



THE
Landlord

JEFF ERNO

Mark Matheson is a rather timid and somewhat introverted college graduate who's in need of a place to live. He's just landed his first post-collegiate job and can no longer stay in the dorms.

Coincidentally, real estate agent Aaron Culver is looking for a tenant to rent an apartment in the building that he owns and happens to live in himself.

The price is right, well within Mark's budget. The location is perfect. The apartment is suitable to accommodate Mark's needs. The only problem though, is that Mark happens to have a serious crush on his would-be landlord.

Is there any way he can overcome or even conceal his secret fantasies about the successful, confident and very attractive man-of his dreams? Does he even really want to conceal them, and what would Aaron do if he were to discover Mark's secret? When the two do in fact actually become landlord and tenant, they quickly discover there is more than one way to collect the rent.

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The Landlord
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The Landlord

By

Jeff Erno

Dedication

To Michele L. Montgomery

Chapter One

Sometimes I just get so damned angry with myself. I don't know why I have to be so intimidated by other people and so bashful. It's like when I'm around this certain type of guy I just get weak all over. I forget what I'm supposed to say, get all quiet, and can't even make eye contact with them. That's how I was with my landlord. I'm sure he didn't do anything to me on purpose, but whenever I was around him, I always felt so inferior.

When I met Aaron for the first time, I actually had no idea that one day he'd be my landlord. I was a college senior, focusing very much upon my studies, being only months from graduation. For money, I was working a part time job as a cashier down at a small grocery store, and occasionally I'd pick up extra side jobs for cash. My roommate's aunt owned her own cleaning business and it sometimes had an overflow of clients. When this occurred, she'd call Tim, my roommate, her nephew, and ask if he wanted to take the job. Tim

was so lazy that he almost always offered it to me. Eventually his Aunt Joyce started bypassing him altogether and calling me directly.

This was how I first came to know Aaron. He was only twenty-four years old, less than three years my senior, and already owned four apartment complexes. While the majority of other guys my age were slaving their asses off in college, trying to prepare to earn a living, he was already out in the real world actually doing it. From what Joyce had told me, he did not come from a family of money either. He just was very shrewd and confident, knew how to raise the capital for these rental investments and also worked full-time as a loan originator for a mortgage company. Perhaps he was his own best customer, I surmised.

Aaron was tall, about six foot three, and quite slender. He kept his blond hair cut very short and styled it in a manner that was spiked yet conservative. Actually, he was fairly conservative in his over-all appearance, but not so much so that you would consider him to be nerdy or even boring. I guess you'd have to classify him as a preppy dresser. He wore mainly casual dress clothes—khakis, cargo pants, polo or rugby shirts and sometimes even button-down dress oxfords. He had a huge wardrobe, which included a lot of sports apparel such as wind pants, pullovers, and

various pairs of sneakers. I came to know about his wardrobe firsthand when I agreed to clean his apartment.

When Joyce called me to offer the cleaning job, initially I had an urge to decline, because I was knee-deep in mid-term studies and was running on very little sleep already. I needed the cash, though, and decided I could squeeze it into my schedule. From what she had said, the job probably wouldn't be too bad because he only had a one-bedroom, ground-floor apartment. Plus, she gave me the impression that if he was pleased with my work, he may call us for other jobs as they arose, being that he owned several other buildings.

So it was with reluctance that I met Joyce over at Aaron's apartment. The building actually was a renovated two-story home that had been converted to apartments. There were two ground-floor apartments that were identical to one another, and one large upstairs apartment. Each of the three had their own separate entrances. There was a rather spacious backyard and the parking area was shared by all. When we stepped inside that first time, I had an overwhelming urge to turn tail and run right back out. The apartment was totally trashed.

The very first thing I saw when I stepped inside was a cupboard loaded with filthy dishes that

seemed to be stacked everywhere. Pizza boxes, garbage and debris littered the kitchen area. The stove looked as if it had never been cleaned. This, however, was mild compared to the condition of the bathroom. I doubted that this Aaron even knew what a scrub brush was, for the shower stall had caked-on grime and mildew which was gonna take me possibly hours to scrub clean. In the bedroom there were clothes strewn everywhere and a full-sized unmade bed. The large walk-in closet was the only area of the home that appeared to at all be in order, each neatly pressed shirt hanging in the same direction.

"Christ!" I said to Joyce. "How much is he payin'?"

"Twelve dollars an hour. Come on, it won't be that bad. Just think of the money."

I looked over to her and sighed. "This is gonna be an all-day job, just for a one-bedroom. Well, let me make sure I have all the supplies I need before you take off. Okay?"

"So you're gonna do it still?" she asked cheerfully.

"Yeah, I need the money too bad to turn it down. What a pig!" Just as I said this, I heard someone at the door behind me. As I turned quickly to see the young man entering the apartment, it became obvious that he must be Aaron.

"Hey," he said, smiling to Joyce. "Sorry the place is such a mess." He was looking directly at Joyce, not even acknowledging my presence.

"Aaron, this is Mark. He's gonna be taking the job. He's done a lot of cleaning jobs for me. Does a great job, don't ya, Mark?"

I turned to look at Aaron, and for some reason I suddenly felt very small. A wave of embarrassment washed over me as I saw myself for a moment from his perspective. Here I was, this college kid the same age as he was practically, being lowered to a position of cleaning his filthy apartment. Quickly I lowered my eyes, looking down to the ground, "Yes...Um...yeah, I try," I said, my voice being barely audible.

"Cool, cuz my girlfriend is coming home this weekend from college. She will freak if she sees what a dump this place is, and as you can tell, I hate cleaning. I know I got papers all over the place in the dining room. It's work stuff. Just stack them together somewhere, but please don't throw anything away."

"No, sir," I said, quickly acknowledging his instruction.

He laughed. "Sir? You can just call me Aaron. I'm not old enough to be a *sir* yet."

"Oh...sorry...Aaron," I corrected.

"Well I just gotta pick up a folder that I forgot. You can just leave the keys in the mailbox when

you're done. If you need anything or have questions, call my cell number. If I don't answer, leave a voicemail."

"Thanks, Aaron," said Joyce.

"Nice meetin ya Mike," said Aaron.

I did not bother to correct him for calling me the wrong name. "Hmm," I said to Joyce after Aaron left, "he seems nice enough."

"Yeah, he's a nice kid. I've known him for years. Well, I gotta get goin. You were gonna check to see if you had everything you needed," she reminded.

I opened the laundry room closet and found where the cleaning supplies were stored. "Uh no. He doesn't have shit in here. Guess I better go out to the van and get some stuff." Generally, we used the cleaning supplies provided by the customer. If they did not have what we needed, we'd supply our own and then charge for them.

After I got the supplies and Joyce left, I set about the task of scouring the pigsty. God, I didn't even know where to begin. Obviously, I first needed to do something with this fuckin kitchen, I thought, and then started re-stacking the dishes while I ran the dishwasher. With most jobs I'd taken, once I actually got started and was into it, I would clip right along and get the job done in a short order. This time, however, I kept catching myself pausing in the middle of tasks. Alone in

Aaron's apartment with all of his personal things, I couldn't help myself. I kept thinking about him, visualizing him in this setting using these dishes, reclining on this sofa, showering in this bathroom. In his bedroom I carefully went through all of his clothing, thinking of how he'd look wearing each item. I was spending a great deal of my time ruminating over him, captivated somewhat by my own thoughts of him.

Suddenly it occurred to me how ridiculous I was being, and I renewed my effort to focus upon the job that I was there to do. I then rushed into the bathroom and drenched the walls of the shower stall with lime remover. I put on a pair of rubber gloves, grabbed a scrubbing pad, and began scouring those stall walls. After scrubbing for a good thirty minutes I was starting to feel lightheaded, most likely from the strong fumes which arose from the cleaner. I had to step out of the room for a few moments so that I could regain my strength. When I returned, I then turned towards the commode to tackle my next major project. I picked up a canister of foaming bathroom cleaner from the counter and dropped to my knees. I then sprayed the entire commode, inside and out, with the cleanser and began to wipe it down. As I knelt there, cleaning that toilet, it suddenly occurred to me that I could not have been in a more humble position. Here I was on my

very knees, scrubbing some other college-aged guy's toilet.

I thought about Aaron then, visualizing him standing here next to me. I thought about him standing here, towering over my crouched body, watching me scrub his filth. I imagined him unbuttoning his fly and pulling his cock out, preparing to use the toilet, which I'd just so immaculately cleaned for him. I wondered how he would feel about it. I wondered if he'd feel superior to me as he stood there. I wondered if he'd scoff at me; laugh at my embarrassment and humility. I wondered if he would ridicule me and remind me of my status beneath him. Strangely, I was so aroused by these thoughts. I actually reached down and groped myself momentarily before I stood back up. *This is so fucking stupid. Why am I even thinking these things?*

My time at Aaron's apartment took up the majority of my day. I was there a total of almost nine hours, not even stopping to take a break for lunch. I cleaned his kitchen spotless, washing and drying the dishes and putting them away, wiping down the countertops and cupboard cabinetry, cleaning the stove inside and out. I even got down on my knees, and mopped and waxed his kitchen floor by hand. I polished every piece of furniture, dusted every knick-knack, changed all of his bedding and washed his linens. I cleaned every

square millimeter of his bathroom, vacuumed every fiber of carpeting and took out *all* of the trash. As I did all of these things, my thoughts constantly returned to him. I kept thinking of the way he spoke to me, and how he couldn't even remember my name. I thought of how superior he probably felt over me.

When I finally left that apartment, it was literally sparkling. Never before had I done such an outstanding job as I had on his place. I only wished that I could have been there when he got back home that evening. I wished that I could see whether or not he noticed how hard I'd worked and whether or not he approved. I was aroused again when I got behind the wheel of my car. In fact, I was rock hard. Doing these things for this guy actually made my cock hard!

Later that evening when I was back at my dorm room, I kept thinking about my encounter with Aaron earlier that day. I kept remembering how he made me feel. I couldn't even look him in the eye, and yet he didn't seem a bit bothered. In fact, he was so casual, with me, that it was like he didn't even notice my intimidation.

I thought about myself in his bedroom, remembering how I'd knelt on the floor and neatly arranged his many pairs of shoes. I'd dusted them off, debating briefly, whether or not I should

actually polish his dress shoes. I'd stopped myself from going that far, though, knowing that it was not one of the duties that were expected from the cleaning service. What would it be like, to actually be hired to shine this hot, cocky, successful yet very young man's shoes? What would it be like to not be hired to do it, but to actually be required to do it simply because my status was beneath him?

I walked over to the door of my room and locked it as I felt myself once again getting turned on. I rubbed my crotch this time overtly. I was so aroused that I made no attempt to even deny it. I then lay back on my bed and unzipped my khakis. I thought about Aaron, visualizing him standing in front of me. I was kneeling right by his feet. He looked so superior as I craned my neck backward to stare up at his tall frame towering over me. I grabbed the waistband of my boxer briefs and pulled it down, tucking it under my ball sac as I fantasized about Aaron.

Slowly I began to stroke myself as I thought about him. I thought about the contrasts between him and me. I was a little guy, not even five and a half feet tall. He was a giant compared to me, having nearly a foot of height over me. I was a poor, struggling college student, living hand to mouth whereas he was a successful businessman. I cleaned toilets while he collected rent money. I waited on customers at the grocery store and

bagged their groceries, while he probably was the type of customer who was annoyed when the bagboy asked if he wanted paper or plastic. He had more important things to be concerned about.

I thought about the fact that he'd said his girlfriend was coming home from school. He was gonna be fucking her, I was sure, in that very bed that I'd changed for him. He was gonna drill her with his cock as she lay beneath him on the very same clean sheets that my hands had touched. I carefully and painstakingly folded the sheets in the hospital corners that he would carelessly tear loose as he pumped his cock into his girlfriend's pussy. I saw him then, visualizing him doing it. I saw him fucking her right there on those sheets. I stroked myself madly.

My thoughts then shifted to his shower. I thought about how long it had taken me to scrub it clean. It was so spotless when I was finished that it had literally shone. The next morning he surely would step into that shower and take for granted that it was in this immaculate condition. He'd clean his body and step out, staring at himself in the full-length mirror as he toweled off. I thought about his lean, tight body, and wondered what it would be like to be him. What was it like to look at yourself every morning in the mirror and see the reflection of that hot stud? He must know how hot looking he is. He must know how successful and

envied he is too. I continued to think of him standing there naked and I jacked off, getting more and more excited as I did so.

Finally I moaned as I reached the point of no return and felt the cum begin to release from my balls and fire up my shaft. I soaked my shirt with gobs of my own sticky cum, thinking all the while of Aaron. I squeezed my eyes tightly closed, seeing him standing there before me. My body shook as I drained my cumload, and I sighed, realizing now I had yet another mess to clean up.

The ringing of my cell phone woke me up the following morning. It was Joyce. "Hello?" I said groggily.

"Mark! Wanted to let you know I heard from Aaron last night. He was really impressed with the job you did."

"Really?" I asked, rolling over on the bed to rest against my elbow. "What did he say?"

"He said he'd never seen his place that clean before. I'm so thankful, Mark! This is gonna send a lot of business my way. I'm so glad I had you take this job cuz I've been trying to get Aaron's business for a long time."

"Cool. So does this mean I get a raise?" I laughed into the phone.

"Hmm," Joyce said in a rather serious tone, "Well definitely at least a bonus."

"I was kidding, Joyce. It was a pleasure actually. I enjoyed it."

"You've got to be kidding," she scoffed. "That apartment was a total pigsty."

"Yeah, but I like challenges. What can I say?"

"Well in that case, I'll make sure to pass along the toughest jobs to you." She laughed.

"Um, no, that's okay. I gotta be in the mood for it."

"Well, whatever your mood was yesterday, I liked it! Keep up the good work. I'll drop your check off this afternoon if you're gonna be around."

"Sorry...I've got exams. I can meet you somewhere this evening though, if you want."

"Let me think...um...how bout I buy you dinner tonight? That way I can show you my appreciation for the great job you did," Joyce offered.

"No, you don't have to do that. I was only kidding about the raise. I just was doing my job, that's all."

"I know," she said, "but I wanna do this. I'll pick you up outside the dorms at six-thirty. Will that work for ya?"

"Sure," I said. "Thanks, Joyce."

"No problem...and thank *you*. I'll see ya then, okay?"

"Okay, bye." Wow, Aaron had liked my work!

It sort of surprised me, actually. I figured him to be the type who'd just take it for granted, possibly not even notice, but not only did he like it, he was so impressed that he actually called my boss about it. I smiled to myself as I placed my phone back down on the bedside stand. Man, look at the time! It was already nine-thirty. It was a good thing Joyce called when she did, because my first exam was in an hour. I threw the covers back and jumped out of bed. This was gonna be a good day though. It already was off to a great start. I smiled to myself as I stood up and stretched, looking over at Tim, my lazy roommate, still fast asleep with his head half-buried beneath a pillow. I hadn't even heard him come in the night before.

My morning exams were a piece of cake, and the rest of the day flew by. Finally, at six thirty I was standing outside the entrance to the dorms when Joyce pulled up. I already knew she'd be punctual. She just was like that. "Hey!" I said as I crawled into the passenger seat.

"How'd your exams go?" she asked.

"Aced em," I said confidently.

"Cool. I shoulda known. You get pretty good grades, don't ya?"

"Valedictorian," I said, trying not to sound boastful.

"Wow! Shouldn't be surprised though. I could tell you were smart."

I laughed. "Actually, I'm not really all that smart, Joyce. It's just I'm such a dull person that I have no social life. Since I have nothing better to do with myself, I study."

"Well, I don't think you're dull. I think you're hilarious. Plus, I can't think of anything better to do with your time than concentrate on your education. You shouldn't be so down on yourself." She reached over and put her hand against my arm.

"It's just that I've always envied the popular guys, ya know?" I confided. "I was always too shy in high school to ever really be involved in stuff, and plus I'm really crappy at sports."

"So," she said offhandedly, "we all have our strengths and weaknesses. Obviously, your strength is more in academics. Personally, I think that is a lot more important than sports."

"Yeah, well it's hard to think that way when you're sittin alone every night watching the History Channel."

She laughed this time. "Well get involved in some stuff then. You're the only one who can make it happen, ya know. It's not like people are gonna come beatin your door down, beggin you to be their friend."

"I know. That's my problem. I feel so lame when I try to make friends and stuff. I don't know what to say—how to act."

"Just act like you," she smiled at me, squeezing my arm slightly.

I just looked down at the floorboards of the van, wanting to change the subject.

"Where do ya wanna eat?"

"Anywhere is fine, really."

"You like seafood?"

I nodded. "Sure."

"Okay, cool. We'll go to Red Lobster."

"My favorite!" I said honestly.

She put the van in gear and backed out of the parking place.

"So what are your plans after graduation?" Joyce asked. We were seated at a booth in the smoking section of the restaurant. Joyce smoked two packs of cigarettes per day, which seemed ironic to me because she was so compulsive about everything else. You'd have thought she'd be the same way about her health.

"Um, well look for a job, I guess."

"Haven't you been looking already?"

"Well yeah. Actually I had an interview last week."

"Somewhere around here? Or back home?"

"Here. Down at the paper. If I get the job, I'll be writing obituaries." I laughed. "It's a start though."

"Hey, whatever pays the rent," she said. "And

you can always keep working for me. So if you get this job, you gonna quit your cashier job?"

"Yeah!" I said in a tone that indicated the sheer stupidity of the question. "I'm a journalist. Or, at least I wanna be some day."

"Where ya gonna live? I mean, if you decide to stay in town."

"Well, actually I can stay at the dorm through the summer, and then I'll have to look for an apartment or something."

"You should check with Aaron. He has four rental complexes, ya know."

"Oh yeah, that's a good idea. Not sure I'd want him as a landlord though," I said, thinking aloud.

"Why not?" she asked. "I bet he'd be a great landlord. He seems pretty laid back and everything."

"Oh, I don't know. I feel uneasy around him," I confessed.

"Whopty doo!" she said, laughing at me. "He would be your landlord, not your roommate. Plus, what is it about him that makes you uneasy? He's about one of the nicest guys I've ever met."

"Oh, I know. It's just me. I'm stupid, I guess."

"Well, you're not stupid. I think you're just overly self-conscious. You're gonna have to get over that if you're gonna be a journalist. You gotta be able to get into people's faces, even when they don't want ya to."

"It's weird, Joyce," I said as I picked up my water glass. "I am totally different when it comes to my career. It is the one area of my life where I feel totally confident. It's like I'm a totally different person."

"You just gotta learn to channel that confidence into the other areas of your life, that's all." She lit up a cigarette and exhaled the smoke out the side of her mouth. "If you want, I'll talk to Aaron for you, see if he has any rentals available."

"Well I don't even know if I have the job yet."

"Still, wouldn't hurt to get things lined up just in case."

"True. I appreciate it, Joyce."

"No problem."

Later that evening, after Joyce had dropped me off at the dorm, I lay in bed again thinking of Aaron. It was so weird, because I'd only met him that one time, and yet he seemed to consume my thoughts. I thought of what it would actually be like to be a tenant of his. How would it make me feel to have to hand over money to him every single month? At least then, I'd get to see him, unless of course he wanted me to mail in the rent check.

