted Gabe's feet. His dress shoes from yesterday weren't very warm. Not to mention, he looked like a fool in too-tight sweats and athletic socks with his spit-and-polish oxfords and a cashmere overcoat.

A quick glance showed Dean with a frown on his face as he concentrated on the road. The sleet was mostly rain now, but patches of ice from last night speckled the pavement.

"Just need to grab some clothes," Gabe mumbled more to banish the uncomfortable silence than for any other reason. "I won't be but a minute. You don't have to come up."

"I told you I would. Lou won't get stupid in front of me." Dean's jaw clenched and a muscle ticked under scruffy day-old stubble.

A surge of desire warmed Gabe until his heavy coat almost stifled him. The urge to lean over, graze his fingernails over the rough whiskers – or better yet his lips – almost overwhelmed him. "I'm not worried about Lou. It's not like I can't handle him. For Christ's sake, I have six inches and fifty pounds on him."

"That's not what I'm worried about." Dean's words were barely more than a growled whisper.

"Then what? You think he's going to seduce me into staying?" Snorting laughter, Gabe shook his head. "Never happen. Even if he's stupid enough to try."

"You've forgiven him before."

"For missing important dates, for being a jerk – not for fucking around."

Dean glanced away from the road for a split second. His gaze locked with Gabe's. "I don't want you hurt any more than you already are."

Dean's deep brown chocolate eyes were almost melting with something Gabe couldn't define. Another flash of hot kisses and a hard body made Gabe jerk his head around. The wet, slushy remains of the sleet turned to a gentle rain as the vehicle pulled up to Gabe's apartment building.

For a second, Gabe wanted to insist Dean remain in the car, but the idea of having him near... A warmth of familiar comfort joined the harder heat of need. Dean had had Gabe's back since childhood. Having him here now was right.

"Let's go." Gabe yanked open the door and climbed out into the cold air.

Stepping over a puddle of slush, Gabe reached into his coat for his keys. A glance up at the apartment didn't tell him anything. The gray morning was dark enough to reveal lights in the apartment, but the reflection on the windows kept anything inside hidden. With a long sigh, Gabe started for the front door.

His mind elsewhere, he didn't notice the patch of icy sidewalk. His foot slipped, chilling liquid sloshed over the side of his shoe. Flinging his arms wide, he tried to regain some balance but it didn't help.

Dean's hard embrace caught him around the chest. A whoosh of breath teased his hair.

"Damn, you're heavy." Dean's hoarse grunt whispered in Gabe's ear.

"All muscle." Gabe laughed as he twisted in Dean's arms. As he got his feet under him, he came face-to-face with Dean.

Laughing threw a sparkle in Dean's eyes. His breath—a mix of coffee and mint toothpaste—breathed warm against Gabe's cheek. Dean's tongue flicked against his lower lip, almost as if he were getting ready to kiss—

Gabe pulled away. "Thanks." He tugged his overcoat together to hide the raging hard-on brought on by Dean's closeness. His brain sent an alert screaming through his mind. *Houston, we have a problem.*

* * * * *

The elevator ride was murder. Gabe couldn't stop thinking about Dean's lips. And his body. Kissing...hot, wet kisses. Fingers gripping his head, an arm around his waist. Heat and hard muscles. Cocks rubbing.

Fuck.

The entire vision of Dean was real. Gabe had made a pass at his best friend. He risked a fast glance at Dean. Calm, cheek a little red from the cold wind, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. But if they'd really been tangled in a passionate embrace last night, wouldn't Dean act different? Standoffish? Uncomfortable around Gabe?

The elevator doors opened before Gabe could think of anything to say. What could he say?

The apartment door swung open as Gabe reached it.

"What are you doing here? You said I had until tomorrow." Lou stood with his arm and foot braced against the inside of the door. The few inches didn't reveal much of the apartment but the sound of music blared from the living room.

"I need a few clothes." Gabe's temper flared as he blurted out the apologetic words. "And it is my fucking apartment." He slammed a hand against the door, pushing Lou out of the way.

Lou stumbled backward. "Well, make it quick. I have friends coming over any minute to *help* me."

Gabe's anger burned hot. He could only guess the kind of help. "Don't even think about taking anything that isn't yours. All the furniture is mine. I paid for it. The only thing you own is your clothes and personal things."

"I don't want your shit." Lou's sneer turned to a pout. "What's *he* doing here?" His gaze rested on Dean.

"He drove me over. And it's none of your business."

"Yeah." Lou crossed his arms and cocked his head. "Like you've kept that *business* all to yourself all these years."

"What the fuck?" Gabe spun on his heel to face his ex-lover.

"Don't go all innocent on me. You've been lusting after him for years." Lou's tone rose in his best drama-queen mode. Lou was infamous for going on the offense in an argument.

"Don't start that shit." Gabe chanced a fast glance at Dean.

Dean's expression was impassive but a red flush stained his cheeks. Leftover from the cold or pissed?

Gabe stormed past Lou toward the bedroom. He needed to get out of here fast before things got ugly. "Just make sure you're out of here by tomorrow night. And with only your things."

Lou snorted a sigh as he rolled his eyes and tilted his chin up.

"Take him seriously," Dean growled. "I know enough people in law enforcement to make your life a living hell for the next year or so."

As Gabe started down the hall, the sound of Dean's footsteps behind him provided relief. He didn't need Dean anywhere near the asshole if Lou was going to start that nonsense again.

A couple of years ago, Dean had been in an accident on the job. On the way to an emergency, his rescue unit had been broadsided by a teenager with music so loud the kid didn't hear the sirens. The teen survived with only a few scratches and some bruising. Dean—who was in the passenger side where the other vehicle hit—suffered a broken arm, a fractured collarbone and a mild concussion.

As soon as Gabe received word of the accident, he had rushed to the hospital. From the middle of Lou's birthday party. Lou wasn't happy and the insinuations started—*Gabe loved Dean more than Lou. Gabe wanted Dean.*

Months dragged on before Lou finally let it drop, but he'd bring it out on special occasions. And now...

Gabe glanced around the bedroom. The twisted sheets and comforter gave evidence to Lou's restless night. Then again... Gabe sniffed the air for the scent of sex. A small surge of relief washed through him. Not that he cared what Lou did now. He just didn't want him doing it in his bed.

"Humph." He didn't. Gabe really didn't give a rat's behind what Lou got up to. Not his problem anymore. With a long sigh, he dropped onto the foot of the bed.

"What's wrong?" Dean's eyes squinted as his gaze raked across Gabe's face.

"I really don't give a shit about him anymore."

"Really?" Dean closed the door then leaned against the dark wood. "You sure?" One side of Dean's mouth quirked in an almost smile.

"It just struck me. I mean, I'm still pissed – especially about the barebacking – but it doesn't hurt like it did last night."

"Why?" Dean tugged his coat off then tossed it toward an overstuffed chair near the door.

Gabe leaned back, resting his hands on the bed. "Things haven't been good between us for a while. I thought it was because all of the overtime. But maybe there was more to it."

"Is there someone else?" Dean's fingers caressed the doorknob.

"Not for me..." The light, circling touch on the cold metal sent sparks through Gabe as if Dean's fingers touched him instead. "Not really...maybe." He couldn't stop a grin from spreading across his face.

"I see." Dean's long fingers flipped the lock then he pushed away from the door. A couple of steps forward then he stopped. "And would I happen to know this new person?"

"Maybe." Gabe brought his hand forward, toward the increasing ache of desire in his groin. Tugging the baggy shirt down, he started to conceal the growing bulge. Instead, Gabe shoved the shirt up until his hand rested on his stomach.

A grin cracked Dean's face. "Looks like you have a little problem there." His tongue flickered out of his mouth then darted around his lips.

"I beg your pardon. There's nothing little about it." Gabe's mind raced with visions of touching Dean, holding, kissing, rubbing—lots of rubbing. "What happened last night?"

Dean sighed as he narrowed the gap between them. Kneeling between Gabe's legs, Dean's hands rested on his thighs. "Not as much as I wanted to happen." He squeezed Gabe's leg but his hands didn't move.

"So the things I keep seeing were real." But Dean's... "You're straight. Why?" Gabe couldn't stand the idea of screwing up a twenty-plus-year friendship, and sex was the fastest way to turn friends into enemies.

Dean shook his head as he stood. Moving to Gabe's side, he sat on the bed. "Always had stray thoughts that made me question my true sexuality. Just lately... You know I love you, right? Always have—best friends and all that."

"Yesss..." Gabe nodded. His heart beat a hard staccato. Hearing Dean say the words *I love you*, no matter the context, did more for his arousal than the idea of sex. Of course, Dean had to keep going to the friend thing.

"In the last year or so...well, I kept wondering what it would be like if we...were..." Dean drew a long breath then let it out slowly. "If we were more than friends."

"So last night I got stupid and you satisfied your curiosity." Part of Gabe wanted to reach out and caress. His hopes hovered between a future with Dean and the destruction of their friendship. Could there be an in-between option?

"No." Dean shook his head as his hand reached for Gabe's. "I'm fucking this up." He snorted a short laugh. "I'm probably fucking it up for good." With a short sigh then a deep breath, Dean said, "I want more than friends. I think I have for most of my life, I was just afraid to admit it. I didn't want to screw up our friendship." His words rushed out until he ran out of air. His fingers tightened around Gabe's hand. "Still don't."

Gabe didn't pull away. His breath caught at the possibility. The warmth of Dean's calloused hand sent fissures of need twirling through Gabe's body. His desire dampened as his gut roiled. His emotions flew in every direction only to come back to Dean's touch.