Jesus Christ! Why did I always do this? I didn't even have a job yet, let alone an apartment. And even if I did get the job, there was no reason to

believe that I'd end up renting from Aaron. Plus what was the big deal about it anyway? Lots of people rent apartments without having sick fantasies about their landlords being naked. Why did I have to be such a pathetic freak?

I flicked off the light and pulled the covers up to my chin. I wasn't gonna think of Aaron any more, I resolved to myself. Even if he did have an apartment available, I sure the fuck wasn't gonna take it. I rolled over and closed my eyes, willing myself to fall asleep. Sometime about two hours later, I finally dozed off after finally having jacked myself off, again fantasizing about my future landlord.

Chapter Two

It was less than a week later that I received a call from the newspaper, requesting that I come in for a second interview. I was offered the job at the conclusion of that appointment. I accepted it without reservation. I knew that it was pretty much an entry-level position, but it was the ideal opportunity for getting my foot in the door. The editor had been impressed with my portfolio and assured me he would allow me to gradually branch out from my assigned inner-office duties in order to prove my abilities.

Before even phoning home to tell my parents, I picked up the phone to call Joyce. "Guess what?" I said to her excitedly with no other greeting.

"You got the job?" she asked expectantly.

"I start next Monday. I'm so excited!"

"Mark, that's fantastic!" she said with genuine enthusiasm. "And I have some other good news for you, too. I was gonna call you in a few minutes to tell you. I just talked to Aaron this morning. He

does have a rental available, if you're interested."

"Are you serious? This is too good to be true. I can't believe how it's working out."

"Well, I told him you probably would be interested. You should give him a call."

"Oh...um...okay. Let me make sure I have his number." I was already beginning to feel nervous, just at the idea of having to call him. Before I'd even finished writing down Aaron's number, I already knew that I'd never call him. I would be too afraid of embarrassing myself. There'd be no way I could carry on an intelligent conversation with this man.

"You know what?" Joyce said suddenly. "I've gotta go over to pick up a set of keys from Aaron this afternoon. Maybe you could ride over with me and see the apartment then."

"Well, where is the apartment?" I asked, knowing that he had a total of four rental complexes.

"It is right above his apartment. The only rental he has available right now is that one upstairs," explained Joyce.

"Oh wow. So I'd be living right above my landlord, huh?"

"Mark, I don't see what you'd have to worry about. You don't seem like a partier or anything, plus Aaron really is very laid back. He'd be great to have as a landlord. I might even be able to get

him to knock off the damage deposit.”

“Wow! That would be so helpful. If that were the case, I could pay him right away for the first month’s rent.”

“Okay, you wanna call him, or do you just want me to call him back right now? Probably you should let me call so I can talk to him about that deposit.”

“Yeah, cool. Then call me back, all right?”

“Great. Talk to ya in a few.”

I heaved a sigh of relief when I hung up the phone. I was so thankful that I wasn’t gonna have to call Aaron. For some reason, just the thought of it made me queasy. How was it that some guy could make me so nervous and self-conscious, especially when I hardly even knew him? It was so weird, but then as I thought about it, I actually did feel like I knew him kind of intimately. I’d seen all of his personal things when I’d cleaned his apartment. It was strange how much you learn about someone when you were allowed into their private living space. This cleaning business stuff was really a very invasive type of job.

After pacing the floor for ten minutes, waiting for Joyce to call back, I finally sat down at my desk and turned on my computer. I was about to connect to the internet when it suddenly occurred to me that I needed to keep the phone line free, so instead I started to play a tedious game of

solitaire. At last, Joyce called me back and informed me that she'd pick me up at 11:30 and that Aaron would be happy to show me the apartment.

My heart beat rapidly in my chest as I thought about seeing him again. Oh my God! I flopped down on the bed and sprawled out. Man, what was it gonna be like, living in such close proximity to this man that I was so obsessed with? Would I ever get over being so timid around him? Would I ever be able to look him in the eye without feeling like I was gonna just die? I didn't know the answers to these questions, but as I lay there I realized suddenly that this was gonna be so awesome. I really wanted it. I really wanted to live above my landlord.

When Joyce and I arrived at Aaron's apartment, I was so incredibly nervous. Of course, Joyce did not have a clue about how I was feeling. Being the extroverted person that she was, her chitchat with Aaron seemed to completely overshadow my timidity. As they talked to one another, it was almost as if I were not even in the room. Apparently, Joyce had previously worked for Aaron's father, which was how the two had met. Aaron's dad owned a small convenience store, and Joyce had been a clerk there for several years before finally starting her own cleaning business.

During these years of employment at the store, Joyce had seen Aaron on a daily basis. He was only a teenager then, and the relationship that he developed with Joyce was sort of a big sister/baby brother kinda thing. I gathered that in some ways she was rather nurturing and motherly to him, yet she also had an attitude of *coolness* that enabled him to get really close to and confide in her.

The two of them were discussing Aaron's girlfriend Robin. Joyce was laughing as she recalled how Aaron and Robin had gone to the prom together. Joyce had helped Aaron pick out Robin's corsage and had taken pictures of them at the convenience store when they pulled up in their limo. They reminisced like this for a good ten minutes before any mention was even made of the apartment. Finally, Joyce dug into her purse and pulled out a set of keys to hand over to Aaron. She was returning them from a job she had done, he thanked her, and then exited the kitchen where we were standing to retrieve a different set of keys from his desk. "Here ya go, these are for the apartment complex on Harris Street. Ya know maybe I should just get you your own set of keys."

"You don't say? That's an idea," she said sarcastically. Joyce dropped the keys into her purse and pulled out her cigarette package. She fumbled for her lighter, preparing to ignite the cigarette, which was now dangling from her lip.

Aaron turned to me. "So, ya need an apartment, huh?"

I nodded at him, finally looking up into his face. "Yes, s—, Aaron."

"Well it's nothin fancy. You can see from this apartment here that I haven't done too much to the building yet. The one upstairs is really not even as good as this one, but it's quite a bit bigger. One bedroom though, and there's a small walk-through type bedroom which you could use for like a walk-in closet or computer room or something."

"Cool," I said. "I don't really even need anything all that great anyway. This is my first apartment."

"You seem pretty quiet. Not a big partier, I bet."

I laughed nervously. "Oh no, I umm, well, I guess I'm just sorta serious acting or something. Boring."

Joyce laughed then, having exhaled her first big drag of secondhand smoke into the air above us. "Mark will be a great tenant, Aaron. And I don't think he's boring either."

"Don't really care if you're boring or not," said Aaron casually. "I can deal with boring actually. The last people who rented it were kinda noisy."

Wow, I thought, that would be pretty ballsy to be noisy when you lived in an apartment right

above your own landlord. Then again, I guess not everyone was intimidated by the authority figures in their lives as I was.

“Well, let’s go upstairs and I’ll show it to ya.”

I followed Aaron through his living room, then to the front door. He opened it into a hallway that led to the other two apartments in the building. Directly across the hall from us was the other downstairs apartment, and to the right of this door was a staircase that led upstairs to the apartment. He flipped on the light switch before ascending the stairs, and Joyce followed directly behind him. I took up the rear, grabbing a hold of the railing as I stepped up behind them.

“I was surprised that they actually left the place in fairly decent shape,” said Aaron. He turned to me as he slid the key into the door. Joyce was in between us, still puffing away on her smoke. “But the bathtub is pretty nasty. I might have to replace it actually.”

“Well, if it just needs to be cleaned, Mark can do it,” said Joyce. “He’s a clean machine.” She looked back at me, smiling.

When we walked into the apartment itself, I was almost immediately taken aback. The living area was extremely spacious and relatively clean, but the décor was utterly atrocious. The first thing I noticed was the wood paneling walls, followed by the glaring yellowish green shag carpeting. The

kitchen was extremely small, with very little counter space, it featured a gas range and a somewhat-new-looking refrigerator. I scanned my surroundings, nodding to myself but not saying anything.

"Well let me show you the rest," said Aaron. "There is a really big bedroom and another sort-of walk-through type bedroom. Guess you could use it for an office or something. And there is, of course, the bathroom. It's big, but like I said, the tub is pretty nasty." He then led me down the hallway and into the bathroom. I saw instantly that he was not exaggerating about the tub.

"Oh God!" I said, purely responding from reflex. "Yeah, that is horrible." Never in my life had I seen a bathtub caked with so much filth and grime. "It looks like this has never been cleaned."

"I know. Sorry. I think I might just have to completely replace that tub. There is not gonna be any way you will be able to get that clean."

"Well...I'll give it a try," I said meekly.

Aaron then led me into the bedroom. Again, the colors were ghastly, but I could not help but smile to myself. I could see myself living here actually. It would not be so bad as a first apartment. There was so much that I could do with it, and the mere size of the place was incredible. I would have more than enough space.

"Well, what do you think?" Aaron asked. "It's

four hundred per month. Normally I charge a damage deposit, but if you are willing to do the cleaning yourself, I will waive it. I already talked to Joyce about it."

"Oh, honey," said Joyce, "I think it will be just perfect for you! I can help you fix it up real cute."

"Um, well...thanks. I mean I appreciate it, but you've done so much for me already. I do think I'm interested in it though. It is really big. I like how spacious it is."

"Yeah, and the people who live downstairs are pretty mellow. They are not partiers or anything like that. You probably will hear more noise from my apartment than from theirs. Also, if you wanna keep cleaning my place, I can take money off your rent."

"Are you serious?" I asked, a little too excitedly. "I mean, wow! That would help me out a lot. I don't wanna take business away from Joyce though." I looked at her apologetically.

"No, don't be silly. You earned that job, Mark. You still can get other jobs from me though, too."

"Okay, well is there a lease or something?"

"Yeah, let's go back downstairs and I will draw one up for you. Are you prepared to take care of this today?" Aaron asked.

I always thought it was interesting that business people used those kinds of euphemisms. Instead of asking me if I had the money, he asked

if I was *prepared*. "Yes, sir, I just have to grab my wallet from the car." I had not even realized that I'd again called him sir.

Joyce laughed at me. "I never thought I'd see the day when people would be addressing Aaron as sir."

"Me neither," conceded Aaron. "A first-name basis is more my style."

"I'm sorry," I said, looking down and feeling myself blush. "I forgot."

After filling out the lease and paying my first month's rent, Joyce drove me back to the dorm. I was so incredibly excited. I had a new job lined up and a new apartment. I was only a couple weeks away from graduation. The thing that excited me the most, though, was knowing I was going to be living so close to Aaron. I was actually quite nervous about it, I felt like such an idiot when I was in his presence. I did not know the correct thing to say, and there was a part of me that wondered if he at all sensed the attraction that I felt toward him. I sort of doubted that though. I knew that he had a girlfriend.

Today's encounter with him had gone quite well, I must admit. He had actually engaged me in conversation and I'd responded to him without making a complete fool of myself. I just had to remember to call him by his first name instead of

sir. Where did that even come from? Why would I even be tempted to address him the same way I would some old man? He was more like a peer of mine, not a superior. He just *seemed* superior to me, though. I don't know why really. Perhaps it was his air of confidence or his obvious success. Maybe it was because he was so much taller than me and that he was in a position of authority over me, so to speak, by being first an employer of mine and then my landlord. I did not really feel uncomfortable with the notion that I was beneath him. In actuality, it felt sort of appropriate. There was a part of me that felt rather humiliated, though, I must admit, for these feelings were in some ways emasculating.

Later that day I informed my roommate Tim that I would be moving out right after graduation. He was going to stay on campus rather than to move home. His family was actually from the same city where we attended college. He just enjoyed his freedom too much to move back home, and plus he had another year of school ahead of him. I sensed he was kind of glad I was leaving, it gave him the room entirely to himself.

I called my parents that evening and told them the good news about the job and the apartment. My Mom said that she and Dad would stay a couple days after graduation to help me get moved into my new place. All these changes were

taking place so rapidly that it seemed rather surreal to me. "Mom, I am so excited! I can't believe I got a job already!"

She prattled on and on about how she was going to help me get my apartment furnished.

I dismissed it offhandedly. "Mom, I don't want you spending a lot of money on me. You can't afford it."

"Don't tell me what I can and cannot afford," she chided. "There are few times in life when a mother gets to experience the milestone events in her child's life. Your graduation is one of these times, and when you get married and give me grandchildren, it will be another."

"Well don't hold your breath! I gotta find a girl who will even date me first." I never had told my parents about the fact that I wasn't even sure I was attracted to girls at all. If that day ever did come when I decided to be truthful with them, I knew it was going to be a crushing blow to my mother especially. I'd rather not even think about it at all.

So that was how Aaron got to be my landlord. I wondered what it was going to be like being his tenant. I guess only time would tell.

Chapter Three

Transitions have never been very easy for me. When I advanced from grammar school into junior high, I honestly thought I wouldn't make it. I was certain I was the only kid on earth that was overwhelmed by the fact that my entire world was changing. Everyone else seemed to be just utterly thrilled to be done with elementary school and to be moving forward into better things. Again, when I entered high school, I faced the same anxiety. College was like a triple whammy to me, being that I had to cope with the separation from my family, find a new job and adapt both academically and socially to life on campus.

Now, all of it was over. All of my preparation for life was behind me, and suddenly I was being hurled into the real world. I was educated, equipped with knowledge and an embossed, framed certificate to prove it. So why was it that I felt so much like a sheep in a den of wolves? I just was so very terrified of being out here on my own.

No longer did I have the safety net of my parents or of my school. It was just me and the world now.

As frightening as it all was, I still was filled with excitement and anticipation. The week of graduation was so wonderful to spend some time with my Mom and Dad. They stayed for five full days, renting a room at the Holiday Inn. This was truly unusual for them, for they hardly ever took vacations. Just the fact that they afforded themselves the luxury of a hotel room was remarkable. Growing up, I remembered family vacations that consisted of camping trips or extended visits with relatives. We never really had the money to go on a real vacation. It wasn't until my senior year in high school that I made it to Disney World for the first time, and that was for our class trip.

During that week, I took Tim over to the Holiday Inn with me one night and we used the pool, then Mom and Dad took us out to dinner. It struck me as being rather interesting that Tim and my father seemed to get along so very well together. They spoke animatedly with one another throughout the meal, discussing NASCAR, the Detroit Lions and other such typically manly topics that I never could relate to. For some reason, I never seemed to have been able to make the connection with my father that most sons do with their dads. It really wasn't so much that I was

this big sissy or something. I did participate in a few high school sports, and I didn't think I really displayed any particular effeminate mannerisms or anything.

My thoughts drifted during our dinner, and I began ruminating about Aaron again. I realized that the exact same awkwardness I felt when in the presence of my father was what I experienced while around Aaron. Certainly, it was not that I viewed Aaron as being a father figure of any sort. He was anything but. Aaron was young, had a full head of spiky hair and was by anyone's description, a pretty cool dude. I think that the similarity of feelings that I recognized was due mainly to the fact that both Aaron and my dad were authority figures to me. Never once in my life had I challenged my dad. I never yelled back at him when I was being corrected. I never stated to him that I disagreed with any decision he had made. I always simply accepted my role as his subordinate.

The thing that puzzled me about Aaron, though, was the sexual arousal that I experienced when I thought about him. Ever since I'd signed that lease and knew for certain that I was gonna be his tenant, those feelings had heightened. Now instead of having these vague, non-specific thoughts of Aaron and his role as my superior, I was actually having very specific and graphic

sexual fantasies. I was starting to think of myself servicing Aaron sexually. I was finding myself wondering what it would feel like to kneel before him, taste him and feel him inside of me. I was entertaining fantasies of providing him with non-reciprocal pleasures, and literally every time that I slipped into one of those fantasies I would become so incredibly aroused that I'd actually lose control. In the past week alone, I embarrassingly had to change my underwear and pants on four different occasions after I'd involuntarily ejaculated while thinking of Aaron. I must have been in a daydream when my mom reached across the table and grabbed my wrist.

"Honey! Pass your father the biscuits."

"Oh, sorry," I said. "I wasn't paying attention."

"Oh I know," my mom said reassuringly. "It's a big week for you. There's lots of things to think about, but don't you worry, we are gonna go over tomorrow morning and help you get your apartment settled. Your father and I discussed it, and we decided that the best way we can help you right now is to get you some new furniture."

"No, Mom," I insisted, "I don't really need anything fancy. I was just gonna go to Salvation Army or something, maybe some resale shops, and look for some cheap stuff."

"No," interjected my dad, "We wanna do this. Consider it your graduation present, and that's

final.”

I looked across the table at him, smiling meekly as I made eye contact. “Okay. Well thank you.”

So the next day, we did exactly that. Mom and Dad took me down to several furniture stores and we picked out a living room set, a bed, a dresser and a dining room table and chairs. In all, they laid out almost three thousand dollars for me that day. Every time my dad reached into his wallet, a pang of guilt shot through my chest, but I really could not argue with them. I knew that it had taken my parents many years to save up the money they now were spending on me, but how could I say no?

Our graduation ceremony was on a Sunday afternoon, and it was the most god-awfully long and boring event I’d ever endured. When I finally had my diploma in hand, it was well worth the tedium, and I knew that a chapter in my life was officially over. Now my real adult life was about to begin. My parents found me outside of the auditorium after the ceremony, and we posed for several pictures together while Joyce operated the camera. When it was all over with and my parents said their goodbyes to me, I headed back to my new apartment for the very first time. The next morning I was going to be starting my new job. It had actually happened! New apartment. New job.

New life. And new landlord.

The new furnishings in my apartment seemed to do an awful lot to improve the drabness of the décor. Although the spacious apartment seemed so vast and so empty, it was starting to become homier in its appearance, and as I began to hang pictures and rearrange things according to my own taste. I was beginning to become more and more pleased with my surroundings.

It was an incredible relief to be done with my job at the grocery store. Even though I really enjoyed the interaction with the coworkers and employees, it never had felt like anything more than a job to me. It was merely a means to an end, a way of garnering a paycheck. My new position at the paper was so incredibly different. It was awesome to be actually employed in the profession of my choosing. This was my passion, and it was awesome for me to be able to be actually living my dream.

You might assume that writing obituaries would be a terribly depressing job, but as I started to get into it, I began to realize that I disliked it far less than I would have expected. It just seemed so significant to me to be able to memorialize a life, to put an official written record in print that indelibly declared that this person had lived, and that their life had touched other people. I strove

for uniqueness with every obit that I prepared, concentrating upon avoiding the tendency to list only the facts: the survivors, the employment history, the community involvement. I would call loved ones and ask for photos, try to get a feel for who this person was and how they touched the lives of those within their world.

Joyce kept in close contact with me, calling me almost daily. She and I had become rather close friends, and she offered me a couple of really good cleaning jobs during my first couple weeks at the new apartment. This helped tremendously, as I discovered very quickly that every single utility company required security deposits and hookup fees. I also had to stock my new kitchen with groceries, and it seemed really bizarre to me to be on the other end of the check stand when I went through the supermarket checkout for the first time.

Basically, everything was falling into place, and within the first two weeks, I was realizing that I was going to love this time in my life. I liked my apartment, my new job was awesome and I was going to be rather comfortable in terms of my financial needs. I was so busy during the transition period, that I did not even think really all that much of Aaron either. This was kind of a relief to me, and I actually considered the possibility that my obsession with him was merely

a passing phase. Perhaps he seemed larger than life to me when I viewed him from a distance, but now that I was actually living right above him, he actually was not all that incredible.

Then one Tuesday night, two weeks after I'd moved into my apartment, my phone rang unexpectedly. So far, I'd only received a handful of calls, and almost every single one was from Joyce. As I picked up the receiver, I honestly expected to hear her voice on the line again. This time though, it was Aaron.

"Hey, Mark."

I was surprised, not only that it was Aaron on the line, but that he also had gotten my name right for once. "This is Aaron, your landlord."

"Oh hello," I said, immediately feeling my knees start to tremble. I sat down right away in a kitchen chair. "Um, how are you?"

"Great. Hey, I was wondering, are you still interested in cleaning my apartment?"

"Sure. Oh, and I wanted to tell you something..."

"What's that?"

"I got that tub spotlessly clean. You wouldn't believe it, it looks brand new."

"No shit? Are you serious? How'd you do it?"

"I scrubbed it for over two hours," I said lightheartedly, laughing.

"Wow, I thought that thing was beyond hope.

Glad you got it clean though, but listen...when do you wanna clean my place?"

"Any time you want, really," I said, resisting again the urge to call him *sir*. "I can do it tomorrow when I get out of work if you'd like."

"Oh cool. That'd be great. I gotta go out tomorrow night anyway. I have a closing scheduled at six o'clock, so it should be the perfect time. Why don't you come down right now and get the key from me, okay?"

"Sure, I'll be right there." So much for wishful thinking! I knew immediately that my obsession with my landlord was not going to be a mere passing phase. The abatement of my fantasies had simply been due to the distractions within my recently busier schedule, but just by talking to him for those few seconds, I felt my heart starting to race as it had done before. I suddenly felt very flushed and weak. God! And now I had to go downstairs and face him in person. Shit!

I paced the floor for a few seconds, not sure how to compose myself. Then I ran over to look at myself in the mirror. God, what he must think when he looks at me, I thought. I was so much shorter than him, and so geeky looking. I bet he thought I was a total loser. I tucked my shirt in as I stared at my reflection, then quickly untucked it. I ran a comb through my hair quickly, then combed it the opposite way, with the part on the other

side. Then I re-combed it, returning to the original part. God, I'm such a fucking psycho! Why did it matter if my shirt was tucked or my hair was combed? I just was going downstairs to grab a stupid key.

When I finally found myself standing in the downstairs hallway in front of Aaron's apartment, I took a deep breath before I gently rapped on his door. I waited a few seconds, hearing nothing, and then repeated my knock, this time a little louder. Finally, I heard his footsteps and I stepped back from the door slightly. When he opened the door to me, I looked up at him shyly and saw him towering there looking down at me.

"C'mon in," he offered.

I quickly stepped inside and stood beside him.

"Have a seat. You want a beer or something?"

"Um...oh, no. Or, no thank you." I couldn't believe his offer.

"You sure? How about a soda or something then?"

"Oh, well, thanks, but I probably shouldn't stay. I'm kinda in the middle of something...for work."

"Ah, okay. Well let me get you that key then. How's your job goin'?" He stepped into the dining room behind us to grab the spare key that was hanging on his key rack.

"Oh, well, ya know...um...I really like it. A

lot," I felt like a total idiot. Why did I always get so tongue tied when talking to him? "I write obituaries."

Aaron immediately laughed. "You're kidding. Doesn't that just kill you?"

I laughed nervously at his lame pun and then immediately felt like a moron. "Yeah, well it is just sort of an entry level job. I'm actually gonna be a journalist."

"Cool. You sure ya don't wanna hang out, have a beer or something? That's kind of depressing to sit by yourself, writing obituaries." He smiled at me then, for the first time—I mean, really smiled, making eye contact as he did so.

"Um...well, okay. A pop maybe. I don't really drink beer—not that much, I mean."

"You smoke?" he asked, "weed, I mean."

My eyes widened as I stared over at him. I shrugged my shoulders nervously and he laughed. "I have tried it before...sure. I don't really like the taste of it much though." I inched my way into the dining room as Aaron headed toward the kitchen.

"Well I hope you don't mind if I do. I kinda like to get high sometimes," he said, now raising his voice so I could hear him from the kitchen. "Personally I think it'd do you some good to get stoned. You always seem kinda nervous. No offense or anything."

"Really? I'm sorry."

He laughed again as he headed back through the dining room, holding a can of Diet Coke. "That's what I mean. Don't be sorry, just relax. Sit down and I'll roll us one."

I obeyed him, moving over quickly to the sofa. "I don't know though. My employer does drug testing."

"Didn't you get tested before you were hired?"

"Yeah," I said. "I had to be tested right after my first interview."

"So don't worry. They're not gonna test ya again right away, and even if they do, just call me. I've got some stuff you can drink that will make ya piss clean."

"Really?"

"Yeah, been there, done that," he said as he sat down in the chair opposite me. He reached beside the chair and pulled out a drawer from the lamp stand that was there. He retrieved a sandwich bag that was rolled neatly. It looked like it contained a very small quantity of pot. He placed the baggie on the glass coffee table in front of him and then pulled over a magazine.

I watched as he reached into the bag, took out a small amount of marijuana and spread it on the magazine.

"Hey, can you grab me a beer? I forgot to get one."

"Oh sure," I said, and quickly jumped up off the couch. My heart skipped a beat as I realized he was having me wait on him. When I returned, I placed the opened beer bottle on the coffee table and sat back down on the couch. This time I positioned myself a little closer to Aaron than I previously was. I observed him silently as he carefully broke apart the marijuana, separating any seeds that he found. I didn't realize how intently I was staring until he looked up at me and smiled.

"You sure you've tried this before?" he asked, as he picked up his beer bottle to take a swig. "Seems like you are not really comfortable."

I shifted in my seat nervously, trying to think of how I should respond to him. "Um..." I looked him in the eye, then almost immediately lowered my gaze. "Um, I took a puff one time. Only once. I just...um...I never watched anyone do this."

"Roll a joint?"

I nodded. "You do it very precisely," I said, trying to sound complimentary. "I never realized it was so...um...involved. You are very careful, the way you handle it." He laughed at me again, and I was beginning to wonder if I'd ever learn to say the right thing to him.

"Ya know, you're pretty cute, some of the things you say." He was gently rolling the cigarette paper between his fingers, sealing it

smoothly around the tightly packed pot. He brought the joint up to his lips and licked the edge of the paper, pressed it down with his thumbs and then gently twisted the ends of the joint to make them pointed. "This is what you call a pinner," he said, as he held the tiny marijuana stick up for me to see. "It's just a small joint. Doesn't look like much, but it'll be enough to get us high, especially with you being so...new."

I wanted to thank him for saying I was cute, but I wasn't even sure what he meant by it. I doubted that when he said someone was cute, he connoted the same meaning as I would. If I were to say to him that he was cute I'd actually be expressing how attractive he was to me, but I was fairly sure he simply meant that my words and expressions were unusual to him, unique even. Perhaps he even considered me to be childish in a way.

Aaron then leaned back in his chair and reached into his pocket to pull out a Bic lighter. With his left hand, he brought the joint to his lips, held it there between his thumb and index finger, and then moved the lighter up to connect with the other end of the joint. He lit it, and sucked in deeply. I watched intently, noting that he did not exhale, but seemed to be holding his breath. He dropped the lighter onto the magazine that was on the coffee table, and removed the joint from his mouth, leaning forward to pass it over to me.

Carefully, I took the small joint from him, trying to imitate the way that he had held it. His lips curled slightly as he smiled, though he did not open his mouth for he seemed to still be holding his breath.

"Just take a small hit at first, and don't exhale," he said.

His voice sounded funny, due to the way, he continued to hold his breath while talking. I stared right at him as I pressed my lips together around the end of the joint and sucked in. As soon as the first puff of smoke entered my lungs, I gagged reflexively, coughing uncontrollably.

Aaron started to laugh, exhaling as he did so. "It's okay, dude," he said. "It's normal to cough at first. Try again."

I held the joint out in front of me and stared at it as I tried to compose myself. I knew I must have been blushing, my face felt so hot to me. "Okay, sorry." I took another hit. This time I did not inhale so deeply, and although I still had the urge to cough, I suppressed it and held the smoke in.

"There ya go," Aaron said. "That's right." He reached over to take the joint from me and took a second hit. Then he carefully rolled the tip of the joint in an ashtray, smoothing it out and removing the ashes.

I smelt the overpoweringly sweet aroma of the pot wafting around me, and finally I exhaled after

what seemed almost an eternity of holding my breath. He then passed me the joint again, apparently expecting me to puff on it a second time myself.

I took another hit off the joint, realizing it was much easier this time than my first two attempts.

He was leaning forward in his chair, resting his elbows on his knees. "Two or three hits are probably enough unless you want more."

I shook my head quickly. "No, that's fine," I said, holding my breath as I spoke. I passed the joint back to him and simply sat there watching him as he finished smoking it. His movements were smooth and effortless. He seemed very comfortable with himself, the exact opposite of how I felt.

"Ya know, I never told ya, but you did a really good job when you cleaned for me that first time. I couldn't believe it when I got home that night."

"Really? Thanks," I said, feeling both surprised and embarrassed by his compliment.

"Yeah, and it impressed my girlfriend, too." He laughed. "You got a girlfriend?"

I shook my head. He smiled in a way that seemed so sweet to me.

"I can see why you don't have a girlfriend. You're so shy. Do you even go on any dates?"

His question was rather shocking to me, seeming rather blunt. My eyes widened as I

looked over at him. "Well, um, sure. I mean, I have, not lately though. These last two semesters have been really busy for me, ya know."

He nodded. "I've been seeing Robin for quite awhile. We actually met in high school, and now she's at college. She goes to Ferris. Everyone thinks we are really serious, and I kinda think she wants me to marry her." His tone was dismissive, and he sort of chuckled as he said this. "But I'm too young to think about that shit, ya know. I just wanna concentrate on my own stuff right now."

"You have a lot of responsibility," I said. "I never knew anyone your age that owned so many buildings, had a job and everything. You're really...um...ambitious, I guess."

"Guess I get that from my old man," he said, "'cept he's an asshole. He owns a Seven-Eleven store. That's how I met Joyce, she used to work for him. It's like no matter how hard you try, ya just can't please him. All he does is bitch."

"Yeah," I said empathetically. "Parents can be that way. I'm lucky though, my mom and dad are both really supportive of me. They bought me all the furniture for my apartment."

"Really? That's cool. I'll have to come up and look at it sometime."

"Any time," I said, a little too quickly. I was starting to feel a little funny, sort of like a lightheaded feeling.

"You're high, aren't ya?" Aaron asked, laughing.

"I think so," I said as I started to giggle. "It feels a little weird."

"But you're relaxed finally, actually laughing. How come you're always so uptight around me anyway?"

"Really, I'm sorry," I said, "I don't mean to be. I'll try not to be that way anymore. Guess I just can't help it, you sorta make me feel...strange."

"I make you feel strange?" he asked in a very taken aback tone. "How do ya mean?"

I shrugged. "Maybe cuz you just seem so much better than me." I was surprising myself to be actually verbalizing these feelings. Perhaps it was the effects of the marijuana that were making me braver. Maybe it was simply that our one-on-one conversation was finally putting me at ease a bit. "You're just a very confident person. Guys like you make me feel...um...shy. Self-conscious, I guess."

"Well, I don't think I'm any better than you, at all. Christ, you just got yourself a college degree. You should be proud of that."

"I don't know," I said sincerely. "I don't think it's really about that. Probably it wouldn't matter how much education I had. You just seem like someone who has authority, I guess."

He busted up laughing this time. He had

finished the joint and placed the tiny roach in the ashtray. He took another swig of his beer. "Wanna listen to some tunes? What kinda music do you like?"

"Honestly, I love almost every type of music. I have a very eclectic taste."

"Well you wanna rock, or are you feelin mellow?" he asked.

"Hmm," I said, thinking about his question for a second. "Mellow, I guess."

"Okay," he said, as he got up from his chair and walked over to the stereo system. "You like Savage Garden?"

I nodded. "Yeah, they're like one of my favorites."

"My friend Joey says they're a couple of fags. He thinks the two guys are boyfriends or something. What do you think?"

"I dunno," I said, feeling my heartbeat quicken again. "Guess I don't care. I just like the music."

"That's what I say, too," Aaron said. "To each their own."

When Aaron returned from the stereo, he did not sit in the chair where he'd been, but instead on the couch next to me. I was a little surprised, and shifted myself on the sofa to move away from him. He acted very natural though, and stretched his legs out in front of himself, propping his feet on the edge of the coffee table. He then clasped his

hands behind his head and leaned back, resting against the cushions behind him. He closed his eyes, completely relaxing himself.

I curled myself up on the couch, leaning against the arm of the sofa and tucking my feet underneath me. I couldn't help but look over at him, sitting there only a couple of feet from me, reclining with his feet propped up. He still was wearing his work clothes—crisply pressed pleated khakis and an un-tucked dress shirt. I inhaled the scent of his Obsession as I allowed the tones of the music wash over me. He had been so correct when he said the pot would relax me, for I was feeling extremely mellow. It was like a warmth inside of me—very peaceful and serene.

Aaron did not open his eyes, but he began to speak to me. "My, friend Joey, the one I just mentioned to ya, he sorta reminds me of you. He's short. How tall are ya?"

"I'm five-foot-four."

"Yeah, that's about how tall he is, too. He doesn't live around here anymore though. After graduation, he moved out to Nevada. We used to get high together like this all the time. We did lots of stuff together actually. Lots of stuff."

"Yeah, I had a best friend like that in high school, too. His name was Phil." I had now closed my own eyes and was completely relaxed.

"Well he wasn't really what you'd call my best

friend. We just did stuff together, that's all." Suddenly I was surprised to feel Aaron's hand as he grabbed a hold of my wrist. I opened my eyes to look at him and saw him staring directly at me. He pulled my arm toward himself, guiding me over to him in a way that was compelling yet not forceful. I shifted my position, yielding myself to his guidance, unsure of what to think of his actions. I now was in an upright, kneeling position beside him on the couch as he placed my hand in his lap.

"We did stuff together," he repeated himself as he looked intently into my eyes.

I was so very nervous and excited as I felt him for the first time, pressing my fingertips gently against the fabric of his khakis. He continued to grasp my wrist, steadfast while holding my hand against his groin, while he moved his feet from the coffee table and spread his legs apart. I heard myself gasping as I took in a breath, and I looked down to watch the movement of my own hand. I pressed my fingers against him, feeling his hardness as I touched him.

The single thought that I remember flashing into my mind was, *This can't be real! This can't actually be happening!* It felt to me as if my heart were going to beat right out of my chest as I knelt there beside this guy whom I had secretly idolized for the past month. How could it be that he

wanted me to touch him this way? How was it that only moments before we were talking about his girlfriend and also how she wanted him to marry her? And now he was wanting me to touch him – to touch him sexually?

“You like it?” he asked in a very quiet and seductive voice.

All I could do was nod. I wanted to tell him that I did not understand. I wanted to say that I knew he was straight, that I knew he had a girlfriend. I wanted to tell him that I was not a fag, was not like the singers from Savage Garden. I couldn’t say anything though. All I could do was continue to stare at the bulge in his pants and gently run my fingers over it. He released my wrist and relaxed himself as I continued.

“Ya know, we can have a pretty good arrangement here,” Aaron said. “We could work out a good deal on your rent. You can clean for me and take care of some of my other *needs*. Ya know what I mean?”

Again, I nodded.

“Take it out,” he said.

Quickly and carefully, I unloosened his belt and unbuttoned his khakis. Then I unzipped them. He was wearing light blue cotton boxers. I slid down off the couch onto the floor, kneeling there in front of him. With his feet he shoved the coffee table, allowing himself space to stretch out a little more,

and I slid between his legs.

I looked up at him then, and for the first time since I had initially laid eyes on him, I truly did feel comfortable. I was kneeling at his feet. Slowly I reached up and grasped the waistband of his pants and boxers and began to pull them down. He thrust his hips forward, allowing me the ability to undress him. As I pulled his pants down onto his thighs, I caught sight of his hard cock for the first time, and once again, I gasped. This time I was so excited that I nearly had an orgasm right then without even touching myself. He was so beautiful, so utterly perfect! The full round mushroom head of his cock was enormous, and the long hard shaft was thick and beefy. His nut sac was rotund and tight against the base of his shaft. Quickly I finished pulling off his pants, bending myself over submissively to pull each pant leg off from his ankles. Then I repositioned myself between his legs and looked up into his face once more.

"You want it?" he asked. "This is what you've wanted all along, isn't it?"

I nodded again.

"Say it," he said.

"I want it," I whispered.

"What? What did you say?"

"I want it," I repeated, this time a little louder.

"I want it so bad...please...sir."

He then reached down and grabbed a hold of my head and pulled me into himself, moaning as he felt my mouth surround him for the first time.

Chapter Four

What happened between Aaron and me could not have actually happened. I knew when I woke up at two the following morning, that it must have been some sort of dream, an extension of the fantasy that had begun in my head a month before. But as I lay there, staring up at the ceiling of my new apartment, I knew it was no dream. My landlord Aaron Culver had called me down to his apartment, got me high and then let me give him a blowjob. Jesus Christ!

I closed my eyes tightly, remembering every detail of what had happened. I remembered the beating of my own heart and how excited I had become when I felt his hand against my wrist. The way that he pulled my arm over to himself, placing my hand in his lap, it seemed to have happened in slow motion. Pressing myself so close to him, I smelled him for the first time. The sweet aroma of the pot mingled with his masculine cologne created a heady, inviting scent. He

smelled and tasted so very clean, only a hint of muskiness wafted from the confines of his barely damp crotch.

Never before had I seen another man up close like this, not right there at eye level. Never had I actually done anything even remotely sexual with either a guy or a girl. I'd always wondered, what would it taste like? How would it feel in my mouth? Would it make me gag, make me sick? Now I knew the answers to these questions but suddenly was faced with a million more. What did this mean? What did it make me? Was I a faggot? A pervert? How did I feel about Aaron, and what did he think of me?

He certainly had enjoyed it, there was truly no denying this. He had been very clear in his verbalizations, while I knelt there serving him. He told me repeatedly how good it felt. He grabbed a hold of my head and guided me, teaching me how to do it. A lot of my performance was instinct. I simply did what I assumed would feel best. I figured the sensation of my tongue would please him, the pressure of my lips sliding up and down his shaft. He seemed to moan the most when I took him into my mouth deeply. At one point, I actually made myself gag when I tried to swallow it all. It didn't seem to bother him though. After I'd regained my composure, I simply resumed my duties and continued to suck him.

He was holding onto my head tightly when he came, and I had never imagined it would feel so incredible. I felt the cum firing up his shaft as he ejaculated. I felt his cock pulsing in my mouth, and I gulped hungrily as I tasted his seed for the first time. It hadn't occurred to me to pull away, all I could think of was pleasing him. Apparently, he never considered the possibility either, for he acted as if it were natural for me to have swallowed.