"Not a good idea." Shaking his head, Gabe pulled away from Dean. He should get up. Move as far away as he could.

"I kind of thought that myself." Dean's hand crept over to Gabe's thigh. "Why take a chance on fucking up our friendship for an itch, right?"

Disappointment tightened Gabe's throat. His eyes stung as he jumped to his feet. "Yeah. Right." Before he could take a step on shaking legs, Dean's hands pulled him back.

"But it's not an itch."

The back of Gabe's knees gave way when they hit the edge of the mattress. He fell onto the bed with a bounce. Words wouldn't form a coherent string so he stayed quiet. His chest ached as he held his breath, waiting for Dean's next words.

"Not *just* an itch." Dean grinned as he straddled Gabe's thighs. His hands pressed against Gabe's chest, fingers massaging Gabe's pecs. "And I think it's worth taking a chance."

Gabe shook his head. "If it doesn't work out, I'll have nothing left." Heat and pressure clouded Gabe's mind, but nothing could block his fear.

"If it doesn't work out, we'll still be friends. Nothing can take that away from us."

"But—" All thought disappeared under the heat of Dean's mouth. Hard kisses pressured Gabe's mouth open. Dampening desire rekindled into a bright flare, burning away Gabe's protests. "God..."

Wrapping one arm around Dean's back, Gabe pulled him lower until they lay chest to chest. Excitement electrified the air in a way Gabe hadn't felt in so many years. The

flare of heat for a new lover always faded with time, but past relationships had never started with such intense need.

The doorknob rattled through the muffled gasps and groans. A loud pounding startled Gabe and he pushed Dean off him. "Fuck." Second thoughts flooded him as Dean rolled away.

"What are you doing in there?" Lou's voice slid through the door like a bucket of ice water. Irritation colored his tone.

"Nothing," Gabe yelled. His voice dropped. "Nothing." Wiping his mouth with his sleeve, Gabe slid off the bed.

"We'll finish this later. My place. No interruptions." Dean's chocolate brown eyes glittered with a fierce intensity.

Gabe knew he'd buckle and end up in bed with Dean. He needed some breathing space. "I should stay here. Lou will probably rob me blind if I don't keep an eye on him."

As if to emphasize his words, Lou pounded on the door again. "Hey, my stuff is in there. You can't lock me out."

"Then I'm staying too." Dean scooted up the length of the bed. Grabbing a couple of pillows, he stacked them against the headboard. "Not leaving until we come to an understanding."

Lou's pounding grew louder and more anxious. Gabe's blood warred between anger and passion. Anger won—for now.

Stalking to the door, he yanked it open. "Fucking stop it!"

"It's my bedroom too." Lou pushed past Gabe. His gaze took in Dean's rumpled shirt and the casual pose on the bed. "You gonna fuck him here?"

The memory of Lou riding his Texas twinkie flew through Gabe's mind. A fog of red seemed to descend over the room—or at least Gabe's vision. "If I fucking want to!"

Gabe grabbed Lou by the arm and spun him through the door, slamming it behind him. Before Lou could react, Gabe twisted the lock.

“Really?” Dean piped up from the bed. His hand patted the vacant spot next to him. “Now we’re getting somewhere.”

“Oh shut the hell up.” Gabe turned then stormed into the master bath. Slamming yet another door felt good but not enough. Locking himself in, Gabe dropped the toilet seat then sat. “Now what do I do?”

Chapter Five

Dean leaned back on the bed with a soft chuckle. Things had taken an interesting twist. If Gabe were telling the truth about his feelings for Lou, Dean wouldn't be so hesitant about a relationship. Dean didn't want Gabe on the rebound but he decided he definitely wanted him.

Other people fell in love with their best friends. Why couldn't Dean?

"Damn." Dean stared at the bathroom door. He more than lusted after him. Even more than loved Gabe. He was *in* love with him. "Oh. Shit."

Tension cramped Dean's shoulders and neck. What if Gabe didn't feel the same way? The whole friends-turned-lover thing could be seriously compromised if Dean felt more than Gabe.

Crawling off the bed, Dean stumbled toward the bathroom. "Hey. Whatcha doin'?"

"Thinking."

"About what?"

"Stuff." Gabe's voice moved closer to the door.

"What kind of stuff?"

"Why are you coming on to me?" Gabe voice dropped to a hoarse whisper.

Dean pressed his forehead against the door. "Can we talk about this face-to-face?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Cause," Gabe said.

"That's not a reason."

"Cause I'll jump your ass and we'll never get to the discussion."

Dean laughed as he flattened both palms against the cool wood. "Well, then we could talk after."

"Not a good idea. I need to know first."

"Know what?" Dean bit his lower lip to keep from laughing.

"Why are you coming on to me?" Frustration bled through Gabe's tone.

Dean could only hope some of it was sexually stimulated. "Because I want you?"

"I'm asking the questions. And since when?"

"Don't know. Stray thoughts have invaded my mind at times—some very inappropriate ones, mind you. But I guess over the last few months things have...progressed." Dean didn't know how to explain it. He'd always had strong bisexual leanings but he'd never said anything to Gabe about it. Or anyone else. "Let's just say I was slow to find my way to this side of the closet."

A snort of laughter cackled from the other side of the door. "Must have been a huge fucking closet."

"Asshole." Dean knew he needed a better explanation. "I've always loved you as a friend. You know that, right?"

"Yeah. Me too. I mean, about you."

"Things have been so busy in the last year. What little free time I had, I wanted to spend with you. Dating just wasn't high on the list. But the more I thought about it, the more these...ideas kept popping up." Dean ran a fingernail down a groove in the paint of the door.

"So you want me because I'm convenient."

"No! Did I say that?"

Another snorted laugh penetrated the wood.

Dean shook his head, forehead still against the barrier between him and Gabe. "I realized that more than anything, I wanted to spend time with you."

"So hanging out equals making out?"

"God, you're an asshole." Dean slammed a palm against the door. "Will you come out of there?"

The lock clicked and the doorknob turned slowly. The hinges creaked and complained as Gabe opened the door. His blue eyes sparkled with humor to match the huge grin across his face. "So why do you want me?"

"Cause I think I more than love you. I'm pretty sure I'm *in love* with you. I didn't realize it until today. That's the difference."

Gabe barreled out of the bathroom. His strong, thick arms wrapped around Dean.

The tight embrace slammed the breath from Dean's lungs. "Easy, big boy." Dean slipped his arms around Gabe and held on for dear life.

Gabe drew a deep breath, inhaling the sweet, musky scent of his best friend. Many times he'd dreamed of holding Dean but never imagined it as reality. Or even conscious, for that matter. It really was subconscious dream material. Now... His body tingled with excitement and desire swirled in an ever-tightening ache in his groin.

Words caught in Gabe's throat. A soft moan escaped as he buried his face in Dean's neck.

Warm hands circled on his back. "So we're going to give this a try, huh?" Dean asked, his breath tickling Gabe's throat.

"Yeah. Maybe." Gabe swallowed hard. Less than a day and his life had changed in such an amazing way.

The restlessness that marred his relationship with Lou was just the shallow end of their problems. Even after six years they had so little in common, Gabe found it hard to believe they'd lasted as long as they had. With Dean, he had a lifetime of shared experiences and memories. Add the rush of desire threatening to sear his skin—surely this relationship had a chance of lasting forever.

Dean tilted his head back. A wide grin spread across his face. "As much as my imagination—and my Internet—has played through the possibilities, I'm really new to this but I know I want you."

"Oh. Yeah." Gabe swallowed hard. He'd be Dean's first. If Gabe screwed this up, the physical part of the relationship could be over real fast.

"But something tells me..." Dean's hand slid down Gabe's arm, stopping at his hand, "I think I'm going to like it." Cupping Gabe's hand over his erect cock, Dean rubbed the bulge in his jeans.

"Shit." Gabe shook his hand free of Dean's long enough to pop the button of Dean's jeans. The need to touch—taste—overwhelmed his sense of where he was. Flashes of last night's encounter taunted him, but the alcohol had dampened his ability to remember the intimate details.

Using his other hand, Gabe caught Dean behind the neck. Dean didn't resist when Gabe's lips met his. If anything, Dean seemed to welcome the kiss with matching enthusiasm.

Lips alternating between soft nips and hard bites. A warm tongue caressed the seam of his mouth. His brain in a fog, Gabe opened to the inquisitive flesh. A leftover hint of coffee flavor made Gabe seek more. Almost sweetness—so different from Lou's frequently smoke-and-alcohol-tainted kisses.

Gabe worked his hand into the tight jeans. Caressing the thick bulge, Gabe sighed into Dean's mouth.

Gabe had long ago learned caution when looking at other men. As his best friend, Gabe had seen Dean naked or near naked before, but he hadn't wanted to cause Dean any discomfort by staring. Accidental glances of Dean's flaccid flesh didn't prepare Gabe for the length and girth of the engorged flesh pressed against his palm.

"Damn..."

Dean pulled away from Gabe. One eye winked as he whispered, "That's a good damn, right?"

"Yeah, a damn good damn." Gabe kept his gaze locked with Dean's amused one. He kept waiting for a sign of panic, of hesitation, but Dean's grin never faltered.

Gabe slid the zipper down slowly, easing it past Dean's erection. He wanted to look down, sneak a peek at the hot flesh teasing his fingers. Instead, he stuck his hand inside Dean's soft cotton underwear then circled the hard cock with his fingers.

Dean's eyelids fluttered shut with a soft moan and a long sigh. "Yes..."

"What happened last night?" Gabe whispered as he set a long, slow pace, stroking Dean's length.