I was drenched with sweat when it was over, and my own crotch was soaked with cum. I had actually shot in my pants. I knelt there trembling, resting my head against Aaron's thigh and he gently touched my hair with his fingertips. I pressed my lips to his leg, kissing it reverently, and then suddenly I pushed myself away from him.

"I have to go!" I said, as I leaned against the coffee table, trying to scramble to my feet. I turned away from him, quickly grabbing the set of keys I'd laid on the stand beside me. "I'll come back tomorrow...to clean your apartment."

"Wait, Mark —"

I was already out the door and heading up the steps. I heard him open the door behind me.

"Mark!"

I turned around to look down at him. He had pulled his pants back on, but they were not

fastened.

"Thanks! Thank you for what you did."

I stopped halfway up the staircase and stared at him, not really sure how to respond. "Thank *you*," I finally managed and then raced up the remaining steps to my apartment. Once inside, I dropped to my knees again, burying my face in my hands and sobbing. Oh my God! What had just happened?

Now here it was only a few hours later and I lay sleepless in my bed, knowing he was below me in his own apartment. What did he think of me now? He must have known from the moment that he'd met me what kind of a person I was. He must have realized I was a fag. He certainly did not seem like one himself though, I never would have guessed in a million years that he'd let some other guy give him head. Plus he had a girlfriend. We had even talked about her not long before we did what we did. Maybe it was just the drugs that made me do it. I wasn't used to being under the influence of anything, not even really alcohol.

But then I realized this was absurd. I had been fantasizing about Aaron since the second I laid eyes on him. I had been jacking myself off every single night, thinking about him towering over me, visualizing him naked, simply picturing his face! What had happened between us was not a horrible thing. It was incredible actually. I

certainly had enjoyed it, hadn't I? My God, I had shot my load right in my own pants. It wasn't like he had forced me to suck him. I did it because I wanted to. He had even made me say it out loud, to admit that I wanted to do it.

And that feeling of gratification I had felt when I knelt before him for the first time, it was virtually incomparable. I knew inside of myself that this was exactly where I had always wanted to be. He knew it, too, for he said so. He'd said, *This is what you've wanted all along, isn't it?* How could he have known it so clearly? How could he have sensed it from me, when I was so terribly shy and quiet when I was around him? Perhaps it was this very timidity that gave me away. Perhaps it was the way I looked at him, or the way that I looked away from him. Maybe it was something unspoken, simply a feeling, a vibe. Whatever it was, I was so thankful he had sensed it.

But what do I do now? How can I face him again after this incident? I wondered how he was going to treat me. Maybe he was going to start bossing me around now, bullying me. Maybe he would blackmail me, force me to do it again. He certainly had that power, I realized. If he wanted to, he could raise my rent. He could evict me. But then I remembered what he'd said about an *arrangement*. He'd suggested we work out a deal on the rent where I cleaned for him and took care

of his *other needs*. Is that what I really wanted though? Did I want for him to compensate me for...*servicing him*? No! God no. It would be like I was a prostitute or something.

How was I going to tell him this though? How was I going to say to him that I was not interested in any such arrangement? How could I make him understand that to take money or monetary compensation for being with him sexually, would make me feel like a total whore? Man, I could not even talk to him, so how was I going to be able to say these things?

I lay there in my bed alone, thinking of all that had happened, how my life had changed so very much in the past few weeks. Now it appeared it was going to change even more dramatically, and all because of my new landlord.

For the first time that next day at work, my job actually did seem depressing to me. I couldn't focus upon my tasks clearly and I found myself having to rewrite sentences and paragraphs multiple times. I couldn't help myself, I just could not concentrate. The single thing that kept entering my mind was Aaron. My feelings about him were so very conflicting. On the one hand, I craved him so badly – desperately almost. On the other, I felt so ashamed of my own desires.

For so many years, I'd been running from the

realities about myself and my own passions. I had denied repeatedly that there was something different about me. I just had not met the right girl. It all was simply a matter of timing. Eventually my heterosexual hormones would kick in, and everything would be just fine. I had explained away my fantasies as mere adolescent exploration. I thought all of these cravings eventually would abate—they'd simply dissolve into my past—when I actually met and fell in love for the first time.

But what were these feelings that I was experiencing towards Aaron? Why was he in my thoughts constantly? Why did I so passionately desire to please him?

I remembered the details of his body, the way he tightened his abs when I was sucking him off the night before. I remembered how clean he smelled, the sound of his moans when I gave him pleasure. It was almost like a purring—pure contentment. The expressions on his face were burned into my memory—his smile, the arch of his eyebrows, the way he cocked his head slightly when he leaned in to say something to me. I thought about how vulnerable and small I felt in his presence. His stature was commanding and authoritative.

How could this infatuation that I felt towards him be anything but love? It was like nothing I'd

ever before experienced, and it was taking over my life.

I was watching the hands of the clock the last two hours of work and actually ended up leaving fifteen minutes early. When I got home, it was not yet even five o'clock. I changed quickly into a pair of sweats and began pacing the floor a bit. I debated getting a bite to eat, checking my email, watching *Oprah*. I did none of these things though, I merely walked back and forth in my apartment. Finally, I grabbed the key that Aaron had given me the night before and headed downstairs.

As I stuck the key into the lock of his apartment door, my pulse was racing with nervous excitement. Visions of my encounter with him the day before flashed into my mind, and I wondered for a second if I was even going to be able to go through with the task of cleaning for him. I stepped through the doorway and slowly closed the door behind me. It seemed so eerie in here, it was far too quiet.

For a few seconds I felt disoriented, and I looked around the apartment. I saw the coffee table, still pushed back away from the sofa, and the ashtray that Aaron had been using when he smoked the joint. Even the can of Diet Coke I'd been drinking remained on the end table where I'd left it. I wondered for a second how someone who seemed to be as perfect as Aaron could be

such a slob when it came to his own apartment. Literally, every aspect of his appearance and wardrobe were immaculate. He owned and drove an expensive car, which seemed to be always spotlessly clean. His teeth were sparkling white, and his hair was perfectly groomed. He was always clean and preppy looking, the all American young businessman.

I guess it was true that no one was perfect, I thought. So the guy was lousy at housework, big deal. It seemed to me for a moment that it would be so appropriate for him to have a partner...or a wife ...who would take care of these sort of things for him. He obviously was more than capable of handling the financial matters in his life. He could definitely bring home the bacon, but it was like he needed someone behind the scenes to be his organizer, his helpmate. I smiled to myself for a few seconds as I stood there in the middle of his living room, envisioning myself in this sort of role.

Oh my God! I suddenly realized how ludicrous my thinking had become. I was a man, not a wife! How could I ever even entertain such thoughts as these, emasculating myself? How could I think of myself in terms of being another man's servant, his maid? But then suddenly I stopped in my tracks and looked around me. Why was I even here then? If it was so horrible for me to lower myself to a position of submission, then why was I

scrubbing Aaron's toilet and washing his dishes? And even more pertinently, why did I blow him yesterday?

There was something about Aaron that literally made my knees weak. Something in his demeanor, in the way he looked at me, in his very air that brought me under his authoritative umbrella. He seemed to overshadow me, to make me feel as if I were by nature beneath him. It was so odd, for it was not a horribly negative feeling. It was not a loathsome, degrading feeling where I suddenly felt like the scum of the earth. Instead, it felt comfortable and natural for me. When I slid to my knees at his feet the day before, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratification that compared to nothing I'd ever felt before. It just seemed right.

I walked around the apartment for a few minutes, taking in the task that lay before me and mentally mapping out a plan as to how I was going to go about my cleaning chores. When I stepped into the dining room, I saw a note on the table. It was folded over with my name written on the outside. He must have left me instructions. I reached down to pick it up and when I did, a bill of currency slid out onto the table. It was a hundred dollars.

Mark,

Thanks for yesterday. Sorry you took off so

suddenly. Hope you're okay. Give me a call.

Aaron

Aaron's handwriting was scrawling and practically illegible, but I was astonished by the contents of his letter. The thing that was most puzzling to me was that I was aware that it must be obvious to him that I viewed him as being superior to myself. Not only did I get remarkably timid in his presence, but I also was so incredibly respectful towards him. I was here now for the purpose of cleaning for him, and the day before I even served him sexually. Yet in spite of all of this, he was being so kind to me. He was treating me with dignity and respect even though he did not actually have to do so, at all.

I placed the note back down on the table, sliding the hundred-dollar bill back within, and headed for the bathroom. I then began to clean, scrubbing his shower again as I'd done once previously. I cleaned, scoured, polished, vacuumed and dusted. I worked furiously and painstakingly like I never had done before. Within an hour, the apartment was shining, totally spotless. Then I walked back over to the dining room table and picked up the note. I retrieved a pen from his desk in the corner and added a notation to the bottom.

Aaron,

Please allow me the privilege of doing this cleaning

job for you as a way of expressing my gratitude for your kindness to me. I honestly do not want your money. I hope you are satisfied with the job that I did.

Sincerely,

Mark

I then placed the note back in the same exact position where I'd found it, turned off all the lights, and headed back upstairs to my apartment.

Later that evening, I was somewhat disappointed that Aaron had not contacted me after he got home. I'd heard movement in the apartment below, and was waiting anxiously, thinking he would call me or possibly even come up to my apartment. When it got to be ten o'clock, I sort of gave up on the notion and settled in to watch a news magazine program on the television. At about ten thirty I heard a thumping sound that was coming from downstairs, and I got up from the couch to try to isolate where the sound was originating.

When I got into my bedroom, I realized that someone from downstairs, presumably Aaron, was pounding something against the ceiling. He was doing this right near a heating vent. Immediately I dropped to my knees and pressed my ear close to the vent. I did not hear anything except for the incessant thumping. I smiled to myself, unsure of what I should do. Should I

ignore him, try shouting something down the vent or respond in some other way? I stood back up nervously, and simply looked down at the floor. Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! His pounding was rhythmic and quite obviously deliberate. Finally, I got up a little bit of nerve and lifted my foot quickly, stomping as hard as I could on the floor. Immediately his thumping stopped.

I stomped again, then a third time. Quickly he responded, pounding whatever object he was using to hit the ceiling, in an identical pattern as my stomping. I started to laugh as I stomped some more, tapping out a melody of sorts with my feet. *Stomp-da-da-domp-domp...* and then his response *Thump! Thump!* I burst into a gale of laughter then, realizing he was playing a game with me. What should I do? I wondered. Should I continue? Should I go downstairs?

I did not have to deliberate long on these questions, for a few seconds later the thumping stopped and my phone rang. I rushed over to the extension in the bedroom and picked up the receiver, "Hello?" I said tentatively.

"Hey! What's up with all the racket?" Aaron said, rather seriously. "I'm tryin to get some sleep down here!"

Taken aback by his sarcasm, my mouth went agape, and I was not sure how to respond.

"Huh?" he said, "You got a party goin on up

there or something?"

The sound of his voice again, it was once more doing it to me. I couldn't think of what I should say. "I'm sorry..." I finally managed.

He started laughing. "Come visit me."

I paused for a moment, standing there, next to my bed.

"Please—" His voice had softened, sounding almost seductive, somewhat urgent, pleading.

"Okay. Okay."

"Hurry up!"

"Okay," I said again, feeling foolish for not being able to think of a better response. "Bye!" I quickly hung up the receiver and ran over to look at myself in the mirror. God! I was still wearing my sweats, and my hair was a mess. I grabbed a comb from the bathroom vanity and began to run it through my short hair. "Yuck!" I screamed into the mirror, making a face at my own reflection. Finally, I ran back to the bedroom and picked up a baseball cap off the dresser. I pulled it on and went back to the mirror. Better, I thought. I then went out to the living room and scooped up the remote, flicking off the television as I grabbed my sneakers.

When I got to his apartment door, I did not even have to knock, for the door opened upon my approach. Aaron was standing there in front of me, smiling. I stopped in my tracks, staring at him

as I took in the entirety of his towering presence. He wasn't in dress clothes this time, but was wearing an oversized beater shirt and basketball shorts. He had on low-rise white ankle socks and no shoes. He was holding a broomstick in his hand, apparently the apparatus he'd used to make the thumping noises. Without saying anything, he took a step backward, as if to invite me to step inside. I did exactly that, and he pushed the door closed behind me.

He looked down at me, being only inches away and then simply dropped the broom without concern. It bounced off the wall and fell to the floor, making a loud clanging noise behind us, but neither of us really paid attention. We were staring at each other. I felt his hands on my shoulders as he inched his way closer to me, still saying nothing. He slid his fingertips up my neck, eventually cupping the back of my head as he leaned into me. Then oh-so-gently, he brought his face closer to my own, pressing his lips carefully against mine. It was such a tender kiss, so very sweet, and as he pulled away from me I stared up into his eyes, noticing for the first time how penetratingly blue they were.

"God you're cute!" he said.

He pulled me into himself again, this time not kissing me, but instead embracing me, sliding his hands down my back, pressing his body against

my own. I could smell him again, that purely clean, intoxicatingly masculine scent. I slid my hands around his back then, grabbing a hold of him and feeling the hardness of his body against my own. This wasn't actually happening, was it? Surely, it was a dream, I thought. He pulled away from me, not attempting to kiss me again, but instead leading me over to the couch.

"Sit down," he said, "You want something to drink?"

I shook my head as I looked up at him. "No thanks," I finally said. He sat down on the sofa beside me, and we shifted our positions so that we were facing one another, me tucking my knees under myself and he resting his arm against the back of the couch.

"Mark," he said seriously, "I gotta talk to you about yesterday. I was so worried."

"You were?" I asked, surprised by his compassionate tone. "Why?"

"You left so soon, I thought you were really freakin. I didn't know why, that's all."

"Oh...um," I looked down into my lap as I tried to formulate an appropriate response. "It's just—well—um, I never did anything like that before. I'm sorry. Guess I did freak a little."

He reached over, placing his hand on my shoulder. "Do you wish you hadn't done it? Are you sorry—"

Immediately I shook my head. "No! No, it was awesome. It was what I wanted, honest."

"It was hot!" he said, smiling. "You were hot."

I laughed, giggling a little to myself, as I felt my face getting warm. "But—" I looked up at him seriously.

"But? But what?"

"But I don't want an arrangement...like you said. I don't want it to be that way."

"It was a stupid thing for me to say," he admitted immediately. "I'm sorry. I...um...I didn't mean to make you feel bad. I didn't mean to cheapen it."

"Okay," I said, smiling again.

"You know, we don't know that much about each other really. Tell me about yourself. Tell me everything. Have you ever done anything like this before? I mean I know you just said you hadn't, but have you known about your feelings? Have you known you are — ya know — into guys?"

"Gay?"

"Yeah, whatever you wanna label it."

"I knew I was into you. I knew it right away, ya know. I just had no idea cuz I thought you had a girlfriend."

"I do! I do have a girlfriend, but it's just weird."

"What do ya mean?"

"Well Robin, she's been my girlfriend for so long...since high school. I really care about her, a

lot. People think we eventually will get married, ya know. I think that maybe even she expects that, but it's not really, what I want. I can't see it."

"Maybe you should tell her the truth," I suggested.

"But I'm not sure what the truth is. I've done things with other guys, well with Joey mainly. I just thought it was experimenting though. I just thought maybe it was a phase, or that I was bi or something. You're the first person, though, who's ever made me feel like this." He squeezed my shoulder gently.

"Like what?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

He sighed as he looked into my eyes. "You're just so cute!" He told me that the day before, and now twice today. "I can't get over the way you look at me, the way you seem to be almost...I don't know...worshipping me or something. It just makes me—how can I say this—it makes me like totally rock hard!"

"Really? Does Robin make you rock hard?"

He shook his head. "No, not really. Sometimes, I guess, but it's different. I like her. Maybe I love her, I don't know, but it's just different. All I could think about today was you. All I could think about was your smile, your laugh, the way you look at me. I wasn't gonna call you tonight. I thought I should wait, let you call me if you wanted to, but I was down here by myself just thinking and

thinking about you. I couldn't help it. That's why I started beating on the ceiling with that stupid broom."

I laughed right out loud. "I couldn't figure out what you were doing. It sorta scared me!"

"It scared you? Ya think it was an earthquake or somethin?" he said, laughing.

"I didn't know what to think. It was funny though. Now you at least know how to get my attention. I want to tell you something though." I shifted slightly in my seat, feeling really nervous and awkward, but also willing myself to be brave and to say what I needed to say.

"What?"

"I think about you, too, all the time. It's true what you said. I do sorta...um...worship you."

"Why do you say that?" he asked, leaning into me. "What is it about me that there is to worship?"

"Everything!" I answered, a little too quickly. "You're just so confident, so good looking. You are successful, smart and a good dresser. You seem to always know what to say. You're funny. I first started thinking about you all the time that day I met you, when I first cleaned your apartment. It made me so excited to clean for you."

"Wow, it made you excited to clean for me?" He laughed hard at this statement. "Why would that excite you?"

"I don't know," I said, now a little embarrassed. "I guess it sorta made you seem superior or something that I would be below you, having to clean up after you."

"But you didn't *have* to clean up after me. You were getting paid for it, ya know. I don't think it makes you below me to be hired to perform a service."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I pretended what it would be like to not get paid for it, to do it just cuz you are superior."

"Do you want a guy who is superior to you?" he asked, sounding rather intrigued by the mere suggestion.

"I don't know," I said again. "I've never had a guy of any kind. All I know is you...um...really turn me on."

"So if I boss you around, you think that would turn you on?" he asked, smiling slyly at me as he said it.

I looked at him wide-eyed and simply nodded.

"Get over here, now!" he ordered.

Immediately I slid closer to him. He once more grabbed my shoulders and pushed me backward. My legs slid out from underneath me as he leaned on top of me, pressing my back against the seat of the sofa. He was on top of me now and pressing his body hard against my own. I felt the weight of him as I sunk down into the cushions. His lips

connected with mine again, this time with far more fervency. Our mouths parted and he slid his tongue into my mouth, kissing me with genuine passion. I responded, reaching my arms around him, trying to press my body as closely to him as possible, even though we were already practically conjoined. His kiss was long and passionate, unlike anything I had ever experienced. When he pulled away from me slightly I gasped for breath and moaned.

“Oh God!” he said, ripping the baseball cap from my head and tossing it on the floor. Then he kissed me again, over and over. He just kept kissing me.

I thought I would literally die!

Maybe I did in fact die, for surely I was now in heaven. I knew with certainty for the first time I was not going to regret living so close to my landlord.

Chapter Five

Aaron's alarm clock woke me up at seven o'clock the next morning. I was at first somewhat disoriented, unsure where I even was. Then I remembered. After he and I had kissed so passionately on the couch, he had picked me up and carried me to his bedroom. He laid me on the bed and began stripping off each article of my clothing, one at a time. When I was stripped down to just my briefs, he began to gently run his fingers over my body, so tenderly, caressing me in a way that was so utterly beautiful.

I had squirmed under his touch, as his fingers sought out and found my most sensitive and ticklish parts. He nuzzled his face into my neck, kissing me, working his way down to my chin. Then he descended my body, encircling my nipples, working them each with his tongue and fingers. He went further down, pressing his lips against my navel, sliding his tongue inside, making me delightfully giggle. He slid down on

the bed, grabbing the waistband of my briefs as he effortlessly pulled them off of me. It was his turn now to see me for the first time.