Dean's eyes stayed closed. His tongue darted out, swiping his lower lip, then whispered, "You climbed on my lap, on the couch. Kissed me. Hard." His lips curled in a grin as he dragged the word out to two syllables. "Like you did a minute ago." His eyelids popped open. The grin faltered but his soft brown eyes twinkled with amusement. "You were...I, ah, got your shirt open...our pants open..."

Gabe wasn't sure if Dean's verbal stumbling was from embarrassment or from Gabe's actions. "Did you like it?"

Dean leaned his head close to Gabe's neck. "Yeah..." The word breathed across Gabe's skin. "So hot. So hard..."

"What else happened?" Gabe asked. Part of him resented the fact he couldn't clearly remember the first time with Dean. He feared his imagination had supplied some of the details instead of his memory.

"Ended up lying on the couch." Dean's lips suckled Gabe's neck just above his collarbone. "Me on top." Dean wrapped his arms around Gabe's waist. His fingers dug into Gabe's ass cheeks.

A shudder swept through Gabe from both Dean's touch and his words. "Then what?"

"Lots of rubbing...cocks rubbing..." Dean nipped at Gabe's shoulder through the borrowed sweatshirt. "Kissing." His hands slipped inside the tight pants. "I came. You came." Dean's head popped up. A wide grin split his face. "You passed out."

"That's it?"

"Yeah. Interesting. Very interesting but not enough." Dean waggled his eyebrows.

Gabe shook his head. His hand cupped Dean's jaw. "I'm having some trouble wrapping my head around this."

"Why?" Dean's grin downsized to a soft smile.

"Can't be this easy." Gabe ran his thumb across Dean's lower lip. "As much as I'd like it to be. Until today, you've never said a word about being—"

"Interested?" Dean gasped as Gabe stroked Dean's length. His eyes rolled shut. He exhaled a long, low sigh.

"Curious." Gabe chuckled low. "You do seem to like it." Different desires warred within Gabe. Making love to Dean versus figuring out when Dean decided he was gay—or bi.

Another stroke and Dean's head lolled forward, hiding in Gabe's shoulder. "Oh yeah. More..."

Gabe released Dean's length long enough to push Dean's jeans down just below his hips.

The whole scene had a dreamlike quality. Was this really Dean breathing hard against Gabe's neck, or was Gabe's subconscious surfacing in his dreams? Add the fact Lou was in the next room, undoubtedly pouting, added to the surreal situation.

Dean's body leaned heavily against Gabe.

Standing in the bathroom doorway wasn't the best place for this... Bed? No. The damn thing squeaked when things started rocking. "Bathroom," Gabe murmured. An extra door between Lou and them would be a good thing.

Dean clutched the top of his jeans, keeping them from sliding down as he followed Gabe's shuffling steps.

Tugging Dean forward, Gabe backed into the bathroom then pushed the door closed. Changing directions, Gabe moved Dean back against the counter.

Releasing his hold on his clothes, Dean's jeans slid down his legs. His hands gripped the waist of Gabe's borrowed sweatpants.

The material strained with added tightness, brought on by Gabe's raging hard-on. Gabe needed relief soon. He'd spent his entire morning in various stages of arousal. Now with Dean yanking at his pants, freeing him from the confines of his sweats, Gabe was ready to burst.

"Easy, Dean..." One wrong touch and Gabe was a goner. He wanted to save his climax for... A cold shudder of fear whipped through his body. For what? Gabe could be infected with any number of diseases thanks to Lou. And because he and Lou didn't use condoms, Gabe wasn't likely to find one in the apartment.

The idea of exposing Dean to something cooled Gabe's desire but didn't quite deal with his erection.

"Wait..." Gabe pulled away from Dean's grasp. "It's not safe. I mean—"

"I know." Dean let go then leaned back against the counter. His cock tilted to the right. The tip of his cock glistened with pre-come. "Condoms?"

"Didn't use them. That's why it's not safe, remember? If I found one here, it'd probably be past the expiration date."

"Damn." Dean's fingers circled the base of his length. His thumb and forefinger created a circle around his cock. A long, slow stroke took his fingers from base to tip and back again.

Gabe's gaze locked on the sight as Dean repeated his motion. Reaching inside his sweats, Gabe palmed the length of his own cock. "Keep that up and I'll come from watching."

A wide grin split Dean's lips. "Watching, huh? Kind of kinky." Dean hastened his stroke a little.

Gabe swallowed hard. "Don't know if I can just watch and not touch." Wrapping his hand around his dick, Gabe squeezed tight. As he licked his lips, his brain returned to work. "You're clean, right?"

"Yes." Dean nodded as his hand traveled up and down his length again.

"Good." Gabe took two long steps to close the gap between them then dropped to his knees.

Dean didn't have to be encouraged. Pulling his hand away from his dick, Dean used it to prop up his body against the counter.

Wrapping his hand around Dean's flesh, Gabe leaned in to tease the tip with his tongue.

"Fuck!" Dean's hands gripped the edge of the counter, knuckles turning white.

"God, I wish!" Gabe circled the crown with his tongue as he slid his fingers down toward the base. Fingers wrapped tight formed a makeshift cock ring. Gabe didn't want Dean to shoot too soon. After so many fantasies about his best friend, Gabe wanted to savor the experience.

The thought echoed through his mind. His best friend... Fear teased a shiver down his spine. Gabe didn't want to lose his best friend. What would happen to their relationship if things went stale as lovers?

The instinct to stop now wasn't as strong as Gabe's need for Dean. Not with things so far gone.

Gabe wrapped his mouth around the crown of Dean's cock. Releasing the tight hold on the base, Gabe stroked his fingers up to meet his mouth. As his hand returned to the base, Gabe's mouth followed. The taste and feel of Dean's length edged Gabe toward climax. His dick ached with unfulfilled need. A simple touch would finish him.

Dean's hips flexed with each stroke of Gabe's mouth. His hands stayed locked on the edge of the counter. A quick glance up revealed an open mouth and closed eyes. Was Dean thinking of Gabe or was his mind inserting a woman in his place?

Doubt tried to distract Gabe, but his body's needs outweighed his racing thoughts. With one hand holding Dean's cock steady, the other dropped to Gabe's dick. With a hard yank of material, Gabe freed his flesh from the tight sweats. Fisting his cock hard and fast, Gabe took more of Dean's length in long, almost-gagging strokes.

Dean's body tried to match his pace but moved in erratic jerks. Then hands grasped Gabe's head in a tight vise grip. With Gabe's motions stilled, Dean took over. Dean's strokes weren't as deep as Gabe had forced himself, but the fierce hold on Gabe was more than arousing.

With one hand on Dean's hip, Gabe's other stroked his cock to completion. Warm come splattered over his hand. Soft groans mingled with grunts as Dean pumped Gabe's mouth.

A short bark of a cry was all the warning Gabe had. A thick gush of come flooded his mouth. Dean's hips pulled back but Gabe followed him, keeping his mouth wrapped around Dean's flesh.

Trapped between the counter and Gabe, Dean pulled at Gabe's hair, but Gabe wouldn't relinquish his prize. Gulping hard, Gabe barely kept up with the volume.

"Oh shit. Enough." Dean's fingers tugged harder, twisting short strands of hair into tight, painful tweaks.

Gabe released Dean's softening flesh. Leaning his head back, he caught Dean's glassy-eyed glaze. "Sensitive, huh?"

"Yes." Dean exhaled the word with a hard breath. His hands cupped the sides of Gabe's face. "And fucking amazing."

Gabe struggled to his feet on weak knees. "Yes. It was amazing." His body leaned into Dean's, his head on Dean's shoulder. Their half-erect cocks rubbed against each other's bodies. "But I'm still not convinced this is a good idea."

With regret so intense his throat ached, Gabe release Dean and pulled away. "No. Can't do this. Not yet."

"Why not?" Dean's forehead creased in a deep frown. His hands rested on Gabe's hips.

"I need to think. This is hitting me too fast." Gabe cupped Dean's jaw. His thumb ran across Dean's lower lip. "I don't know if this is what I want right now." As Dean started to speak, Gabe pressed his thumb against Dean's mouth. "Or maybe I should say what I need right now 'cause God knows I want you."

Confusion warred with desire. Although Gabe knew his relationship with Lou had been dead for a while, jumping into bed with anyone—especially Dean—wasn't a smart idea. If things didn't work out, Gabe could lose his best friend. Not to mention the possibility of being exposed to HIV. He wouldn't risk Dean as Lou had him.

Gabe pressed his forehead against Dean's with a long sigh. "You should go home. Give me time to think. I'll be fine here."

"What about your car?" Dean's breath washed warmth across Gabe's face.

"I don't need it until Monday. Once Lou's out tomorrow, I'll come by and get it."

Dean's hands tightened on Gabe's hips. "Maybe we can talk more then?"

"Maybe."

Gabe didn't resist when Dean tilted his head then pressed a soft kiss against his lips. Tight control kept Gabe from demanding more. Life seemed to be taking a strange path right now and Gabe wasn't sure he could handle the ride.

* * * * *

Dean stared at his bedroom ceiling. The rising sun flushed the room with a rosy glow. The gloom and doom of yesterday's weather must have passed. The nooks and crannies of spackling came into view as the room brightened with sunlight. Sleep-deprived eyes blinked for focus.

"I shouldn't have left him there. Not without talking." It wasn't the first time Dean whispered the words to the empty room. Probably wouldn't be the last.

Rolling over, Dean punched his pillow before he settled again, this time staring at the window. He'd always had feelings of attraction to both sexes, but he'd stuck with heterosexual relationships. He hadn't had a biological imperative to take up with men. Just an attraction more than friendship with some. Gabe especially.

His brief encounters with Gabe so far made him want more, but his initial doubts nagged at the edges of his thoughts. Losing his twenty-something-year friendship with Gabe would be more heartbreaking than not pursuing an intimate relationship. Or would it?

Dean's throat tightened with emotion. He knew what he wanted – needed – but the ball was in Gabe's court. If Gabe refused to consider Dean as anything other than a friend, Dean would have to go along with the decision.

But...a thrill of desire circled low in his belly then teased through his groin. The touching, the kissing, Gabe's amazing mouth – need flashed heat through Dean, dispelling the cool morning nip in the air. His body knew what he wanted from Gabe. Fueled by the memory of yesterday's bathroom encounter, Dean's semihard morning wood stiffened into a serious hard-on.

After scratching a path down his stomach, Dean flattened his hand on his cock, pressing the hot flesh against his lower stomach. The pressure reminded him of the mutual rub-off with Gabe. The hard body writhing under Dean, thrusting upward, pushing into his abdomen, bumping cock to cock.

Dean closed his eyes and let the memory of whiskey-flavored kisses and passionate groans wash over him. His thumb and fingers circled the crown of his cock then squeezed. A sharp spike of pleasure caught his breath. Wrapping his hand around his flesh, Dean pulled the length. With no lubrication, the sensation was rough, especially over his sensitive glans.

Rough and masculine. Like Gabe's hands. Like yesterday at the apartment when Gabe's hand had wrapped around Dean's dick. Heat had seared through Dean with an intensity he'd never experienced. Even Gabe's drunken mauling hadn't turned him on like that short contact. And then the most incredible blow job Dean had ever had.

With Gabe's judgment impaired, Dean's conscience had plagued him. But yesterday, stone-cold sober, Gabe wanted him as much as Dean wanted Gabe. Nothing to cloud Gabe's minds except his doubt. Doubt that could keep them apart.

Dean pushed aside his fears. Gabe would have to see their friendship could survive the next step. He had to.

Focusing on positive possibilities, Dean drew an image of Gabe in his mind. One with hot kisses, hard bodies, naked, entwined, cocks grinding...

Dean ran his hand up and down his dick with long, slow strokes. Hints of moisture gathered on the silky tip aided the increasing pace of flesh sliding against flesh.

The blankets surrounding him grew too confining. Pushing the warm cocoon down, chilly air rushed in but didn't affect his rising passion. Need pulsed through his body, mimicking his heart rate. His hips pumped upward, pushing his dick through his hand.

"Gabe..." If only Gabe were here, his mouth devouring Dean's in hard kisses. His hands gripping Dean, exploring his body. Fingers prodding cracks and holes... "Oh fuck!"

Warm, wet pleasure striped Dean's chest and stomach. His hand, slick with semen, milked another spurt of come then another. Slowing his motions, he gentled his grip as he gasped for air.

"Damn..." Dean didn't know what he'd do if Gabe didn't decide in his favor.

One thing he knew – his bisexual leanings were taking over his fantasies. Even his occasional porn viewing had turned strictly gay. At first, he'd drifted away from straight to threesomes – usually ones where the men interacted with each other. Then Dean's searches left the women behind.

Dean shivered in the nippy morning air as his come cooled on his skin. As much as he wanted Gabe, Dean was sure of one thing. Even if Gabe didn't want him, Dean's curiosity would demand satisfaction soon.

* * * * *

Lounging on the bed fully clothed, Gabe's gaze discreetly followed Lou around the bedroom, taking note of what he stuffed into the open suitcase on the bed. His thoughts couldn't stick to the issue at hand and kept wandering off to Dean. The sooner Lou got his shit together and out of here, the sooner Gabe would see Dean.

His pouting soon-to-be-ex strutted around in tight black boxers as if to show Gabe what he'd be missing. Lou bent over every few minutes, wiggling his ass in the air.

"You'll miss me," Lou finally said with a huff of exasperation.

"Nope. Won't." Gabe schooled his expression into bland neutrality. As angry as he was, Gabe knew losing his temper would only work against him. Lou's overwhelming ego would feed on the attention from a good argument. Ignoring him, on the other hand, would drive Lou to distraction.

After six years, Gabe would have thought there'd be some truth to Lou's words. But he felt nothing. A little fear, yes, because Lou might have exposed him to HIV. For the loss of the relationship and Lou himself? Nothing.

Something must be wrong with him. So many years down the tubes and all Gabe wanted to think of was Dean.

"You are already fucking Dean, aren't you?" Lou propped his fists on his hips.

"No. I'm not." Gabe rolled off the bed. His height alone was enough to make Lou take a short step back. "And neither is he fucking me." Sudden anger resurged. "Why would you risk us both by screwing around unprotected?"

Lou rolled his eyes. "I didn't take that many chances and I always asked if they were clean."

"And you – the epitome of honesty – expected them to answer truthfully?"

"Why wouldn't they? It wasn't like I wouldn't fuck 'em. We'd just use a rubber."

Gabe shook his head at Lou's faulty logic. "Have you ever thought they might not know? They could have been exposed but hadn't been tested yet?"

Lou's eyes open wide then narrowed. "I'm sure I'm clean." With a disdainful sniff, he turned back to his packing. "So you don't have to worry about it."

"Well, thank you for that pronouncement, Lou. If you don't mind, I think I'll get tested anyway."

"Whatever."

A loud knock on the front door interrupted them.

"That'll be Hank." Lou took off into the living room, still half naked.

Gabe shook his head as he followed. Why had he spent six years of his life with this man?

Leaning against the doorframe, he watched Lou with his friend Hank. How close a *friend* was he? Had Lou cheated with Hank as well? Tall, broad-shouldered but not as bulky as Gabe, Hank was a good-looking man. His personality, however, left something to be desired. With a mean sense of humor and quick to take offense, Hank wasn't someone Gabe wanted to be around much. Plus his thin face and squinty eyes always seemed to be laughing at Gabe.

Maybe because he was fucking Lou?

Gabe waited for the jealousy to boil up but it didn't. With a shrug, Gabe headed for the kitchen. His stomach growled with hunger. He hadn't bothered with more than coffee this morning and it was well past lunchtime now. Almost dinner.

With their heads close together, Lou and Hank whispered in low, urgent tones. Hank's hand cupped Lou's upper arm in a more-than-familiar manner.

Again, Gabe felt no response. With a long sigh, he wondered when the relationship had died. Someone forgot to invite Gabe to the funeral.

"You need to give Lou some money." Hank's voice surprised Gabe. For a big man, he moved very quietly.

Gabe twirled around to face Hank. "Why the hell would I give him money?"

"Because you're throwing him out of his home." Hank puffed up his chest and straightened his back. Even so, Gabe still had nearly three inches on him.

"I'm throwing him out of *my* apartment. Because I caught him cheating on me. He has a job. He should have significant money in savings because he certainly didn't contribute much here. So I'm not giving him a dime." Gabe's anger finally surged and he took a step toward Hank.

Stepping back, Hank had the good sense to look afraid. "We'll call a lawyer."

"I am a lawyer, you fucking moron. Lou doesn't have a case. Now both of you get out of my apartment!"

Hank scurried out of the kitchen. Grabbing a box near the door, he beat a hasty escape.

Watching Hank retreat, Lou's shoulders raised and lowered with a long sigh. "I'm going to have to stay with him." Lou turned to face Gabe. The first true regret registered on his face.

Gabe snorted an unsympathetic laugh then returned to the kitchen. Evidently Lou's only regret had nothing to do with Gabe and everything to do with what Gabe provided in the way of creature comforts.

Yeah, it's over. And good riddance.

Chapter Six

Dean hadn't heard from Gabe all day. Staring at his cell phone sitting on the coffee table, Dean willed it to ring. He decided to wait for Gabe to call him, but his patience was wearing thin. He was a little worried but it was almost eleven. Dean didn't think he'd hear from him tonight.

The possibility of Gabe getting back with Lou seemed slim but they did have a history. Even Gabe's reassurances yesterday that things had been bad between him and Lou for a long time didn't ease Dean's fears. Or the surprising rush of jealousy the idea created.

The television droned on just fine without Dean's attention. His gaze wandered to the living room window. The dim light of the street lamps filtered through trees lining the sidewalk. Winter wind had picked up after a fairly mild day. The howling sound added to Dean's darkening mood.

After all that asshole did to Gabe, if he went back to Lou... Dean's blood boiled at the idea of Lou endangering Gabe. What kind of idiot took chances like that these days? Self-destructive jerk.

As quickly as the anger heated him, sober thought cooled him. If Dean got involved with Gabe, he could be risking his health as well. Maybe jumping Gabe's bones just yet wasn't the best idea. The smart thing to do would be to wait until Gabe had time to be tested. But he wasn't very smart when it came to Gabe.

HIV terrified Dean as much as it did Gabe, but his attraction to Gabe wasn't just physical. As turned-on as the idea of being with a man was for him, Dean wanted the man to be Gabe. Seeking out someone else would be a last-choice option if Gabe absolutely rejected him.

No. Dean had waited this long. HIV couldn't change his feelings, wouldn't change his mind. Plenty of people lived with HIV-positive partners. Safe sex wasn't foolproof but it was damn close if you were careful.

If Gabe needed time and space, Dean would give it to him, but he wouldn't give up. Dean could turn on the charm when he needed to. If Gabe had to be wooed and convinced, Dean was up to the task.

Staring at his phone, he saw the light flash before the ring sounded. He snagged the phone and answered without looking at the caller ID.

"Hello?"

"Dean?" Gabe's tone seemed unsure.