Then I felt the warmth of his mouth as he took me inside of his mouth. It was like sliding into a warm bubble bath, though a thousand times more intense. I moaned and grabbed frantically at the sheets beneath me. His tongue pressed against my throbbing shaft. Mine was so much smaller than his, but still nothing to be ashamed of. His fingertips brushed against my balls as he wrapped his lips around me. It was a very slick and smooth sensation, far different than the feel of my palm when I jacked myself off.

"Oh, Aaron!" I cried, as I writhed on the bed, completely stretched out and naked beneath him. "Oh God! I can't...oh...oh I can't control it....anymore! I'm gonna cum! Oh God!" He pulled his mouth off me quickly and grasped the base of my cock with his hand, pumping it as I fired several large jets of cum across my naked belly.

He then scooped up a droplet with his finger and brought it to my mouth. I licked it off as I stared up into his eyes. How could this be real? How could it actually be happening?

"Since you wouldn't take my money, I thought I had to pay you somehow," he said. "For cleaning the apartment, I mean."

"Aaron, you don't have to pay me. You never have to pay me." He then went into the bathroom and brought back a warm washcloth and a towel. Carefully he cleaned me up and dried off my body. Then he pulled me towards him, embracing me while I shivered. I didn't understand why I was so cold all of a sudden.

I wanted more than anything at that point to reciprocate, to drop to my knees and service Aaron. I wanted to please him as he had just done to me, but he simply held me, giving me no indication that it was expected. He grabbed a robe that was hanging in his closet and offered it to me. I slipped it on and we went back to the living room.

"Want something to drink now?"

"Sure. Thank you."

When he returned from the kitchen with two Diet Cokes, we sat back down on the sofa.

This time I snuggled up next to him, resting my head against his shoulder. "I had no idea, Aaron."

"About what?" he asked, gently running his fingers through my hair.

"That it would feel like that. It was my first time...ever."

"Really?" he asked. "So you've never done anything before, huh? With anyone?"

I shook my head. "But it was even better than I expected it would be. Sorry I did not last very long

though."

"It always goes quick the first time. First time I had sex, I got so excited I almost shot before it even started."

"Really?" I laughed. "I wouldn't have expected you to be like that."

"Yeah, why do you say that? You think I'm some kinda super stud or something?"

"No," I answered, "I *know* you're a super stud."

He busted up laughin. "True, won't deny that. My first time was when I was only fourteen. It was with this girl named Christie. She was fifteen, a sophomore. I was only a freshman."

"Was she your girlfriend?"

"Not really. I never really had a serious girlfriend 'til Robin."

The sudden mention of her name sent a pang of jealousy through me, but I knew I had no right to say anything.

"We've been together for so long. We're like the perfect couple, ya know. I'm so afraid of hurting her."

"I know, I can't imagine how hard it would be on you. But ya know, you really don't have to tell her anything, not yet. You said already that you haven't figured everything out for yourself. Maybe you should wait."

"Yeah, maybe. I guess I should make sure of what I want before I go making any

announcements."

"Right," I said. "That's a good idea. You and I, we hardly know each other yet anyway. We just really met."

"It feels different though," he admitted. "It feels so intense. I never really felt this way about Robin. But you're right, of course. We really don't know each other that much. We should hang out together, get to know one another."

"Like go on dates?"

"Whatever, however you wanna phrase it. I just know I wanna be with you. You're so cute."

Aaron and I continued to talk into the night then, and he told me about the things he liked and disliked. We talked about music, movies, who we thought was hot and who we didn't like. We talked about sports, cars and our future goals. Aaron planned to own his own mortgage company some day. He was in the middle of two current deals to acquire more apartment complexes. We talked about silly things, our favorite colors, cartoons and the pizza toppings that we most liked. He told me about some of his friends, his sexual experiences, even his fantasies.

It was after three in the morning when we retired to the bedroom finally. I did end up going down on him then. This time it was not so animalistic. It was not merely service. It was not really even an act of submission. It was purely

romantic. It was me wanting to please him, wanting to express to him how very much I desired him. It was gratitude, passion and hunger. Truly, it was beautiful, and when it was over, we snuggled up together and fell asleep.

Three and a half hours later, I woke up to the buzz of the alarm. Quietly I got up and found my clothes, slipping my sweats back on before I returned to him and kissed him on the forehead.

He sleepily opened his eyes. "You goin'?"

"Yeah, I have to work," I whispered.

"Can you reset the alarm for nine?"

"Sure," I said, and gently kissed him again. Then quietly I slipped out of his apartment and headed upstairs to my shower. I didn't really care that I had gotten so little sleep, for being with him was worth every single second.

I crashed on my new couch when I got home from work that evening. I was trying to watch a television program, some mindless talk show, I think. When I awoke two hours later, it was to the sound of a loud rapping on my apartment door. I rubbed my eyes groggily and pushed myself up from my reclined position, stumbling aimlessly across the room in the general direction of the entrance door. When I swung the door open, there stood Aaron, holding in his hand a large pizza

box. I smiled up at him, still dazed by my sleepiness.

"Are you gonna let me in, or what? I have food."

"Oh, sorry," I said, stepping back from the door to allow him entry. As he stepped through the entrance, he quickly turned to me and pulled his free arm from behind his back, holding out a single long stemmed rose to me.

"Here," he said. "This is for you."

"Oh my God," I replied, staring at him in disbelief. I felt my eyes welling suddenly with tears. "Thank you."

"No. Thank you. Thank you for making me feel the way that I do when I'm around you. Thank you for last night...and for today."

"For today?" I asked, smiling up at him. "What did I do today?"

"You were with me all day long, in my every thought. You're all I can think of."

"Aaron—" I started to say, but couldn't continue, finding myself on the verge of a full-fledged burst of emotion. I grabbed his wrist then and led him into the kitchen where he placed the pizza box on the counter. Then he spun me around and kissed me, enveloping me entirely with his powerful embrace. I pulled away from him slowly and brought my arm around between us, holding up the rose. "Let me put this in

water." I turned from him to grab a tall drinking glass from the cupboard.

"Mark, you really shouldn't sleep in your work clothes." He was laughing. "You're all wrinkled."

"Oh I know," I agreed. "I fell asleep on the couch. Someone kept me up half the night. It was that noisy landlord downstairs. Sometimes he's so damned inconsiderate."

"Oh really? Maybe you need to look for a new place to live. You shouldn't have to put up with that."

"I know," I said, as I filled the glass partially with tap water, "but he is so *hot*. I can't take my eyes off him. Ya know, sometimes you will put up with a lot of stuff from a guy if he is hot enough."

"God you have a cute ass!" Aaron said.

I laughed as I spun around. "Stop staring at my ass!" I scolded. "You're embarrassing me."

"Come here and I will really em bare ass you," he said.

I dropped the rose into the improvised vase and set it down on the counter. Aaron reached out and grabbed a hold of my necktie, pulling me toward himself.

"Let's take a shower before we eat, okay?"

"You mean together?" I said in a mocking tone. "Naked?"

"You're a smartass today, ya know," he said as he grinned. "Why you bein such a shit?"

"Cuz you woke me up! I'm grouchy when I first wake up." This statement was entirely untrue, I was truly one of those people who tended to bound out of bed in the morning. I couldn't stop myself from teasing him though.

"Well maybe a shower will help wake you up."

I shrugged. "Okay, you're the boss."

"And don't you forget it!" he said. Still clinging to my tie, he then led me into the bathroom. "Oh my god, you really did scrub this tub clean!" he remarked. "That's amazing. It looks brand new."

I simply smiled up at him as I reached around his waist to un-tuck the back of his shirt. "I told you I could clean it," I said, sliding my hand against his bare skin. Using both hands, he loosened the Windsor knot in my tie, pulling against it to completely remove it from my neck. Then he reached down to begin unbuttoning my shirt. His own shirt was now completely un-tucked and I reached up to remove his tie, but he stopped me, grabbing my head with both of his hands and pulling my face towards his own. He kissed me firmly on the lips, stepping closer to me as he did so.

I backed up instinctively as he pushed me against the wall. He continued to kiss me, over and over, as his fingers returned to the task of unbuttoning my shirt. I wrapped my arms around him and with my own fingers, I unfastened the

buttons on my cuffs. He pulled away from me slightly and spread my shirt open, exposing my chest. His palms pressed against my pecs as he slid his fingers upwards towards my shoulders. He slipped his hands under the fabric of the shirt, pushing it off of my shoulders. I extended my arms downward, allowing the dress shirt to fall to the floor.

Quickly Aaron then finished removing his tie, savagely ripping it from his collar. He hastily unbuttoned his shirt, all the while staring intently into my eyes. I had moved my hands to his waist, fumbling to grasp his belt buckle. By the time he had his shirt off, I had managed to unfasten his belt and was opening his fly. He placed his hands on my shoulders, applying gentle pressure as if to indicate that he wanted me to lower myself. I dropped immediately to my knees before him, now facing his crotch at eye level. I remained focused, pulling his fly open and sliding his dress pants down over his thighs. He was wearing boxers that were now noticeably tented in the front.

I lowered myself further to the ground then, realizing I had to remove his dress shoes before I could finish taking off his pants. He reached out to steady himself against the wall in front of him and raised his right foot slightly from the ground. I grabbed the heel of his shoe and tugged, pulling it

free from his foot. Then I moved to the other shoe and did the same. I then reached up and grasped the waistband of his boxers, pulling them down to his ankles. He then allowed me to remove each leg of his pants and boxers, so that the only articles of clothing that remained were his dress socks.

I stopped momentarily before continuing in my task to completely undress him, because I had to look up. I had to see him standing there above me towering over my kneeling body. I had to take in his nakedness, his sheer masculine beauty. I had to see his hardness, the unquestionable evidence of his desire for me. I smiled up at him as I knelt there shirtless. He was purely a God to me. He was the embodiment of my every passion, my deepest desire. My obsession for him had steadily increased ever since that very first second I laid eyes upon him two months previously. This was now turning into a truly unbelievable reality. I remembered lying in my bed at night, stroking myself, thinking about what it would be like to be living this fantasy. Now the fantasy was no longer a dream. I was actually here and kneeling at his feet, worshipping him.

I bowed myself then before him, pressing my lips against the top of his socked foot. First, I kissed the right, then the left. I gasped and moaned, my desire to serve him passionately betraying my futile attempt to compose myself.

My emotions welled up within me, and as I kissed his feet then, over and over, tears filled my eyes. How could this be real? How could I actually be so privileged as to be in this place now, while kneeling before this man of my dreams?

"Take em off," he said, obviously not fully aware of the emotion which had overtaken me.

I continued to stare down at his feet, not wanting him to notice my tears, and slowly stripped each sock worshipfully from him. When I looked up at him, he saw the teardrops, which had stained my cheeks, and immediately he lowered himself, crouching down in front of me.

"Why are you crying?" he asked, cupping my head in his hands so tenderly.

"I can't believe it's real," I whispered. "I can't believe it."

He then leaned forward, assuming a kneeling position before me, kissing me on the forehead first, then moving his lips down to my tear-streaked cheek. "Oh it's real," he whispered. "It is the most real thing I've ever felt."

He moved his hands down to the sides of my bare torso, grabbing a hold of me and pulling me upwards. He had me stand then in front of him while he knelt. He undid my pants and removed them, then my briefs. I reached down and stripped off my own socks, tossing them onto the pile of clothes on the floor beside us as we stared into

each other's eyes, now being completely naked together.

After adjusting the water temperature, Aaron stepped into the shower, and I slid in to stand in front of him. I turned to face him, grabbing a bar of soap. Slowly I began to lather his body, forming circles on his chest, working my way down his lean frame towards his abdomen and his thighs. I reached around him to lather his firm round buttocks, easing my way up the small of his back. He kissed me intermittently, expressing his desire for me, yet allowing me to worship him so reverently. I then dropped to my knees and washed his legs, his feet, moving back up towards his private parts. I slid my fingers between his thighs then, gently cupping his ball sac, lathering it with my sudsy palm. He quietly moaned as I did so, and I worked my way up, wrapping my fingers around the base of his cock. I couldn't resist it! I moved my mouth towards him, reverently kissing the bulbous head of his erect penis. My lips parted and I took him inside of my mouth.

After the shower, we towed each other off and returned to the living room to share our semi-cold pizza.

"You want me to heat this up?" I asked.

"You do a good job of heating things up," he said jokingly.

"I'm being serious," I said, smiling up at him.

"You're so cute with wet hair." We were each wearing only a towel around our waists.

"You gotta quit sayin that so much. I'm gonna start believing you!"

"What? That you're cute? Well you better start believing it, cuz it's true."

"You really do make me feel like it. I've always hated the way I look, but you make me feel so much better about myself," I said to him seriously. "And you...you're perfect."

"Why would you hate the way you look? You have such an adorable face, big brown eyes. You're not fat, you have this cute little tight body. And your butt—I can't even describe how hot it gets me to look at that ass."

"Stop it! You're doing it again...embarrassing me. I hate my hair, and I think I *am* fat. I have ugly feet, too, and I'm way too short. Plus I think I look like sort of a nerd. I'm scrawny."

"How can you be both fat and scrawny? That makes no sense," he reasoned.

I sighed as I looked up at him. "I'm scrawny cuz I'm not muscular, and I don't have a tight body. Look at this flab around my abs!"

"That's not flab," he said, laughing. "That is loose skin, and everyone has that, except for maybe a bodybuilder or someone. Hardly anyone is perfect. You gotta stop judging yourself by

models and professional athletes. You're a terrific looking guy! I think you are hot. That should be obvious to you by now."

"Well you're the one who's hot," I said, again trying to shift the conversation. "Your body is much nicer than mine."

"We both have nice bodies. We all should strive to stay in shape, and I'm not perfect as you say. If you wanna get more muscular, then you should come work out with me. You can join my gym. I'll even pay for your membership. But don't do it cuz you think you gotta be better looking to suit me. Do it cuz you want to for yourself."

"I never thought I'd be able to talk to you like this, Aaron. I can't believe we actually have conversations with each other."

He laughed again. "Well I suppose we could communicate with sign language or smoke signals. Or we could just send each other emails."

"No, I mean I always was so nervous around you. I still am kinda, but not like before."

"Give me a piece of pizza and shut up," he said jokingly. "First you won't ever talk to me, now I can't get you to stop."

"Aaron!" I protested. I opened the pizza box and immediately exclaimed, "You remembered my favorite toppings. Ham and pineapple."

He grabbed a piece and smiled down at me. "Let's go watch a movie."

We spent the remainder of the evening curled up with one another on the sofa. He ran downstairs to grab a tee shirt and some shorts at one point, but then spent the rest of the night with me. We slept cozily together in my new bed, and I woke him in the morning with gentle kisses. He was all I ever wanted, and I couldn't even believe this all was actually true. I just kept waiting for myself to wake up from this incredible dream.

I did precisely that when his girlfriend Robin arrived home that weekend.

Chapter Six

It was Friday afternoon, just three full days since everything had started to change between Aaron and me. Less than a week prior, he'd been only a fantasy to me, someone I had secretly worshipped from afar, but now within the past seventy two hours, he'd become my reality. He now was the physical embodiment of all my hopes and dreams. It was so very surreal to me as I sat at my desk, contemplating all that had happened.

In my wildest dreams, I never would have dared imagine that it could ever be possible that Aaron would feel an attraction toward me. It was undeniable that I was infatuated with him, bordering upon an obsession, no less, yet how could it be that he would have feelings that in any way would reciprocate my own? The very things about him that were so overwhelmingly appealing to me, were the things that I lacked. He was a leader, accomplished, successful and very confident in himself. I, on the other hand, felt most

comfortable by being in the passenger seat. I felt content to experience my pleasures vicariously, to emulate the paths of others more successful than myself. I craved guidance from someone that I sincerely viewed as being capable, someone who was superior.

Could it be that Aaron had cravings of his own, but that they were somewhat the opposite of mine? Was it possible that he desired to help as much as I desired to be helped? Could it be that he wanted someone who was in some ways inferior? Maybe he truly craved to be worshipped. Wasn't that actually, what he'd said to me? He said, *When I see the way you look at me, it's as if you...worship me*. He was so very right, and it was actually more than befitting that he had perceived my responses to him in this way. I did honestly worship him. He was larger than life to me.

But this was happening so very quickly. It was unimaginable for me to ever even hope that he would step out of his own comfort zone in order to pursue a relationship with me. For five years, he had been with his girlfriend Robin. How could I just waltz into his life at this stage and expect anything to change? Surely, he must have contemplated a life with her during the five-year course of their relationship. Surely, he must have considered being her husband, the father to her children. He must have imagined himself raising

and supporting a family, procreating, following the American dream.

In a very significant way, my presence in Aaron's life was a distraction. It was an interruption from everything that was acceptable and normal within our society. How could he abandon the lifetime dream that he most certainly must have had with his girlfriend, in order to be with some puny little fagboy who lived upstairs and rented a dingy apartment from him? I really had nothing to offer him, and for me to even dare to hope for some sort of commitment from him to me would be ludicrous. But even if he gave me not even one single second more of his attention and affection, at least I would have these three beautiful days to cling to. At least I'd always have these memories.

For me to have even been thinking along these lines right at the height of our passion, right at the onset of our love affair, was perhaps a foreshadowing of the conflict that was about to arise that weekend. When I arrived home from work that late afternoon, I could not help but notice a different car in our driveway. It took a few seconds for it to register, to actually sink in, that this strange car belonged to none other than Aaron's significant other, Robin. The jealousy and anxiety that I'd been suppressing over these past days seemed to bubble to the surface as I simply

sat there in my own automobile, staring at this symbol of the one person who was so incredibly threatening to me.

All of my earlier rationalizations seemed to suddenly vanish as I realized that even though I knew in my mind that Aaron had some major soul-searching to do, some serious decisions to make, I wanted this other person completely out of the picture. I knew about his history with Robin, and I knew without question that she must truly love him to have remained with him over the years. I knew how hurtful it would be for her to learn that Aaron had feelings for someone else, and if she were to find out specifically that this other person was male, it would be all the more painful. Yet my desire for Aaron completely overshadowed all of these facts. All that seemed to matter at this moment was that I loved him.

I loved him? Oh my God, dare I even admit such a thing? We only had truly begun communicating with one another three days prior. We only had been intimate a handful of times. Surely, I could not be in love with him already. But if this were not love, then what was it? Was it merely an intense infatuation? Was it an obsession? In my naiveté, I did not have the answers to these questions. All I knew was that no one ever had made me feel this way before. Never had I desired someone so strongly. Never had I

craved to be with another person every single second, the way I did with Aaron. Images of him invaded my thoughts throughout my days, and dreams of him consumed my nights. I could not get enough of him, wanting every minute to touch him, kiss him, make love to him, worship him.

None of these desires were going to become a reality this evening however. As I ascended the stairs to my upper apartment, I knew this was going to be a quiet evening alone for me. When he returned from work, Aaron would spend his night with her. He'd share dinner with her, maybe even take her out. Most importantly, he'd quite certainly make love to her. It almost was more than I could bear to think of.