"Yeah."

"You didn't sound like you."

Dean blushed. He probably sounded breathless. He felt as if he'd been holding his breath all day. "Phone startled me."

"Were you asleep? I just realized how late it is."

"No," Dean answered. "Just lost in thought." He didn't want to admit he'd been hovering over his phone all day. Not yet. He wanted to see what kind of mood Gabe was in first. "Lou gone?"

"Yeah. Finally. He left about an hour ago. Still bitching about having to leave."

"Unbelievable. What a set of balls!"

Gabe's laugh snuffled through the phone. "Not to look at, mind you."

The heat of jealousy flushed through Dean. "TMI again."

"I thought you wanted to check out my side of the fence." The humor melted from Gabe's tone.

"I do. I just don't want to hear any intimate details about *him*."

"Do I detect a tone of jealousy in your voice?"

"Maybe..." Dean refused to admit how jealous just yet. He didn't want to scare Gabe away.

"I kind of like that. Lou was never very possessive. Except where you were concerned." Gabe's rueful chuckle was almost too low to catch. "Of course, he threw his little fits but I don't think he really believed I was fooling around. I'm not sure he would have actually cared. Probably wanted to believe I was as guilty as he was to soothe his conscience. If he had one..."

"Well, he's gone and it's just the two of us left. Have you thought more about that—the two of us?" Dean bit his lower lip as Gabe's sigh traveled through the phone.

"Yes."

"And?" Dean's hopes started to rise.

"I don't know."

"Don't know what specifically? Give me something to work with."

"Things are changing too fast. I'm not sure I can jump into another relationship right now. Definitely not sure you're ready to jump into bed with me."

"Oh, I'm sure about that part. Absolutely sure of that part." Dean's cock woke up and agreed. He ran his hand over his denim-covered length.

"But you've never —"

"At one time, I'd never had sex with a woman but I knew I wanted it."

"And now you want sex with a man. Or is it just me?"

Dean wasn't sure how to answer that question. He wanted sex with a man, but Gabe wasn't the only one he'd gotten wood over. Did Gabe want to hear that? Honesty forced him to answer truthfully. "Sex with a man. But preferably you."

"Really?" Gabe's disbelief came through loud and clear.

"Yes. Really."

"Since when?"

"Since when what? Sex with a man or with you?" Dean couldn't stop his teasing tone.

"Both," Gabe replied.

"Always... I mean, I've gotten hard watching other guys for a long time. Even as far back as high school. I just never did anything about it."

"Why not?" Disappointment colored Gabe's words.

"Mainly because I also got hard for women. I knew about gay, I knew about straight, but for a long time I didn't realize I could fall somewhere in between. Since I was attracted to women, I decided I was straight. Seemed easier after watching some of the shit you went through."

"So you're bi?"

"Well, the evidence certainly points to it, don't you think?" Dean laughed.

"Yeah. I guess." Gabe paused for a few seconds. "What made you decide to branch out all of a sudden?"

Dean chuckled at Gabe's choice of words. "I don't know. Bored. Surfing the web, I discovered some gay sites. Read some blogs, checked out some porn. Which turned me on like..." Dean exhaled hard, "like I hadn't been in a long time."

"Hmmm... Anything in particular?" Gabe's tone dropped lower, softer.

"A lot of things. Blow jobs fascinate me."

Gabe snorted. "Every guy likes blow jobs. I'd probably let a woman suck me if she offered."

"Yeah. But I'd like to try giving one. To you." The idea had fascinated Dean lately, but saying it aloud sent heat washing through him. Of course, a lot of things fascinated him these days. The idea of Gabe's cock pressing into his ass was on the top of that list.

A strangled groan came through the phone.

Dean pushed his advantage. "Wouldn't you like that? Me on my knees. Lips wrapped around your cock?"

A half-sobbed moan ended with a choked, "God."

"I probably wouldn't be very good. Considering I've never done it before." Dean slipped the button of his jeans free. *Might as well get comfortable.* "You'd have to tell me what to do." The phone was so quiet, Dean wondered if he'd lost the connection. "You still there?"

"Yes."

Dean pulled his zipper open slowly, one metal tooth at a time. "Why so quiet?" Holding back a soft gasp, Dean slipped his hand inside his briefs. Palming his warm flesh, he waited for an answer.

"Sorry." A soft gasp followed Gabe's reply. "Distracted."

"Hmmm... Is that a good or bad distraction?"

"Neither." A car horn sounded through the phone line on Gabe's end. "Okay. Maybe bad."

"Are you driving?"

"Not really. My car is at your place, remember? Hang on a minute." Muffled voices on Gabe's end of the phone were too garbled for Dean to make out. "Thanks."

A grin pulled at Dean's lips. "Where are you?"

"Climbing out of a cab in front of your apartment building."

Dean yanked his hand from his pants then jumped up from his seat. Almost sprinting to the window, Dean squinted into the darkness.

A taxi's "on duty" light shone down the street as the vehicle drove away. Gabe's dark figure stood still on the sidewalk.

"Come on up." Excitement shivered through Dean's body. Maybe tonight...

A sigh puffed against the phone on Gabe's end. "I should just get my car."

Dean nodded in spite of the fact Gabe probably couldn't see him. Maybe he was rushing things. Just because Gabe had made the first move didn't mean he was

interested in something other than friendship. Besides, Gabe had been drunk. "If you think that's best. Of course, your car isn't here. We left it at the bar."

Gabe's deep chuckle relieved some of Dean's tension. "So coming here was some kind of Freudian slip?"

"Maybe." His breath left an obscuring fog on the window. Dean ran his sleeve over the circle of condensation. Gabe still hadn't moved. "Isn't it cold out there?"

"Freezing my balls off."

"Then come up. I promise not to check your statement for truthfulness. Unless of course you want me to." Dean held his breath as Gabe's shadowy figure took a step toward the front of the building.

"I'll come up if you behave yourself."

"Promise." Disappointment helped deflate Dean's cock. Cradling the phone between his shoulder and ear, he tucked his half-erect flesh back in his jeans and carefully pulled up the zipper. Showing up at the door with his dick hanging out wasn't exactly behaving.

The phone went dead as Gabe disappeared into the building below.

Dean glanced around the room. The lighting was subtle—just a single lamp on an end table near the couch. Not intentionally romantic and very normal. The television murmured low on a cop show Dean had lost interest in a while ago.

Deciding the apartment was fine the way it was, Dean moved to the door and cracked it open. Gabe could let himself in. Wandering to the kitchen, Dean yanked open the refrigerator. Four beers, a half a bottle of soda and several small bottles of water. Not much to offer.

The door creaked open in the living room. "You want something to drink?" Dean yelled without looking up.

"Beer?"

"Coming up." Dean grabbed a couple of longnecks between the fingers of his left hand. "Hungry?" Not that there was much to offer. It really was too late to eat anyway. Dean would rather forgo the usual niceties of a normal Gabe visit. His thoughts kept straying to other things to taste.

Dean forced his thoughts elsewhere as his cock twitched with renewed interest.

"Not really hungry."

Gabe's nearness startled Dean. He hadn't heard him enter the kitchen. "Okay." A flush of heat brushed Dean's face. Almost afraid to turn around, Dean handed a beer around to Gabe.

"Unless you want something," Gabe said. He opened the beer with a soft pop and hiss. The lid hit the trash can with a small clunk.

"No." Dean shrugged. "Just thinking...need to buy some groceries." Pushing the refrigerator closed, Dean then turned toward Gabe.

A slight smile crooked one side of Gabe's mouth. "So you want to talk?" His eyes glittered with blue sparkles as he bit his lip against a grin.

"Not really." Dean's jeans tightened with the rise of his wayward dick. "But you don't want me to jump you either, so talk is all that's left. That or watching television in silence."

"It's not as if I don't want—I just don't know if it's such a good idea."

Dean leaned against the refrigerator. "Why?"

Gabe let his smile widen. "As much as I'd like to jump your ass, I can live without it. I can't live without your friendship."

Jump your ass... Visions of Gabe doing other things to his ass flashed through Dean's mind. Dean forced his brain to focus on the rest of Gabe's words. "Why do you think you'd ever lose that?"

"Because we can be friends forever." Gabe shook his head. "Lovers break up."

"Not always."

"But it's a possibility."

Dean pushed away from the support of the fridge. "Yeah, and it's a possibility I'll get hit by a car tomorrow crossing the street—but I'm not going to hide in my apartment to avoid anything happening."

"So many people I know don't last and then they never speak to each other again. Look at me and Lou."

A half laugh popped out before Dean could stop it. "You and Lou got together because you had a physical attraction—not that I ever understood what you saw in him. And I have no idea why you two stayed together so long, but you never had a friendship to begin with. I'm not sure you ever became friends."

Gabe sighed and shook his head. "Probably not. But being friends first doesn't guarantee we'll survive being lovers." His thumb circled the lip of his beer bottle. The image of Gabe's finger circling a dark hole didn't help Dean's concentration.

"Nope. It doesn't." Dean dragged his gaze back to Gabe's face. "But it does guarantee we can go back to being friends." Dean took another step toward Gabe. "After twenty-something years, can you imagine anything that would take that away from us?"

"I guess not. But is it worth chancing?" Gabe's small shrug gave Dean hope.

"I think so." Another step brought Dean close enough to feel Gabe's sigh. "Can you imagine anything better than the two of us together—in every way imaginable—forever?" To control the urge to touch Gabe too soon, Dean clenched both hands around his unopened and almost forgotten beer.

Gabe's gaze narrowed and a small frown creased his forehead. "Forever? This isn't just about a buddy fuck for the sake of curiosity?"

"Never. I told you I love you—I'm in love with you."

"No," Gabe pursed his lips as he shook his head. "You said you *thought* you were in love with me."

Dean grinned. "I was trying to break it to you gently." Raising his hand, he ran a finger down Gabe's jaw to his collarbone. The visible shiver was gratifying.

"So you really are in love with me?"

"Yep."

Gabe lifted his hand to Dean's then wrapped his fingers around Dean's fingers. "What if I'm not in love with you?"

"Oh." Dean stepped back, pulling his hand from Gabe's grasp. "I...uh..." Disappointment swept through Dean like a sharp chill. "Didn't think. Sorry."

Clutching his beer, he darted around Gabe, practically running for the living room. "Want to watch some TV?" He wanted to keep going, hide in his room and hope Gabe would leave. Embarrassment flushed his skin and warmed his face.

Maybe Gabe was right. If Gabe's rejection sent him into hiding from his best friend now, what would happen if they didn't make it long-term?

"Hey. I didn't say I wasn't." Gabe footsteps followed him across the room. A strong hand caught Dean's shoulder. "Stop, will you?"

Dean did as Gabe asked but didn't turn around. He hadn't been such a bonehead since high school when he automatically assumed Mary Chambers would agree to go to the junior prom with him. He'd ended up alone then as well.

"Dean—" Gabe slipped around him.

Resisting the childish urge to turn away, Dean took a deep breath then raised his face to meet Gabe's gaze. "I'm sorry. I got carried away after the other night, yesterday. I shouldn't have assumed it meant anything more than revenge on Lou."

"I admit my memory of what happened the other night still isn't completely clear. I also realize I made the first move." Gabe clasped Dean's shoulders with both hands. "It's not as if I hadn't thought about you like that before. I couldn't really help it at times. But I never thought you'd welcome the attention. Actually, I figured best friend or not, you'd punch me in the face."

"So now what do we do?" Dean's heart jumped to his throat.

"Now I'm thinking. But you have to understand the difference between some movies on the Internet and reality. Gay sex isn't all that neat and easy as it looks in porn."

"I know that. I'm not stupid. And I didn't just watch porn. I read up on...things." Things that made his skin burn and his cock hard. This time the flush heating Dean's skin was more than just embarrassment.

"And did you read up on AIDS?" Gabe's teasing tone sobered.

Anger with Lou washed through Dean. The son of a bitch shouldn't have risked Gabe. "I understand AIDS. I'm an EMT, remember?"

"So it could be months before I'm sure I'm clean. Maybe we should wait."

"No." Dean shook his head. "It won't make a difference. Whether you have it or not, I'm in this for the long haul."

Nodding, Gabe's mouth split in a wide grin. His eyes glazed with moisture. "Good." His hands slid from Dean's shoulder, down his arms then wrapped around Dean's waist. A rough embrace pulled Dean close. "Good," Gabe whispered near Dean's ear.

Dean clutched his beer against Gabe's back as he returned the tight hug. With a long sigh of relief, Dean buried his face in Gabe's neck. "Thank God."

A soft chuckle vibrated through Gabe's chest. Gabe's warmth chased away a trace of fear hidden deep in Dean. So much had happened in such a short time, but it seemed like an eternity had passed since Dean realized how deep his feelings were for Gabe.

"So where do we go from here?" Dean asked. He inhaled deep, letting Gabe's masculine scent tease his senses. Desire curled through his body with his breath. His cock resumed its on-again, off-again erection. Definitely on again...

"I'd suggest we go slow and see where things take us. Then again," Gabe rolled his hips forward, pressing a hard bulge into Dean's lower stomach, "we may already be past slow."

"Oh, definitely past slow." Dean slid his free hand up Gabe's back then curled his fingers over Gabe's hard shoulder. Dean tilted his head up toward his taller friend. "We can always start with kissing and work our way toward other stuff."

"Good idea." Gabe brushed his lips across Dean's cheekbone. "Although I've found kissing..." puckering his lips, Gabe pecked a fast kiss on Dean's mouth, "can lead to other..." another quick meeting of mouths, "interesting things pretty quick."

With a frustrated grunt, Dean grabbed the back of Gabe's neck then held his head still. This time when their mouths met, Dean took advantage of Gabe's huff of laughter. His tongue slid between Gabe's lips, glancing off the hard smoothness of his teeth.

A rush of warmth and need collided with a tenderness Dean didn't remember ever experiencing. The idea of being with Gabe as friend and lover was something he'd never really thought seriously about until this weekend. Now...

A soft moan accompanied a tighter embrace. The strength of Gabe's arms was a bit of a surprise.

The sheer power of Gabe's body would be an interesting change from the women Dean had dated. And a highly arousing one if the rush of need flowing straight to his cock were any indication.

A strong hand traveled up and down Dean's back. His sweatshirt crumpled up and stayed a little higher on his back with each motion. Finally, Gabe's warm hand slid along Dean's spine.

Pushing forward Dean sought pressure for his erection. Sweet desire surged through him as their bodies pressed together. Gabe's hand dropped down to Dean's ass then paused to encourage the closeness with a firm grasp.

"Yeah. I think slow is out," Gabe murmured between short nips of Dean's lips. "Now the decision is between bed or couch."

"Bed. Definitely bed." Dean didn't want to let go. He maintained a tight grip on Gabe as he shuffled backward toward the bedroom.

Gabe's chuckle teased Dean's mouth. "Don't I get a choice?"

"No. You chose the couch last time." Dean's impatience forced him away from Gabe. With more room to maneuver, he grabbed Gabe's arm then yanked him the last few steps to the bedroom.

"Not fair. I don't remember the couch." In spite of his protests, Gabe followed Dean through the door. A slight tug backward slowed Dean's momentum. "Please tell me you have condoms and some kind of lube in here."

"Lube?" Dean jerked around to face Gabe. "Damn!"

Gabe's frown flipped as he roared with laughter. "Your face is priceless." Wrapping Dean in a tight embrace, Gabe's laugh lowered to a chuckle. "We can manage without. Plenty of other stuff to do."

"No..." Mentally kicking himself, Dean's mind raced through anything that would work for lube.

Laughing, Gabe rested his hands on Dean's hips. "Anxious to get your dick up my ass, huh?" He tugged Dean forward so their groins bumped together.

"What?" Realization penetrated Dean's frantic thoughts. "The other way around." Dean flushed at the hungry look that swept over Gabe's face.

"Fuck!" A visible shiver swept through Gabe's body.

Dean snorted with laughter. "That was the idea. Unless you don't want to."

"Oh, want to. Definitely want to." Gabe's arms wrapped around Dean, squeezing so hard Dean's breath caught.

A sudden shudder whipped down Dean's spine. Desire so intense it made his throat ache kept him from responding. This relationship would work. How could it not when Gabe's embrace melted Dean's heart at the same time it hardened his flesh.

Buzzing interrupted Dean's thoughts. "What's that?"

Gabe removed one arm. His hand fumbled at this belt. "Freaking phone." With his other arm still around Dean, Gabe glanced at the caller ID. "Shit."

"What's wrong?" Dean craned his neck to see the phone but couldn't read the screen.

"My doorman. I asked him to call me if Lou showed up again." Gabe popped the phone open as he murmured, "Got to take it."

"Yeah. Definitely." Dean held in a sigh of disappointment as Gabe released him and took a couple of steps away.

"Don't let him in. He shouldn't have a key but I don't trust him." Gabe paused for the doorman's reply. "Yes, you can. He doesn't live there. Not on the lease. I pay the rent." Another pause. "Okay, fine. Just make him wait. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Dean tried to hide his frustration but it wasn't easy. "What the fuck does Lou want now?"

"Claims he forgot some stuff."

"Didn't the doorman tell him you weren't home?"

Gabe pocketed his phone. "Yeah but Lou claims he has a key and I haven't had time to change the locks."

"Shit."

"I have to go." Gabe pulled Dean into a strong embrace then kissed him hard, deep with a warm, inquisitive tongue. One hand kneaded into the muscles in Dean's back while the other gripped a handful of Dean's ass. With a hard puff of air, Gabe pulled away. "And I'll come back with lube."

"Oh no you don't." Dean wasn't letting him get away that easy. Lou might prove more troublesome than Gabe expected. "I'm going with you."

"You don't have to. Lou will just try to irritate you."

"Too late. He already has." Dean ran his fingers down Gabe's jaw. "Besides, your car is still more than two blocks away at Mack's. We'll be faster if we take my car."

A grin split Gabe's face. "Okay. And there's lube at my place. Grab the condoms because I don't have any!"

Dean buried his face in Gabe's chest with a groan. His cock was ready to drill concrete already. He wasn't sure he'd last until they had time to do anything about it.

Chapter Seven

“Stop it!”

Gabe laughed as Dean swatted his hand. With Dean driving the car, Gabe concentrated on driving Dean crazy. “Just trying to keep things warm.” Once again, he ran his hand up the inside of Dean’s thigh. This time he stopped just short of his groin.

“If things get any warmer, I’ll set fire to the seat.” Squirming, Dean glanced toward Gabe then back to the road.

Gabe squeezed Dean’s thigh then pulled his hand away. Already after midnight, traffic was light. The drive to Gabe’s apartment wouldn’t take more than ten minutes then Gabe would have to deal with Lou – again. Hopefully for the last time.

Catching Lou with his Texas twink seemed like a lifetime ago instead of just days. Gabe had trouble remembering why he’d stayed with Lou all these years. Granted Lou had some attractive features and could be lovable when he wanted. Usually when Lou wanted something. For some reason, Gabe had been unable to see the truth of their relationship.