Just as I was inserting my key into the lock of my apartment door, I heard a voice behind me, a female.

"Excuse me, Mark?"

I turned to look down to the foot of the stairs. It was a young woman, undoubtedly Robin, standing in the doorway of Aaron's apartment. "Yeah," I said, forcing myself to manage a smile, as I first made eye contact.

"You the one who cleaned Aaron's apartment?"

I nodded, "Yeah, I am." *I'm also the one who sucks his dick when you're away at school.*

"I'm his girlfriend, Robin. I don't know if he's told you about me, but I only am here sometimes.

I actually live in Big Rapids. I'm goin to school there. Anyway, I wanted to tell you how great the apartment looks. Thanks for doin such a good job. It's unbelievable, really."

"Oh, well thanks for sayin that," I said sincerely. "That's very nice of you."

"I know he is such a total slob," she admitted. "I've never seen the place so immaculate."

I thought to myself about the fact that he had not actually been there at all the night previously to mess it up. "Typical bachelor, I guess."

"Yeah, guess housekeeping's not his specialty." She smiled up at me warmly.

I suddenly felt a little guilty for the bitter feelings I'd just moments earlier harbored against her.

"I was wondering if maybe you'd wanna join us for dinner one night this weekend. I kinda wanted to show you my appreciation for the good job."

I truly was taken aback by the invitation, and stared at her for a few seconds. Then when I noticed her puzzled expression as she awaited my response, I managed to say, "Oh, I really appreciate it. That would be nice, but I'm gonna have to check. I think I might have somethin' goin' on already."

"Oh, okay. Well I'll have Aaron give ya a call, all right. If you can do it, fine. If not, we can take a

rain check."

"Cool. It was nice meeting you."

"You, too!" she said cheerfully. "Have a good night."

When I got inside my apartment, I leaned against the wall, immediately burying my face in my hands. Oh God, why couldn't she just be a total bitch? I wanted so badly to hate her! Here I was blowing her boyfriend for the past three days, and she makes a special point to watch for me in order to thank me for doing such a swell job cleaning his apartment. Then she invites me to dinner!

Robin was little, being about five foot three and probably no more than a hundred fifteen pounds. Her hair was short, a chestnut brown color, perhaps a couple shades darker than my own. She had a wide, toothy grin and deep brown eyes. Her tanned complexion offset the sparkling whiteness of her teeth, and her meticulously manicured nails complimented the gracefulness of her feminine movements and animated gestures. She had a tightly toned body, but was not particularly well endowed in the bosom department. Her beauty and femininity though, were strikingly remarkable to any observer.

This role of observer, however, was precisely what I planned to avoid over the weekend. After meeting her there in the staircase that Friday

afternoon, I felt so very much like an intruder. It seemed to me I had somehow victimized this sweet, little princess of a girl, having stumbled into an area of her life in which I did not belong. When Aaron had previously spoken to me of her, he had not conveyed to me her radiance and the vibrancy of her personality. His portrayal of her had left me rather cold, feeling she was perhaps passionless and bitchy. She seemed to be anything but these things, and I truly did not want to play any role in causing her any pain.

When I finally willed myself to move from my position against the wall, I went into my bathroom and stripped off my clothes, feeling the need for a shower. It was only the night before that Aaron and I had shared this space together, romantically bathing one another. It was in this very spot that I had knelt before him and lovingly cleaned his body and then worshipped him with my hands and mouth. It was here where I had bowed myself before him and had expressed to him the most passionate desires of my heart. I had wanted to show him how very much I idolized him. I'd wanted to show him how much larger-than-life he was to me, how he was truly the center of my universe. Now, however, all these feelings seemed trite. They seemed to pale in contrast with Robin's five year history with this man-of-my-dreams. How could I ever compete with her?

My own teardrops mingled with the beads of water that formed on my face as I stood there under the jet of the shower. How could the joy of the previous three days be washed away so very quickly? Why did I even allow myself to have entered this confusing triangle of misdirected emotions? I'd known from the beginning he had a girlfriend. Not only had I known it, but in some twisted way, it was the very thing that made him so incredibly attractive to me. He was straight, I'd thought, and who could be any hotter than a straight jock stud like Aaron? It was ironic that the very thing about him that differentiated him from the other types of guys with whom I could possibly have gotten involved with, was the one single thing that made him unavailable to me.

It was clear to me then that truly I was a fag. I was without question gay, and frightening as it may be to admit, I was in love with this man. I was so taken by every aspect of his personality. His mere appearance was utterly breathtaking to me, and every single component of his demeanor commanded my respect and admiration. I was captivated by the sound of his voice, by the smell of his cologne and by the very expressions that he made when communicating to me. I'd memorized the details of his face, every line, every nuance, every movement. I'd never felt so overcome with emotion than I was when in his presence. I had

never felt so happy, so totally complete.

But all of this was now out of my hands. I could not press Aaron to make a choice, for I knew I would be the loser, and really, it would not have been fair to him to even attempt to corner him this way. He had been with her for so very long. He had confided in me that he still was sorting out his feelings about what his same-sex desires and attractions actually meant. I did not know where I was going to fit into this confusing myriad. I did not know if I would fit in at all.

I toweled myself dry and put on my robe, deciding I couldn't really even consider the option of food. Instead, I padded my way to the bedroom and threw myself on the same bed where Aaron and I had slept the night before. I buried my face in the very pillow where his head had rested, and there I wept so violently. I cried and cried, until I'd literally cried myself asleep.

When I awoke at three fifteen in the morning, I at first stumbled to the kitchen for a bottled water from the refrigerator. Then I relieved myself in the bathroom and headed back to the bedroom, and then to my computer which was in the small room which was adjacent. This computer room actually was located exactly above Aaron's bedroom, and when I'd first moved in, sometimes the thought of him lying there in bed right below me actually had

excited me. On this night, though, I was not so excited, for I realized Aaron would not be in that bed alone. Robin would be curled up beside him just as I'd been the nights previously.

I sat down at my computer desk and logged onto my online account, beginning to sift through the email spam, when suddenly I heard noises from downstairs. I could hear a faint voice crying out from the room below me. It sounded like crying, I thought. I was sure of it. Surely, it must be Robin. I became very still, concentrating upon listening to what was happening. Wait, no that was not crying. It was moaning! It was Robin moaning. Oh my God! He was fucking her.

As I mentally placed the sounds into the correct context, I realized that this was precisely what I was overhearing. I was listening to Aaron fuck his girlfriend. I could actually hear the creaking of the bed. The weight of his body as he thrust into her literally made the bed thump. It was like a knocking, very rhythmic. He must be thrusting hard into her, drilling her pussy with abandon, for the sounds of her moans grew louder. The moaning became shriller, almost like screams. Was he making love to her or torturing her? I wondered. Louder and louder, her cries became as he continued to invade her pussy with the same cock he'd slid into my mouth only one night before. Eventually she grew so loud that it was

almost as if she were in the very same room as I. Then abruptly the noise stopped.

You would have thought that hearing this would have enraged me, caused me to become insanely jealous. When later I looked back upon it, I did in fact experience some of those envious feelings, but at that particular moment all that I could think of was the mental image of Aaron using this woman to achieve his goal of sexual gratification. I saw him on top of her. I saw it so clearly in my mind. He was thrusting into her, drilling her hard and mercilessly. He was grinding into her in a way that maximized his own pleasures. I envisioned him as asserting his natural masculine dominance, she being pinned beneath him as he pumped his rigid hard on deep inside of her. Over and over, riding her, he fucked her pussy like he owned it. It was his hole to use!

Immediately I peeled back my robe and grabbed myself, wrapping my hand around the base of my own cock. I bit down on my lip as I stroked, trying to remain as perfectly still and quiet as possible. What was he doing now? I strained to hear any sound below me. There was, however, only silence. I was still so hard, right on the verge of shooting a load all over myself, when I suddenly heard the moaning resume. It couldn't be possible, I thought. He can't be doing it again, not after just having finished less than five

minutes before! But it was happening, he was fucking her a second time. Her high-pitched moaning resumed in only seconds. He was a total God, I thought. He must know exactly how to please her. Listen to her shrieks! Listen to the way he drives her crazy!

I started stroking myself faster, pumping my cock in a rhythm that kept time with the thumping of the bed below me. I imagined Aaron being on top of me. I imagined my own legs wrapped around his waist as he thrust his huge cock in and out of my boy pussy. It was as if he were ramming himself deep into me. Every time I heard her moan, I thought of myself being in her position. Oh god! Oh, fuck! I am gonna shoot! Just as her moaning reached the point of crescendo, I released my load, spraying hot jets of cum all over my chest and abdomen. "Aaaagh hh!" I moaned, forgetting about my need to be quiet.

Suddenly, however, the sounds below me stopped, and the only noise I heard was the echo of my own cries of ecstasy.

Chapter Seven

For the rest of the morning I stayed up, unable to go back to sleep. I'd actually fallen asleep so early the night before that I'd gotten more than enough rest. So instead I typed some emails, one to my mom, one to my best friend back home, and one to Aaron.

Dear Aaron,

As you may have guessed, you were in my every thought today. When I came home to find Robin at your apartment, I was disappointed, I must admit, however, I cannot deny that I knew a thing as beautiful as what we shared wouldn't last forever. I'm sorry that it only ended up being three days, though. But hey, I'd trade three days of paradise for an eternity of mediocrity.

After having met Robin, I see why you have loved her for so long. Truly, she is a sweet and very kind person. I have no desire to ever interfere in any way with the commitment that you have for her. I'm sorry if my presence has at all confused you or caused you any hardship.

Since the moment that I met you, I have idolized

you, literally worshipped the ground that you walked upon. I feel no less for you now. I will begin immediately to look for another apartment if you are willing to nullify my lease, for I do not wish to make you feel awkward in any way by being so close by. Please understand that you are the most wonderful thing to ever have happened to me, and I will always cherish what we shared. Thank you for allowing me this much.

With all my love,

Mark

The tears in my eyes were flowing so heavily by the time I finished typing these words that I literally could not see my computer screen. I sucked in my breath as I reached up to wipe my eyes, and a sob escaped my throat. I then ran to the bed, quickly burying my face in the pillow. How could it hurt so badly to let go of him when it had only been such a short time? How could the pain be so very intense?

I knew the answers to these questions, I realized that my feelings for Aaron had begun much sooner than three days ago. I had been drawn to him immediately, the very first time that I met him. I had fantasized about him, worshipped him and harbored a secret obsession for him for the past couple of months. To have these fantasies suddenly become reality and then almost as quickly to have them snatched away

from me, it was almost unthinkable. There was a part of me that honestly wished we had never actually been intimate together. Were my feelings for Aaron to have remained unrequited, then at least I would still have the fantasy to cling to. Now, however, I was left with nothing.

After nearly a half hour of crying my heart out, I returned to my computer, re-read the email and clicked send. It was now almost six o'clock in the morning, and I really could think of nothing pressing that I needed to do. Perhaps I would just curl up and read a good book. I had been wanting to start the latest Anne Rice novel for the past week, but had been otherwise preoccupied. I dismissed the idea, and decided instead to go for a run. Aaron had spoken to me about getting in better shape by joining his gym, but that did not seem to be a real option at this point. I might as well get started on my physical regime on my own. Plus I used to run almost every day in high school when I was in track, so it was not a novelty to me.

Ninety minutes later, I was entirely a ball of sweat and barely breathing when I grabbed the railing of my front steps. The run had been exhilarating but also truly exhausting. It had been awhile since I'd jogged like that. I dragged myself up the steps and pushed open the front door to the apartment hallway, when I came face to face with

Robin. She was just stepping out from Aaron's apartment wearing a sweat suit similar to my own.

"Hey!" she said, smiling up at me. "Oh my God, I wish I'd have known you jogged. We could've run together."

I smiled at her meekly, still winded and not quite able to speak.

"Do you run every day?"

I shook my head. "This is my first time in years," I said, puffing to catch my breath. "Can't ya tell?"

She laughed. "I run three to five miles every morning. Rain or shine!"

I simply smiled at her, not knowing how to respond.

"Maybe tomorrow we can team up," she added cheerfully, and then stepped toward the front entrance door.

I stepped aside, letting her pass.

"See ya!" she said as she breezed past me.

It now was nearly eight o'clock in the morning as I trudged back up the staircase to my apartment, heading immediately to the fridge for a bottle of water. I noticed the light on my answering machine flashing, and wondered instantly who could have called so early in the morning. After grabbing the water and unscrewing the plastic bottle cap, I stepped over to

my machine and pressed the play button.

"Mark, this is Aaron. I got your email."

He must have just left this message, I thought, when Robin stepped out of the apartment.

"We have to talk. Robin is going to lunch today with some friends and I wanna come up to see you. Call me back this morning as soon as you get up. Please!" Then he disconnected.

I sighed as I flopped myself into a kitchen chair. What should I do? I wondered. Should I call him back now or wait til after I took a shower? Maybe I shouldn't call him at all. Maybe I should just let things go the way they were, let him get on with his normal, everyday life. Even if I did decide to do this, though, I reasoned, there still would be the issue of my lease that he and I would need to discuss. I'd never be able to continue living here so close to him if it was going to be this way.

Suddenly all of the emotions I'd been trying to work off with my run, once again washed over me. Quickly I picked up the phone and dialed his number.

"Hello," he answered on the first ring.

"Aaron, it's Mark," I said, and immediately began crying.

"You're crying! Mark, what happened? Are you all right?"

"Yes." After a pause, I said, "No!"

"What happened?" he repeated urgently.

"I—" The words wouldn't come. "I—um..."

"Mark, nothing's changed! I don't want you to move out, and I don't want you out of my life, not now or ever."

"But—" I stammered.

"I'm coming up there! I'll be right there."

"Wait! No, I can't right now. I look terrible."

"So what," he said, and hung up the phone immediately.

Within seconds, I heard his footsteps as he raced up the staircase. He rapped on my door twice and I jumped nervously, still frozen in my position by the telephone stand. Before I could take a step toward the door, he let himself in, quickly spinning around to face me as he slammed the door behind him. He was still clutching his cell phone in his left hand.

Seeing him then, for the first time since yesterday morning, my heart literally melted. It was exactly as he'd stated, I did not want him out of my life either. Not now or ever! "Aaron!" I cried, unable to really think of one single thing other than his name to say. We moved toward one another, then almost like magnets being drawn together by a force more powerful than our own wills. He wrapped his arms around me, and I buried my tear-streaked, sweaty face against his chest, gasping as I clung to him.

"What's wrong?" he insisted. "Where did all

this shit come from? I thought everything was fine with us yesterday morning, and now —”

“I met her,” I sobbed. “She’s so...beautiful. I heard you this morning. I heard you make love —”

“Oh, Mark! If you only knew.” He pushed me away from him so that he could look down into my eyes. He placed his phone down quickly on the counter beside us and reached up to wipe the teardrops from under my eyes. “Do you have any idea what was going through my mind?”

I shook my head as I looked into his beautiful blue eyes. “What do you mean?”

“When we were doing it at three o’clock this morning, Robin and me...do you have any idea what I was thinking? I was thinking of you! I was thinking of being with you, not her!”

“You were?” I gasped.

“Yes! And she said it was the best sex she’d ever had. You must have heard her screaming, didn’t you?”

I nodded, suddenly unable to resist an urge to smile. Through my tears, I then grinned up at him. “She was like a wild animal.”

He busted up laughing. “I know! But all I could think of was you, of making love to you, not her.”

“Aaron, what are we gonna do?” I asked seriously. “I can’t stand it this way. I can’t stand thinking of you with her, I’m sorry.”

“I know,” he said, as he again pulled me into

himself. "But this has all happened so quickly. You gotta give me some time, please. You gotta let me get this all sorted out, but please don't bail on me! Please trust me. I don't want to hurt you, but I don't wanna hurt her either."

"I know, Aaron, I just never expected..."

"I never expected to love you so much. I never expected that at all."

"I love you, too," I sobbed, astonished somewhat by this first admission. "I love you more than anything!" He then pushed me away from him slightly and then leaned in to kiss me. It was oh-so-passionate, as our lips connected. It was as if not only our bodies were pressed there together, but also our souls. He loves me! He said he loves me!

Aaron convinced me to come to dinner with Robin and him that evening. I had protested vehemently, but he wanted me to be there. He insisted that Robin wanted that, too, but I reminded him that she actually knew nothing of the true nature of my relationship to him. When she found out, surely she would hate me forever.

The things that Aaron had said to me that morning, his calm and confident assurances, buoyed me throughout the day. It really was not as if anything had at all changed. He still had his girlfriend, he was still, by all intents and purposes,

living a *straight* lifestyle and I still had no guarantees that any of this was going to work out for the good. Yet, I somehow believed him when he told me to trust him. I believed him because everything about his very presence demanded that I do so. I believed him because of how he made me feel, and because of how he himself appeared to feel. I believed him because never before had I been happier than I was when he was with me and because I couldn't even imagine facing tomorrow with him being only a memory.

Really this entire situation was something that was very much larger than myself or my feelings. The angst that Aaron was struggling with surely was something that began before me. He'd confessed to me that his explorations of his homosexual desires had begun with Joey. Most likely he was aware of his attractions even before that though, but to have met his girlfriend at such a young age and to have then continued in that relationship for so long, it just was so easy to coast along and not really deal with his true desires. Finally, I came into the picture, and then boom, he ran smack into a wall. His sexual orientation was no longer something he could sweep under the rug or hide away from his friends and family. It was glaring him in the face.

For the life of me, I couldn't really understand why it was I who did this to him. I didn't see

where I really had anything to offer him. When he told me like a million times that I was so damned cute, I truly thought he either needed an eye examination or was possibly just a little off-balanced. I really was not cute. I wasn't even what I'd consider average. I was a short, scrawny, shy wimp who always had mussed up hair. I never knew the right thing to say, was always getting tongue-tied and felt incredibly awkward in social situations. I was not particularly skilled at any one thing, although I had a passion for journalism. Even in this area, I was still a novice.

And here Aaron was, this successful and accomplished businessman. He was tall, attractive and very articulate. He had a very extroverted personality, a hilarious sense of humor, and was the polar opposite of nerdy. He was really way out of my league, and yet he said that he loved me. He said he didn't want me out of his life, now or ever. He said that he'd never felt the way that he does for me with anyone else, and even confessed that he thought of me when he made love to his beautiful girlfriend. This truly was beyond my very comprehension.

At six-thirty, I found myself rapping on Aaron's apartment door and fidgeting nervously while I waited to be let in.

Robin was the one who answered, and she was most gracious when she did so. "I'm so glad you

were able to change your plans to join us. I hope that it was not too much trouble."

I shook my head as I looked her in the eye, but then quickly shifted my gaze to the floor. "No, it was no problem really. Nothing was definite."

"Cool. Well come on in. Aaron's in the bedroom. Have a seat. I hope you like *Olive Garden*. That's where he's taking us."

"Sure," I said. "I love Italian."

"So you gonna run with me tomorrow? Seventhirty."

"Hmm, probably. Sounds good to me, if you're sure you don't mind."

"No, it'll be great. I'm so glad Aaron finally got a decent tenant upstairs. I think he's gonna love havin you for a neighbor."

"I hope so." *I hope he loves it far more than you could ever imagine!*

When Aaron stepped out of the bedroom and joined us in the living room, he smiled at me broadly. I wanted to leap to my feet and embrace him, but of course I could do nothing but nod and smile back at him.

"Hey there. How ya doin, Mark?"

"Pretty good, thank you," I replied. "How're you?"

"Can't complain," he said as he stepped over to stand next to Robin. She reached behind him to wrap her arm around his waist. "Well, you guys

ready?"

It was very difficult for me to see them standing there together, identified so obviously as a couple. I knew that in Robin's mind, this man here standing beside her was her boyfriend. They belonged to one another, yet in my heart I knew that Aaron would never feel that way about her. Certainly he cared for her and shared a very beautiful history with her, yet she was not the person with whom he could find true happiness. To be honest, I wasn't even entirely sure that I was that person either. It was far too soon, really, but for him to have found something within me that sparked a genuine desire and a real passion, at the very least indicated that no woman was really ever going to satisfy him.

Undoubtedly Robin deserved to know about Aaron's true feelings. Something within me cried out just then, perhaps a pang of guilt, demanding honesty. Maybe I was feeling that if the situation were reversed and it was she he truly loved, I would want to be told about it. Then again, I couldn't help but realize that this would be one of the most painful realities that I would ever have to face. How would I ever be able to cope with the knowledge that Aaron loved someone else other than me, if the shoe were on the other foot? I don't think I would even have the will to go on at that point.

But I also sensed that Robin was a genuinely strong person, and certainly she was not stupid. If Aaron had been dealing with his mixed feelings for awhile now as I surmised, then surely she must have picked up some sort of clue. Maybe it was because they lived apart from one another, and the times that they did see each other were very intermittent. Maybe Aaron was actually bisexual, attracted to both men and women, and eventually it would be I who would have to cope with this reality. Maybe he was just a damned good actor. I wished I knew more about Robin, and about how intense her feelings for Aaron actually were. The best-case scenario would be that she already had a sense that she and Aaron were not right for one another, and that she would be willing and ready to let go of the relationship. If only things were actually that simple.

Robin actually did a lot more talking that evening than Aaron did. At the restaurant, the two of them sat next to one another in a booth and I sat opposite them. For the first part of the evening, Robin seemed to be very interested in me, asking lots of questions about college and about career goals. It seemed strange that I'd already graduated and yet she was still in school even though she was three years older than me. She had taken a couple years off school after graduation though. She was studying elementary education and was

going to be a teacher.

At one point Robin excused herself to use the lady's room, and this left Aaron and I alone in the booth together.

"This seems too weird," I said. "I shouldn't have come."

"I'm sorry," he said as he looked me directly in the eye. "You and Robin get along great together though."

"I know! That's the problem. It all would be easier if I hated her guts."

"You don't seem the type to hate anyone's guts, Mark. That's what I love about you."

I looked down at my lap. "Stop it," I whispered. "Don't tell me good things about myself when I'm feeling so horrible. This whole situation...it's a lie. It's a lie and it's wrong. You know, she even wants me to go jogging with her tomorrow. Aaron, I don't wanna be her friend. When she finds out the truth, she's gonna hate me."

"No, she's gonna hate me. I'm the one who's been with her for five years. I'm the one she is gonna say lied to her."

"You didn't lie though, Aaron. Did you? I mean your feelings for her were genuine, you just didn't know. You didn't know you were gonna fall in love with someone else, and that that someone was gonna be..." I lowered my voice, "another guy."

"Mark, I have to tell her about me. Period. I have to tell her about who I really am, and actually that has nothing to do with you. I was doin' stuff with Joey even before I met you. Before that, there were other things...fantasies and stuff. I even had this one guy that I used to talk to on the internet, sometimes I even used to call him. This all has been building up, ya know."

"When are you gonna do it?"

He sighed. "Maybe tomorrow. Maybe before she leaves tomorrow, I don't know."

"If you tell her the truth this weekend, it will be better for us," I said meekly as I looked up at him. "Then we won't feel so...guilty."

"I don't feel guilty when I'm with you, and you shouldn't feel that way either! But I know what you mean. It is the lying that is bad, but not us. There is nothing about 'us' that is bad, and don't ever think there is."

"I know, I'm sorry. That's what I meant."

Robin was approaching, having returned from the restroom. "What're ya talkin about?"

"I was telling Mark about the jet skis," Aaron lied. "I gotta take him up north this summer and let him try it."

"You ever use one?" asked Robin.

I shook my head. "No, but I do like to swim. I love the water really."

"My Dad has a cabin on Lake Charlevoix. It's a

great vacation spot," said Aaron.

"Cool," I said, smiling warmly at him. "That sounds like fun."

We talked fairly animatedly with one another for the rest of the evening, and Robin even convinced me to have a couple glasses of wine. I really was starting to like her, but when she broached the subject of whether or not I had a girlfriend, I sort of bristled.

"Don't worry," she assured me, "you'll find that perfect person. I know you will."

At least she was correct about one thing.

I deliberately got up early Sunday morning so that I could jog by myself. I wanted to be back home by the time that Robin was ready for her own run. I'd just tell her I woke up early and that we'd have to take a rain check. I knew she was heading back to school that afternoon, and I was relieved that it was all going to be over. The idea of Aaron having the conversation with her that he'd mentioned to me the night before at dinner, was disturbing to me. I couldn't begin to imagine how Robin would react; I thought she would probably be utterly devastated.

That afternoon I called my parents and reported to them how well I was settling into my new apartment. Mom told me of some tentative plans that she had for a birthday party in honor of my

father. He was turning fifty on July 10th. I told her that of course I'd be there, and asked if it was okay for me to bring a friend. This inquiry actually surprised myself, for I rather doubted I'd have the nerve to actually show up at my parents' home with my gay lover.

Was that who Aaron was to me? My lover? I didn't really think that he was—not yet. We only had been together for less than a week. Who knew where this was going to end up and if it would even last? A part of me expected Aaron to suddenly take a look at me one day and ask himself, *What the fuck did I ever see in him?*

When my phone rang in the early evening that Sunday, my heart skipped a beat. Quickly I looked outside to see if Robin's car was still there. It was, so probably the call was not from Aaron. When I heard Joyce's voice on the line, I was somewhat relieved.

"What's goin on? I haven't heard from you all week!" she scolded.

"Oh sorry, I've been busy. I was gonna call you yesterday, but...I don't know...guess I got distracted."

"What's got you preoccupied? Is there someone you need to tell me about?"

I smiled to myself. How is it that Joyce could be so perceptive? Was she telepathic or something? God I hoped not! "Maybe..." I said teasingly.

"Spill!" she demanded. "Who is she? I'm assuming it's a she."

I was a little taken aback by this comment, for I'd never really discussed anything relating to my sexual orientation with her. "Um..." I gulped, "Why would you say that?"

"Well ya never know," she said. "Wouldn't matter to me who you were attracted to, just so you're happy."

"Thanks," I said. "Well..."

"Well what?"

"Well...it's true. I'm...um..."

"Gay?"

"I didn't really wanna come out to you over the phone though."

"Oh, honey, who cares! I'm so glad you did tell me though. I suspected it all along. No straight guy would ever be able to clean the way you do."

I laughed. "Thanks, Joyce. Ya know, you're the very first person I've ever told."

"Really? Well you mean other than this guy...this mystery guy that you've been so busy with."

"Yeah," I said, smiling. I was literally shaking at this point, my palms sweating and my heart racing ninety miles per minute. I couldn't believe I'd actually confessed this huge secret to her.

"So tell me about him! Tell me everything. Is he as cute as you?"

"Oh my God!" I said, feeling myself start to blush. "There's no comparison. He is hot—really hot."

"And does he have a name?"

Oh my God! What should I say? I couldn't tell Joyce we were talking about Aaron—*her* Aaron, the one she had known for years and valued as a son, the one she had counseled, consoled and basically watched grow into manhood. Joyce knew not only Aaron, but Robin as well. She spoke highly of both of them, regarded them as a beautiful couple, and now surely she would see me as the intruder. She'd never understand. Plus, how could I even think of outing Aaron to someone as important to him as Joyce? It was up to him to decide if and when he would make that revelation.

"Hello?" said Joyce. "Mark, are you there."

"Oh...sorry! Um...listen, I gotta go, I've got something on the stove. I'll call ya back later, all right? Bye!"

As I placed the telephone receiver back into its cradle, I leaned against the wall, smiling. It felt good to tell someone else about my feelings, even if I couldn't yet reveal the person who was the object of this affection. Actually, I wanted to go shout from a mountain top that I was in love with Aaron Culver. I wanted to tell the entire world, for these feelings within my heart just couldn't be

contained. I felt compelled to share them, to declare without shame that I had met and fallen in love with the man of my dreams, and that he was the most wonderful man in the entire universe! I couldn't do it yet though, we had to take baby steps.

When Aaron called me an hour later, I discovered he'd taken the first of these steps himself. He'd told Robin about himself!

Chapter Eight

“You told her? About us?”

“No, I told her about me. Come downstairs,” he said. “Come be with me, and we can talk about it, okay.”

“Sure, of course,” I said reassuringly. “Sorry, I’ll be right there.”

“Okay.” He sighed. “Thanks.”

He was holding a beer in his hand when he opened the door to let me in. As he looked down at me, smiling sheepishly, there was something in his gaze that shocked me. For the very first time since I’d known him, I sensed a vulnerability. He just looked sort of spent emotionally, sort of like he had been wounded. It must have been an ordeal for him; he must have had difficulty talking to her.

As I stepped inside, he wrapped his arms around me, and I almost expected him to cry. He didn’t though, but squeezed me tightly as he pulled my body into his own. He was still

clutching the beer bottle, and he released me momentarily to set it down on the coffee table.

"Come in," he said, "Come sit with me. Want a pop or something?" he asked as we sat down on the sofa.

I merely shook my head while continuing to stare into his eyes.

"She wasn't even mad." He sighed. "It was weird."

"Really?" I asked, my voice barely above a whisper. "What did she say?"

"Well, to start with, I told her that there was something important that I had to talk to her about, but that I knew it probably would hurt her. She didn't say anything to that, just sat there listening to me. Then I told her I cared about her so much. I told her that I loved her actually, but that I wasn't sure it was the same kind of love she felt for me."

"Oh my God, and she still didn't say anything?"

He shook his head and then took a sip from his beer. "But, I said, it was nothing to do with her. She was beautiful and a wonderful person, and we were very special to one another, and I hoped it always would be that way. She didn't say anything, but she started to cry just then. A single tear drop was running down her cheek, and it really kind broke my heart, ya know."

"Oh, Aaron, I'm so sorry," I placed my hand on his knee.

"Then I told her that for a long time, every since high school actually, I'd been really confused about my feelings. I told her that I began noticing that I was attracted to guys and that for awhile I thought I might be bisexual. This was when she finally spoke. She said, *Are you...bisexual, I mean*, and I shook my head.

"I said, *No, I'm gay.*"

"And she wasn't angry? She didn't yell at you or anything, or try to argue against you?"

"Nope, she just sat there, staring at me for a few minutes. She didn't say anything for a long time. Then finally she got up, told me she was leaving and headed back to Big Rapids. She didn't even really say goodbye or anything. It kind of blew my mind."

"She's in shock maybe. Do you think she's gonna be all right?"

"I hope so," he said. "I gotta make myself available to her, Mark. If she calls or wants to meet me or something. I owe her that much. When she's ready to talk, I gotta give her a chance to say what she needs to say."

"Of course," I agreed. "I understand completely."

"It's so strange. I think it would be easier if she were mad. I think I sorta feel like I deserve for her

to be really pissed at me."

"No...no you don't!" I argued. "It's not your fault, Aaron. It's not like you chose to be who you are. It's not like you even lied to her. When you figured it all out, you told her the truth. What more could you do?"

"Well." He sighed again. "I could have made sure she knew that I didn't want the same things she did. I could have told her a long time ago that I had doubts about the two of us."

"Maybe you did tell her," I reasoned. "For you to have gone this long without a proposal, for you to have not moved further in your commitment to her, that was a very clear message. She must have been sensing that something wasn't right."

"Possibly. You probably are right. It still sucks though. God, I love you so much, Mark. I'm sorry you gotta go through all this, too. It's really lousy, ya know."

"No, it isn't lousy," I told him as I moved myself a little closer to him. "It's good that you were honest and it's good that when you did finally decide to do this, that you have someone to go through it with you. I'm privileged really. I'm the lucky one to be that person in your life right now." He then draped his arm around me and pulled me into his side.

"No, I'm the lucky one," he said, and leaned down to kiss me.

It was so gentle and loving, the way his lips pressed against my own. I breathed through my nose, inhaling his scent, as I felt the comforting strength of his embrace.

"Thank you," he said as he pulled his face slightly away from mine. "Thank you for being so perfect and so incredibly cute."

I smiled at him then. What an unbelievably sweet thing to say, I thought. And especially to say it now, my heart swelled with happiness and serenity. This was where I belonged. I knew it. I belonged right here with this man, right here in his arms. No matter what happened, he'd always make me feel wonderful like this.

I didn't go back to my own apartment until seven o'clock the next morning. For the previous two days, Aaron and I had been apart, and it was like it had been an eternity. I was so thankful to be with him now, to feel his body next to mine, the strength of his embrace. We watched television together, snuggling next to one another on the couch. I lay down, resting my head in his lap and he brushed my hair with his fingertips.

His hands began to traverse my body, and softly his fingers glided across my back. He slipped his hand under my shirt and slowly began working his way up, pressing against my flesh with his strong-yet-gentle touch. His fingertips

began forming circles on my back as he rubbed my smooth flesh, and I felt goose bumps traveling down my arms as he continued to touch me. This was literally the most relaxing feeling I had ever experienced, and I just laid there, completely melting into him. The sounds escaping my lips were something between a sigh and a moan, as I closed my eyes and drifted into this surreal state of utopia. Truly this was paradise.

He was so expert at massaging me, working his fingers into the region between my shoulder blades that seemed to contain a lifetime of stressors that I didn't even know existed. I just relaxed myself, allowing the tension to escape my body as I felt his fingers pressing against the back of my neck, gently digging into me. I felt like a rag doll, draped limply across his lap, and literally my only regret was the knowledge that at some point this unbelievably relaxing feeling would have to end. It was such a warm feeling, a sensation that seemed to be glowing somewhere inside of me. It was like a gentle breeze blowing over me, warming my entire body. How could anything ever feel so incredibly wonderful?

All of this time I'd known how passionately I worshipped this man, but now it felt as if it were he worshipping me. I wondered how he'd ever learned to do such remarkable things with his hands, but these thoughts did not trouble me, for

all that mattered is that he was doing them now with me. After what seemed both an eternity and merely a millisecond, he carefully gripped my shoulder and pulled me against himself. Then he shifted me in his lap so that I was now laying on my back, staring up at him. He was smiling, looking down at me, and his fingers were now gliding across the smoothness of my chest.

"You're beautiful," he whispered. "You're totally fuckin' beautiful."

I turned my head toward his body then, and pressed my lips into his abdomen, kissing it. I kissed him repeatedly, right above his navel. It was an odd place to focus my attention, I know, but it was what was right in front of me. He was laughing then, and I'm not sure if it was because I was tickling him or because of my silliness, but his laughter was so adorable. I was so happy to hear him like this, to evidence the sounds of his pleasure. It truly was my deepest desire, to please him.

Finally, he slid his palms under my armpits and pulled me up, bringing me to a seated position on his lap. He wrapped his arm around my shoulder and pulled me against himself. My knees were bent, and I pulled my legs up next to my torso, curling almost into a fetal position. He kissed me then, right on the lips, probably the most passionately that he ever had. I grabbed the back

of his head as he did so, running my fingers through his hair as he leaned into me, sliding his tongue into my mouth, slowly cocking his head from side to side, as he seemed to devour me.

Finally, he pulled away and stared into my eyes. He smiled at me, and it was so very beautiful.

“Know what I want?” he asked quietly.

I shook my head, awaiting his romantic response.

“A chili cheese dog! I’m starving!”

I burst out laughing, trying to feign mock indignation. He was so funny, I could not pretend to be offended.

“Come on! Let’s go to Seven-Eleven.” He then scooped me up in his arms and pushed himself off the couch. “I’ll carry you,” he said as he headed for the front door.

“Wait!”

“What?”

“Your shoes. Don’t you gotta put your shoes on?”

“Oh.” He laughed. “Good point.”

Still holding me in his arms as I clung tightly to his neck he then carried me into the bedroom. He stepped into a pair of sneakers, one at a time, without even tying them, and then spun around to head back out the door.

He stopped briefly in the dining room, “Grab

the keys from the rack."

I did so before we headed out the door.

The cool thing about Aaron's dad owning the Seven-Eleven store was that he could get free Big Gulps, Slurpees and hot dogs whenever he wanted. When we walked into the store that night, the clerk immediately recognized him.

"Hey, Sandy!" said Aaron, "This is my friend, Mark. We got a craving for chili cheese dogs."

"Help yourself," she told us, "It's been kinda slow in here tonight."

"Really? Well how ya doin? I haven't seen ya in awhile."

"I know." She smiled. "I miss ya. You never come in and visit like ya used to, eating all the food and leaving me messes to clean up."

"Hey!" Aaron jokingly protested, "Are you callin me a slob?"

"Well...if the shoe fits..."

"Okay, I promise. No messes tonight. That's what Mark is for. He cleans up all my messes. Don't ya, bud?" he looked down at me, smiling.

"Yeah, I'm his cleaning guy. I clean his apartment," I said cheerfully.

"My sympathies," said Sandy.

Aaron and I headed toward the hot dog case. He lifted the lid, and pulled out a wiener with his bare hand, shoving the end in his mouth. He held it there, gently gripping it with his teeth and he

turned to me playfully. Then he pulled out the compartment under the hotdogs and removed two wrapped buns. He handed me one as he unwrapped the other. Then he grabbed two more dogs and inserted them in the unwrapped buns. I held mine out to him as I stared up at him silently. Then we loaded them up with cheese, chili, and condiments, all the while Aaron still had the other hotdog dangling from his mouth.

Then we each grabbed a fountain pop, Diet Coke, of course, and he led me into a back room. It was like an office of some sort. There was a large, cluttered desk and a single chair that was on casters in the room.

He placed his hotdog and pop down on the desk and then plopped down comfortably in the chair. When he removed the other hotdog from his mouth, he was holding it in the air. "C'mere," he said, smiling.

I stepped over to him, both of my hands full with my beverage and food. He held the hotdog up just above my head, dangling it there in front of me, and I followed it with my eyes.

"Wanna taste my weenie?" he asked.

I smiled and nodded, glancing quickly into his eyes. I moved my mouth closer to it, parting my lips as I did so, almost about to touch it with my tongue, when he pulled slightly away from me, backing up a bit in the chair. I followed him,

slowly, inching my way toward the hotdog.

"How bad you want it?" he teased. "How bad you wanna feel my big wiener in your mouth?"

"Real bad!" I said eagerly. "Oh God, I want it so bad!"

"Oh yeah? Show me how bad. Show me how bad you want it in your mouth."