And what was the truth of Gabe’s relationship with Dean. Was this a pathetic desire to have someone – not be alone?

Gabe’s gaze drifted back to Dean’s profile. Raising his hand, he ran his finger from just below Dean’s ear down his strong jaw to his chin.

Dean dipped his head then grazed his lips against Gabe’s hand.

The simple affection in Dean’s gesture made Gabe’s throat tighten. There was no comparison between Dean and Lou. Or the depth of feeling running through Gabe. Yes, he was attracted to Dean. Always had been to some degree. Who wouldn’t be? Even Lou had commented more than once about Dean’s rugged good looks and chiseled features.

But things went below the surface of physical attraction where Dean was concerned.

Slipping his hand down his throat and inside Dean's jacket, Gabe ran his fingers across Dean's chest. Dean's shiver vibrated through the simple contact.

Desire shuddered down Gabe's spine to his already tight jeans. Lou's interruption actually couldn't be better timing. Gabe's apartment wasn't short on a supply of lube. The thought of Dean's tight ass wrapped around Gabe's cock was almost enough to send him over the edge.

"God, I want you." Gabe flushed with heat at his blurted words.

"Yeah. Me too." Dean's hands tightened on the steering wheel. "Soon." The darkness shadowed Dean's eyes when he glanced at Gabe.

The feral intensity had to be imagined but Gabe burned with need anyway. "We just have to get rid of Lou." Something he thought he'd made clear to his ex already. Whatever Lou claimed to forget could have waited until tomorrow.

As Dean eased the car around the corner on to Gabe's street, Gabe pointed toward the garage. "Pull in there and park in my spot." Gabe glanced through the glass doors of the building.

Lou stood in the lobby, facing the outside with his arms crossed. A scowl marred his normally attractive features.

Turning into the garage, Dean followed Gabe's quick directions to his parking place.

Gabe popped his seat belt. "Maybe you should wait in the car. Seeing you here won't make things easier." Although he'd like Dean's support while facing his erratic ex, things might go smoother if he faced him alone.

"Easier on him or you?"

"Him, I guess." Gabe nodded. "You're right. I want you there. What Lou wants went out the window with his Texas trick."

Dean's hand caught the collar of Gabe's coat. Pulling him toward the center of the SUV, Dean brushed his lips across Gabe's. "Good."

Sliding his arm under Dean's, Gabe pressed forward over the uncomfortable console. Dean's mouth parted in a grin as Gabe ran his tongue across Dean's bottom lip. Warm flesh met Gabe's. Dean's arms wrapped him in a tight awkward hug.

"This will be much more comfortable in a bed, you know?"

"Yeah." Gabe pulled away. His body ached for more. His erect cock pushed tight against his zipper almost begging for freedom. "Let's deal with Lou."

Dean climbed out the vehicle then scurried around to Gabe's side. They fell into step next to each other, bumping shoulders and matching grins. The cold, damp garage did nothing to dispel the heat flowing through Gabe. This Gabe could get used to.

"What's he doing here?" Lou's tone melded a whine and a growl.

"'Cause I want him here," Gabe fired back. "What are you doing here?" Coming to a halt near his ex, Gabe cocked his head to one side and arched an eyebrow. "Exactly what did you forget?"

"Not with him here." Lou's full lips puffed up in a royal pout.

"Too bad." Gabe grabbed Dean's hand then marched around Lou into the hall.

Lou's footsteps scurried after them. "Wait. I just want to talk."

"Nothing to say." Gabe kept going, tugging Dean along behind him.

"I'm sorry!" Lou barked the words out fast.

For that, Gabe stopped. Turning around, he narrowed his eyes at Lou. "And that is supposed to make me forget you cheated, you risked both of us by fooling around indiscriminately. I'm just supposed to say all's forgiven and act like nothing ever happened?" Now Gabe's anger bubbled to the surface. Releasing Dean's hand, Gabe took a step toward his ex. "What? Hank's place not as nice? He wants you to pay rent? Groceries? Utilities?"

"No. It's not that." A flush of guilt across Lou's pale face confirmed Gabe's assessment of the situation. "I still love you."

"No you don't. You love the cushy life I gave you. And the sad part is, if you'd never cheated, I probably would have never rocked the boat long enough to break up with you. This is all on you. Not me." Gabe turned around then grabbed Dean's hand again. Pulling his friend along, he swept through the lobby.

"Gabe, please!" Lou wailed as he followed the two men.

"Deal with it, Lou!" Gabe nodded to the doorman. "He's absolutely not allowed in, Matt. Call the police if you have to."

"Yes sir." The burly man scooted around from behind the reception desk.

As Gabe marched Dean toward the elevators, he heard Matt tell Lou to leave. Maybe Lou understood the situation now. Maybe not. Gabe snorted his disgust with his ex and himself for allowing Lou to use him all these years.

As for right now? He punched the elevator call button. He had plans. The door bounced open immediately.

After dragging the silent Dean into the car, Gabe slapped his floor number. As the doors closed, he pushed Dean against the wall with a little too much enthusiasm.

"Oww—" Dean whooshed a hard breath. "Easy, big guy. Not that I mind the caveman routine—actually I kind of like it—but I'd like to be able to enjoy what comes next without any broken bones."

"Shit! I'm sorry. I'm just so—"

Heat ran rampant through Dean's body. He cut off Gabe's words with a hard kiss. "Don't apologize. Like I said, I think I like having you take control, pushing me around. Something so very...male about it."

Gabe crowded Dean against the wall. His hard body, and even harder bulge, teased Dean's nervous system from head to feet. Rough kisses, wet and full of tongue, ravaged

Dean's mouth. Gabe's hands roamed up and down Dean's back until one slipped into the back of his jeans then grabbed his ass in a strong grasp.

"Damn—" Gabe grunted as the elevator doors opened. "Come on."

With a vise-grip grasp on Dean's wrist, Gabe led the way down the hall at a fast pace. In his other hand, he fumbled in his pocket. As they reached the door, Gabe pulled out his keys and promptly dropped them. "Shit."

Before Gabe could retrieve them, Dean knelt on the floor then snagged them. Instead of getting up right away, Dean rubbed his cheek against Gabe's bulging erection. Heat flushed through the tight denim against Dean's face.

"Oh God, give me the keys." Gabe's fingers ran through Dean's hair then tugged his head back with a sharp pull.

The slight pain sent a thrill through Dean. Looking up as he handed off the keys, Dean opened his mouth then wagged his tongue at Gabe's groin. He grinned at the intense scowl on Gabe's face.

Exhaling a hard breath, Gabe let go of Dean then made fast work of the door.

Dean scrambled to his feet as the door opened behind him. Gabe grabbed him, one arm around his waist and one around his neck then marched him backward into the darkened room.

Hard kisses landed on half of Dean's mouth. Gabe adjusted his aim until warm lips and a moist tongue teased Dean's lips. Opening to the heat and passion, Dean let Gabe take complete control. Tonsil-teasing kisses mixed with shallow licks that made Dean's lips itch. Strong fingers dug into the flesh of Dean's ass while a gentle hand held the back of his head.

Wrapping himself around Gabe, Dean pressed his aching cock into the hard muscle of Gabe's body. A slow, steady rhythm pushed him closer to the relief he'd sought all evening. His breath quickened into short, rapid pants around Gabe's intense kisses. "Need...you..." Dean clutched Gabe close, his hips pushing harder, faster.

"Not yet." Gabe broke the kiss, pulling Dean away by his hair.

"Noooo..." It took Dean a minute to realize the wounded howl was his own.

Gabe laughed as he combed his fingers through Dean's hair. "Not like this. Definitely not fully clothed." Freeing his hand from Dean's ass, Gabe flipped on a light. "Bedroom was your choice, remember?"

Dean's mind, clouded with almost unbearable need, took a few seconds to remember the earlier conversation. "Yeah. Bedroom." Taking the initiative, he twisted in Gabe's arms. With Gabe still holding on, Dean led them to Gabe's room.

On the threshold, he hesitated. This was Gabe and Lou's room—their bed for six years.

"What's wrong?" Gabe whispered in his ear. "Change your mind."

"Never." Dean shook his head and shed his reluctance. Gabe had made his choice. The past didn't matter now. Confident he'd already replaced Lou in Gabe's heart, nothing would keep Dean from replacing Lou in Gabe's bed.

Grabbing both of Gabe's hands, Dean pulled him toward the bed. "If you don't have lube, you are in so much trouble."

Gabe shuddered against him. "No problem. Have lube. Condoms?"

Releasing one of Gabe's hands, Dean pulled a box from his coat pocket. "Condoms." He tossed the box on the bed, still pulling Gabe behind him.

Prying Dean's other hand free, Gabe spun him around then planted a hard kiss on him. "And I plan on using a lot of them."

Fingers ripped at Dean's fly. Hands slid inside his open jeans, pushing them down his hips. Before he realized what Gabe was up to, Dean bounced flat on his back on the bed with his legs draped off the edge, jeans gathered around his ankles.

Gabe's bulk knelt between Dean's thighs. His warm hand encircled Dean's cock. "Thought about your taste all last night." Gabe leaned forward. His lips wrapped around the crown.

The teasing tongue flickered against the sensitive slit. Each swipe sent shivers of hot and cold through Dean's body. Dean's hands grasped Gabe's head, scrambling for a grip on his too-short hair. "Gabe..." The groan was as close to a plea as he could manage.

Heat rushed through Dean's groin, building into an intense fire. He wanted to warn Gabe of the imminent eruption but his body froze. His throat caught in a cry of ecstasy. Words wouldn't form. With his back arching up, Dean's hips surged into heaven.

Gabe took him all—deep, hot, tight and vibrating with a loud groan.

Dean lost it. His body melted from the heat. His brain exploded with starbursts of color that faded to white. Breath hung in his lungs as if the universe had stopped. His muscles turned to gelatin and puddled inside, limbs too far gone to move.

When the world righted itself and Dean's brain began to function again, Gabe's fantastic mouth fluttered across Dean's neck and chest with gentle kisses. "You okay?" he whispered as his lips swept past Dean's ear.

"Fuck." The expletive was the only thing Dean could say.

"Oh, that's next." Gabe's head ducked down. Sharp teeth tweaked a hard nipple.

Dean's body twitched with anticipation but refused to move. Dean couldn't stop Gabe if he wanted to. And he absolutely didn't want to.

"Be right back." Gabe disappeared.

Too weak to move his head, Dean just closed his eyes and listened. A drawer slid open then the rattle and roll of Gabe rummaging through the contents. Lube, hopefully? Then Gabe was back, kneeling between Dean's legs.

Cold plastic rolled into the dip in the mattress next to Dean's body. The chill startled him but he didn't move. He wasn't sure he could. Forcing his eyes open, Dean examined Gabe's serious expression in the dim light from the living room.

Biting his lower lip in concentration, Gabe could have been the teenager Dean once knew worrying over a test answer. Instead, Gabe's focus was all on Dean. A shiver woke his limp body and sent renewed interest to Dean's cock.

Gabe tugged at Dean's shoes, slipping them off then tossing them over his shoulder into the darkness. Next, he stripped the jeans off Dean's feet. Warm hands ran up Dean's calves to his knees. Gabe's gaze flickered from Dean's flaccid cock to his face. A look of wonder almost overrode a grimace of need. "Are you sure, Dean? Much more and I'm not going to have a stopping point."

"Yep. Sure. Very sure." Pulling his body out of its bliss-induced lethargy, Dean raised his legs until he propped his heels on the edge of the bed. He spread his knees wide, giving Gabe full view and complete access. Rolling his softening erection under one hand, Dean whispered, "Fuck me."

"Damn." Gabe's gaze stayed glued to Dean's face as his hands fumbled with his fly. Yanking his pants down to his thighs, Gabe reached for the lube. "You look amazing like that." Gabe leaned forward then brushed his lips along the inside of Dean's thigh. "I want to go slow, savor this, but I don't know if I can. So close already."

The bottle lid snapped open, followed by the squelch of lube squirting.

"Do what you want." Dean ran his fingers across Gabe's bowed head. "We have all the time in the world now." His heart raced with excitement sown with a little fear. Dean had been truthful when he said he'd read up on anal sex. Although he couldn't image Gabe ever hurting him, he'd be a fool not to worry a little. What little intimate contact Dean had had with his friend made him very aware that Gabe's cock matched his body build and height.

Thick and long, Gabe's dick could hurt if they rushed things. But even the thought of pain couldn't cool the desire to feel Gabe's flesh buried inside him.

Fingers coated with lube circled his anus. "Shit! Cold." Dean clutched his legs tighter to keep from closing them against the chilly intrusion.

"I'll get things warm in a minute." Gabe's tight, low chuckle rumbled deep in his throat. One finger pushed past the outer ring of muscle then pulled out. Again, just the tip slipped inside then out.

The flickering play teased but also relaxed. No pain, no burn. Gabe's free hand reached between Dean's splayed legs then rested on Dean's stomach. Warmth suffused Dean from the inside out. The soft touch rose slowly up Dean's torso, following the slender line of fur from Dean's navel. Reaching Dean's chest, short fingernails grated through his chest hair. Gabe paused to flick a nipple with one finger.

A jolt of pleasure swept through Dean, down into his groin. His ass clenched around Gabe's fingertip, almost pulling it in.

"Oh yeah," Gabe whispered. "Want more?" Without waiting for an answer, his finger pushed deeper.

Dean rocked forward to meet the probing digit. A slight burn but no pain. Holding his legs high, Dean settled into a slow, short, back-and-forth motion. Each stroke brought less burn and more pleasure.

A gasp erupted from Dean as Gabe tweaked his nipple hard. As he rocked forward, the single finger in his ass multiplied. Now two pushed deeper than the one before. "Oh God..." Moving faster, Dean met Gabe's assault with greater need. His cock lengthened and filled against his lower stomach.

Gabe's arm, still stretched across Dean's stomach, rubbed against his reawakening flesh. "Gabe..."

"Like that, huh?" With a final pinch of Dean's nipple, Gabe raked his fingernails down Dean's torso. His hand wrapped around Dean's dick then pulled the filling flesh in a long, slow stroke. A big grin split Gabe's face. "Some guys can't get hard during ass play."

A third finger pushed against Dean's ass. Taking a deep breath, Dean exhaled long then sank back toward impalement.

"One more..." Gabe whispered.

Dean felt the cluster of fingers pressing against his hole. Another deep breath and they slid into him.

Gabe twisted and turned his hand. Each upward turn hit what Dean assumed was his prostate.

His body shivered with each glancing touch. "More," Dean gritted his teeth. His eyes clenched closed as he tried to follow the exquisite sensation.

"I've got more." Dean's eyes flew open at Gabe's deep growl. Gabe's eyes were narrowed and his mouth grimaced in an almost feral grin. "And I'm gonna do something with it right now."

Dean's breath caught in his chest. "Yeah. Now." Gabe's fingers disappeared, leaving a crushing emptiness. His eyes stung as he waited for what was next.

The rip of the condom and the pop of the lube cap reassured Dean but he didn't open his eyes yet.

This time the lube, just as cold, didn't shock or surprise him. The thick girth breaching his ass occupied all his attention. Burn accompanied a sharper pain as the crown popped past the anal muscle.

Dean gritted his teeth and dug his fingers into the flesh of his thighs. Pulling his legs wider apart seemed to aid Gabe's passage.

"Breathe, Dean. Don't hold your breath."

Exhaling hard, Dean obeyed. Gabe's cock pressed deeper.

"Almost there, babe. Keep breathing, long, slow breaths."

Dean smiled at the endearment but did as he was told. A short thrust rubbed against his prostate and encouraged rapid breathing. His heart raced as Gabe did it again. Dean resumed his slight rocking, meeting each of Gabe's careful thrusts. "More."

A long groan rumbled from Gabe as his pelvis pressed against Dean's ass. "You've got all of me."

Gasping for air, Dean grinned at the wide-eyed wonder on Gabe's face. "Then fuck me. Now." Dean rolled his hips for emphasis.

Gabe didn't say a word. He pulled Dean's legs up against his chest. Warm lips and scruffy unshaven skin caressed Dean's instep as Gabe's body moved in a slow dance of long strokes, deep and hot. "You feel so good," Gabe murmured.

"So do you." Dean gasped as Gabe changed the angle, nudging his prostate a little harder with each movement. "Damn!" Dean lowered his arms to the bed. His hands clutched the bedding in tight fists. Using his arms for leverage, Dean tightened his stomach so he could push into Gabe's thrusts.

Dean's renewed cock bounced against his stomach, dabbing sticky strands of pre-come on his skin. Heat flushed through his body. "More." Dean had trouble recognizing his own strangled cry but Gabe must have understood.

Slow, measured beats sped up until Gabe's hips rapped a short, fast rhythm against Dean's ass. Although the strokes weren't as deep, Gabe's hard flesh nailed Dean's prostate twice as fast and much harder. Ecstasy spread in a wave of dizziness.

Dean reached for his aching cock, once again desperate for relief.

"Damn!" Gabe leaned over, pushing Dean's legs down until he was literally heels over head bent in half. Hard, wet kisses ravaged Dean's mouth. Gabe's body squished Dean's cock between their stomachs with amazing pressure.

Gabe's quick pace disintegrated into uneven jerks and jolts. "I'm sorry," Gabe moaned through rapid, pecking half kisses. "Couldn't wait."

The hushed words were enough to finish off Dean. His cock spurted wet heat between their bodies. Dean wrapped one arm around Gabe's neck. His legs bent back in an impossible angle, he pulled Gabe as close as he could, returning sloppy kiss for kiss. "So good. Fucking unbelievable."

Pulling his arms from around Dean's legs, Gabe wrapped Dean in a tight embrace. "Love you," Gabe whispered as he buried his face in Dean's neck.

"You too."

Gabe raised his head until his gaze met Dean's. "Really? You're absolutely sure?"

"Yeah. I don't want anyone but you." Dean smiled as Gabe broke out into a huge grin.

"Good. Good." With a long sigh, Gabe relaxed onto Dean's prone body. The tension in Gabe's voice turned into relief.

"You and me forever." Dean welcomed the warm embrace and the heavy weight of his friend – his lover. Together, they could face anything.

About the Author

By day, Shayla Kersten is a mild-mannered accountant. By night, she's a writer of sexy romances. Torn between genres, Shayla writes erotic stories about hot heroes and their sexy women as well as hot men and their passionate heroes.

A native of Arkansas, Shayla spent four years in the Army as a missile specialist, stationed in Germany and Oklahoma. After her enlistment was up, she spent eleven years in New York City taking a bite out of the Big Apple. Even her love of theatre and the nightlife of the big city couldn't cure terminal homesickness for the Natural State. In 1995 she returned to her roots in Arkansas.

Shayla now divides her time between her mother, her spoiled-rotten dogs, her dratted day job and her obsession – writing. And no, her mother doesn't know what she writes. That's between Shayla, her dogs and her readers!

Shayla welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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