Hurriedly I placed my pop and hotdog on the desk next to his and stepped closer to him once more. "I'm begging you! Please let me have it. Please...shove it in my mouth. All of it! I beg you!"

He laughed. "You call that beggin?" he asked, still dangling the hot dog in front of me.

Immediately I dropped to my knees. For a brief second I was concerned that Sandy may walk in on us, but I was becoming so caught up in the moment that I dismissed the thought quickly. I craned my neck back and opened my mouth wide as I stared up at the hot dog, which he held directly over my head. Slowly he moved it closer to my mouth. I was straining to reach it, trying to touch it with my tongue. Just as it was about to make contact, he pulled it away from me quickly. "Oh God! Aaron, please! I beg you...slide it in, oh please!"

He laughed playfully as he looked down at me. Then he moved it closer again, this time allowing me to just barely touch it. I tried wrapping my lips

around the end of it, but he pulled back once more.

"You want it bad, don't ya? You want it so fuckin bad."

"Yes! Yes, sir!" I cried.

He then lowered the hotdog as I cranked my jaw open wide. As he slid it in, I wrapped my lips around it seductively and looked up into his eyes. He slid it back and forth in my mouth as I pressed my tongue against the meat stick.

"You like? You like my big fat hotdog in your mouth, boy?"

"Mmm," I said, as I continued to suck on it. "Yes, sir!"

"Oh yeah...good boy." Then he started laughing, releasing the hot dog from his fingers and allowing it to remain in my mouth.

I reached up and grabbed it, holding it up to him. "That turns you on?" I asked him, still kneeling in front of him.

"Let me put it this way, if Sandy weren't here, you'd get more than an Oscar Mayer wiener in your mouth." He then grabbed the hot dog from me and quickly took a bite of it. "Mmm, good," he said with his mouth full.

I got up from my knees, then and sat on top of the desk in front of him. He scooted his chair over between my legs, and we sat there face-to-face, stuffing ourselves with the chili cheese dogs.

"You make me so happy," he said in between bites. "You're so cute and so fuckin sexy."

"Aaron," I said seriously, "I just can't believe it when you say things like that. It's like...um...like a dream or somethin."

"Well believe it," he assured me, "cuz it's true." Then he leaned in to kiss me.

When we left the convenience store, Aaron drove around town for a while. It was a warm summer night, and we had the windows rolled down. He took me down by the waterfront, and we sat there together, still in the car.

"You come down here for the fireworks on the Fourth?" he asked.

"Yeah, I did last year. I can't believe what awesome fireworks they have here. Up home, they are pathetic compared to here."

"I know," he agreed, "They definitely have some cool fireworks. We can go together this year."

"That'll be so cool. I've never watched fireworks with someone that—"

"That you were in love with?"

I looked over to him, seeing only the shadow of his face in the dim light. "Yeah," I said, "Someone like you." He then leaned into me and kissed me once more, reaching up to cup my face in his hands.

"It'll be great," he said. "Totally perfect."

When we finally drove home, he didn't have to invite me to spend the night with him, for I knew it was the only real option. How could I even think of tearing myself away? And how could I ever know how beautiful it was going to be that night, when he actually made love to me for the very first time?

Chapter Nine

“I love it when you talk to me like that,” I said to him as I sat down on the edge of the bed.

“Like what?” he asked, peeling his tee shirt up over his head to expose his bare torso.

“Like you did at the store, when we were in the office. Like the way —”

“That I made you beg?”

I nodded. “Yeah, that was so hot.”

“So you like it when I dominate you? You like to be bossed around?”

“Isn’t it obvious how I feel? I mean...um...you told me yourself that I seemed real shy around you.”

“Yeah,” he agreed, “but you aren’t as bad as before. Now sometimes you don’t wanna shut up.”

“Oh,” I said, looking down at the ground suddenly. “I’m sorry. If I talk too much, just tell me...please.”

“Mark! I’m only teasin ya. Jus’ messin w’ ya is

all."

"Oh, okay. But seriously, I don't wanna be annoying to you."

He moved over toward me then and sat down on the bed. "You never are annoying to me. Every single thing about you turns me on—your big brown eyes, the way you laugh, your smile. How could any of that ever annoy me?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know. I just worry about it. I'm really not all that, I'm just a really boring kinda person. I guess I don't understand really why you even like me so much."

"Well there are like ten thousand reasons, and I haven't even discovered what all they are yet, but I know you're perfect for me just the way you are. No one else ever made me feel so...excited. And if it's really true that you think I'm so much better than you, then you should value my opinion."

"I do!" I exclaimed. "I value your opinion more than anything."

"Then when I say you're chill, you're chill. When I say you are cute, you are. Got it?"

I nodded in response.

"Huh? Is that any way to respond to your superior?"

"Oh sorry! Yes, sir, I value your opinion. I believe whatever you say."

"You better," he said, "and I want you to start

believing it not just cuz it's my opinion, but because it's true. Now get on your knees and kiss my feet!"

I was a little shocked by this sudden order, but did not hesitate to comply. Immediately I slipped off the bed and assumed a kneeling position before him. I bowed my head most respectfully, and kissed the tops of each of his socked feet. Every time that I knelt before him like this, it turned me on so much. I was literally rock hard as I bowed down to him, humbly offering him my most reverent worship. Apparently, it turned him on as well, for as I started to work my mouth up his calf, inching my way into his inner thigh, I noticed the big bulge in his shorts. He was visibly throbbing.

My mouth found him, and I pressed my lips against his arousal. I slid back and forth against the smooth nylon fabric, tracing the outline of his cock in a way that was truly of worship. Slowly I kissed it, over and over, making love to the undeniable evidence of my partner's attraction to me. I wasn't even sure if his state of arousal was because of me, per se, or merely due to the fact that he was being worshipped. It pleased me, nonetheless, to witness his responsiveness.

He began to then arch his body slightly, raising his buttocks from the mattress, and I knew it was my cue to remove his shorts. I reached up to grip

the elastic waistband, and pulled them down over his thighs. Most reverently, I then backed away from him somewhat and carefully pulled the shorts all the way down his calves. He moved his legs together, allowing me to easily slip the shorts over his ankles and feet. Instantly he resumed his former position, spreading his legs wide for me, and I slid back into place.

I heard him moan as my tongue made contact with his nut sac. Gingerly, I then began to flick the tip of my tongue back and forth, tickling him playfully. He obviously enjoyed the sensation, he moaned a little louder and reached down to run his fingers through my short hair. I continued to dart my tongue back and forth, bathing him with its slickness. I burrowed into the crevice between his balls and his thigh, working my way all the way around to the other side. His cock stood at attention, throbbing in response to the pleasurable stimulation.

"Suck me!" he finally cried out. "Suck my cock!"

His voice was stern and commanding, it sent a wave of excitement through my entire body. To hear him speak so authoritatively, demanding service from me, was almost enough to make me climax myself right there at his feet.

As I quickly opened my mouth and lunged upward to take him inside of my mouth, he

tightened his grip on my head. He was guiding me onto his cock! Now in a position of total control, he pushed me down, forcing me to slide all the way onto his rigid shaft. I cranked my jaw while keeping my lips wrapped tightly around his cock. My tongue remained firmly placed against the underside of his prick. The entry was smooth and balls-deep. Once again, he moaned.

The forcefulness of his thrust was somewhat shocking to me, and I had to focus, instantly concentrating upon suppressing my gag reflex. He, however, did not seem to be aware of any discomfort or challenge that I may be facing. He was solely in tune with his own pleasure at this point, and seemed to be only concerned with maximizing it. He began to pump me then, sliding me up and down upon himself. It was truly amazing to me how he suddenly seemed to have tapped into this extremely dominant side of himself, as if something had awakened within him that demanded attention. It was a need, I thought—a primal desire to be served. It was a very powerful urge to assume his true position of superiority over me. He had to have known all along that this was his right. He had to have sensed that it ultimately was his role to be served and mine to offer service. Now he was finally acknowledging it.

That very first night that I'd sucked him, he had

assumed a role that was somewhat dominant. It just was in his nature, I think. But this time, it was far more intense. This time he seemed to give into it more; he allowed himself to experience the power and the all-consuming arousal that came with knowing he was the Alpha male. He was king. He was the master and I was the servant.

He pumped me then on himself with abandon, jacking me up and down on his shaft as if he were holding onto some sort of masturbation toy. He drove his cock deep into my throat, burying it so that he could feel the tightness around his shaft. He was sitting there so comfortably, as if presiding on a throne, and he just continued to grip my head and pump. It went on and on, for he obviously was deliberately hedging his orgasm. He apparently didn't want it over with too soon.

Finally, when I thought my jaw was gonna break from exhaustion, he gripped my head fiercely and shoved me all the way down on himself. My nose was being ground into his pubic hair stubble as he held me firmly in place. Then I felt the firing of his cumload into his shaft against my tongue. I actually felt it before he released! He moaned loudly and pumped his load, draining himself into me. I gulped reflexively. I did not even taste the cum at first, most of it was going directly down my throat. When some of the ejaculate did back up onto my tongue, I savored

its sweetness, swallowing hungrily.

His body began to relax and his grip upon my head slackened. I pulled off of him slightly, still keeping the end of his cock-shaft in my mouth. As I looked up at him for his approval, he smiled down at me. His hands were now gently cupping my face.

“Good boy,” he praised me. “You did a real good job.”

Quickly I slid back down onto him, cleaning his shaft thoroughly with my mouth. When I finally pulled off completely, his cock was rigid and shiny, utterly beautiful. I kissed the bulbous, mushroom head and then again stared up at Aaron’s face.

He bent down to lift me, sliding his hands around each of my sides. Smoothly he pulled me up into his lap where I then embraced him, pressing my lips passionately against his. His tongue darted into my mouth, and it excited me, knowing he was now sharing the taste of his own semen with me. He leaned backward then on the bed, pulling me on top of him as he continued to kiss me. I felt his hard on pressing against my body and was amazed by his remarkable stamina. He’d just cum and it was still throbbing. As he rolled me onto my back and positioned himself above me, I was very much aware that he still was in total control. He looked down into my eyes,

perhaps looking for a clue from me as to whether or not I was ready to go further with him. My yearning and desire must have been written all over my face.

He implored, "Take me inside of you..."

"Yes!" I cried, ever so softly, my voice only a whisper. "I beg you."

It was then his turn to undress me, and he started with my tee shirt. He pulled it smoothly over my head. Then he stood at the edge of the bed and grabbed the elastic waistband of my wind pants. He gripped my pants and underwear together, pulling them off easily, and I now lay there before him completely naked but for my socks. He then reached into a bedside drawer to remove some lotion and smiled at me as he looked down into my eyes.

I spread my legs apart, my butt being positioned on the very edge of the mattress. He slid his left arm under my legs and raised them both together in the air. I held them for him, spreading them apart to expose myself. Then in a manner that seemed almost playful, he began to run his lubed finger into the crack of my ass. He was not inserting himself, merely pressing against the pucker of my hole. It was a sensation I'd never experienced before, and involuntarily I giggled. He was tickling me, I guess. Then very carefully and with painstaking ease, he poked the tip of his

finger into me. There was no pain, and in fact, I squirmed a little, enjoying the pleasurable sensation.

He slid in a tiny bit deeper then, all the while staring down at my face. I smiled up at him, surprised by how incredible his finger felt to me. He was probing around inside of me, and I felt his finger begin to slide back and forth. I moaned softly, squinting my eyes shut periodically. He advanced then to two fingers and then to three. With a circular motion, he used his fingers to loosen and dilate my hole. He was preparing me for something much larger.

After a few moments, he used his free hand to pick up the lotion bottle. He squirted some onto his own cock and dropped the lotion back onto the bed. Then he wrapped his palm around his spit-shined cock and lubed it with the creamy gel he'd just deposited. I heard the squishy sound of the lotion being spread across his hard cock as he continued to plug my hole with his fingers. He then pulled his hand away from my ass, evacuating me suddenly, but then immediately grabbing each of my ankles to lift my legs into the air. He positioned himself beside the bed facing me, pointing his lubed hard on at my waiting hole. He quickly brought his right hand down to grasp the base of his cock in order to steer himself in. Carefully he poked his cockhead against my butt

hole, and then he eased into me.

As the head entered me, I suddenly was overcome with a wave of intense pain. It was like he was forcing a baseball bat up inside of me, ripping me apart. I cried out as my body spasmed, and immediately he pulled back. Frantically I grabbed at the sheets beneath me and closed my eyes tightly, riding the wave of pain that seemed to be shooting up inside me.

"Are you okay?" he asked tenderly. "Oh, babe, I don't wanna hurt you."

I nodded my head anxiously, unable to speak at that moment. When the pain finally dissipated, I opened my eyes and looked up at him. "Sorry," I said, "I'm okay. Try again...please."

He smiled down at me. "Okay," he said, as he repositioned himself, again pointing his cock head at the target. As he slid himself in this time, the sensation was hardly painful at all. In fact, it felt similar to what he had done to me with his fingers. This time I moaned quietly, not from the pain, but from the uniquely exquisite feeling of having him within me. He moaned as well, smoothly sliding himself deep inside of me.

"Oh yeah," he said. "Fuck yeah! Babe, you feel so good. You feel so nice and tight around me."

"I love having you in me," I gasped. "I love having you deep inside me."

"Yeah? You want me to fuck you? You want me

to make love to you, boy?"

"Oh yeah! Yes, sir! Oh please!"

He then grabbed each of my ankles and began to thrust, pumping his cock in and out of my virgin hole. My own cock was rock hard now, slapping against my belly. The forceful way that he drilled himself deeply within me was making me so aroused. It felt as if I may shoot a load right then. I had never realized that the experience of being fucked would be so pleasurable that it might make me cum. It was the pressure of his thrusting that was massaging my prostate.

He leaned into me, pumping his cock faster and faster into me. He was working his way into a rhythm, drilling my hole mercilessly. Finally, I cried out as I felt myself on the verge of losing control. "Oh God! I'm gonna cum!" I screamed. He rammed into me fiercely then, literally fucking the cum out of me as I shot my load all over myself, spraying spurts of sticky fluid all over my chest and face. He then moaned loudly himself and thrust deeply into me. I stared up at his face as he squinted his eyes shut tightly and growled an animalistic moan. He was pumping his second load into me!

Remaining still deep inside of me, he then leaned over me and pressed his lips to mine, kissing me so passionately. I wrapped my legs around his waist and pulled his torso against my

own sticky chest. We both were gasping and panting and our tongues connected, overcome with the intensity of the passion.

“I love you!” he said. “God, I love you!”

Chapter Ten

In the days that followed, Aaron and I were to become inseparable. Every night when I got home from work I'd either go down to his apartment or I'd wait for him to come up to mine. We watched movies together, had our dinner with one another, and even on one occasion got drunk together. He took me to the theater on Wednesday night where we watched one of the Lord of the Rings films. On Thursday night, we went to the beach. It was starting to get dark already by the time we arrived, and we had most of the beach to ourselves. We were the only ones left when the sun finally set, and we laid in the cool sand, while looking up into the twilight sky.

"Let's go swimming," said Aaron.

"We already did," I objected. "Plus it's dark."

"I know, we can skinny dip."

I busted out laughing then. "No way. What if we get caught? Technically this park is closed now. It closed at ten o'clock."

"So what? Either you do it by choice, or I'm just gonna have to force you."

"Oh really?" I laughed as I pushed myself upright, standing next to him. "Well, ya gotta catch me first!" I said and turned quickly to dash away from him down the beach. I didn't get more than twenty feet from him when he descended upon me, tackling me into the sand. "Ugh!" I cried as I landed with a thud, his arms wrapped around my waist. We both were laughing.

"Okay," he said, as he gasped for breath, "get naked!"

I squirmed around underneath him, and he positioned himself so that he was pinning me on my back. Then he grabbed the waistband of my swimsuit and began to tug downward, as I buried my heels in the sand and tried pushing myself away from him. The only thing I succeeded in accomplishing, however, was to actually assist him in undressing me. "No!" I screamed, but it didn't matter, for I was already stark naked. He then stood up over me and quickly pulled off his own shorts.

"Come on!" he said, waving my swimsuit in the air over my head.

As he stood over me I saw him only in silhouette, the only light was the illumination of the bright full moon above us.

"Your turn to catch me!" He dashed toward the

water.

I glanced up to follow him with my gaze. His lean body and bare buttocks were so inviting, as I watched him run away from me. I pushed myself upright then, and shot up to chase him.

For the next several minutes, we frolicked in the water, Aaron, splashing me every time I tried to approach him. He kept pulling away from me, diving underwater just as I was about to grab him, all the while taunting me with the swimsuit. Finally, after about ten minutes, when neither of us could really even breathe any more, he gave in, allowing me to grab a hold of him. When I did, though, the swimsuit was suddenly forgotten as he pressed his lips upon my own, embracing me with a passionate kiss.

He continued to cling to me and to kiss me, and I felt his hard body against my torso. He was aroused, and I could feel his hard on pressing into my abdomen. With his arms wrapped around me, he then pulled me over, diving underwater with me, still kissing me as the water engulfed us. Sinking there together in the cool black water, it was unbelievably surreal. It felt as if our bodies were connected, the water swirling around us as we swam together.

I never ended up finding my swimsuit that night. It was lost somewhere at the bottom of the lake. I had to wrap a towel around my waist as we

left together, and we ended up sleeping together upstairs in my big new bed.

The next morning Aaron informed me that he was gonna take me away for the weekend. Again, I laughed at him in mock protest. "What if I already have plans?"

"Well, break 'em," he said. "Unless maybe you want me to take my other boyfriend instead."

"Hmm, let me think," I said. "Oh all right. Where we goin'?"

"It's a surprise. but we are gonna be gone 'til Sunday night. I'll pick you up here at five o'clock tonight. Be ready."

"Better make it five-thirty. I don't get outta work 'til five."

"Okay, five-thirty." He then pulled me into his arms jokingly saying, "And pack your swimsuit."

"I can't. It's at the bottom of the lake. Remember?"

He laughed. "I'll buy you a new one." Then he kissed me.

That afternoon I worked like a speed demon, trying to get my tasks done as quickly as possible, and I managed to actually get out a half hour early. This afforded me time to get home, shower and get a few items packed before Aaron arrived. I saw him pull in the drive just a few minutes past five.

When he opened his apartment door for me ten minutes later, his expression was rather somber. "Guess who called me today?"

I shrugged. "Who?"

"Robin."

"Oh... How'd that go?"

"Well, she's pretty bitter. She said some stuff that was not really too nice, I guess. Well, really I don't think any of its surprising. She was hurt so bad. I think it's normal for her to be pissed."

"Yeah. You know, anger is one of the stages of grief. What exactly did she say?"

"She wanted to know why I never told her the truth sooner. She wanted to know if I'd met someone else. She wanted to know if I was really sure about being gay, or if it was just that I was confused."

"What'd you tell her?" I asked, wondering immediately if he'd told her anything about me.

"I said it was just a process of discovering myself. I was confused for a very long time, but finally I did work it all out. I know now who I am and who I love. I told her I was sorry I never told her more before, but that I just didn't really understand it. And I told her I did meet someone, and that he was someone really, really special, and I love him very much."

"You said that to her?" I asked, suddenly feeling the tears well in my eyes.

He nodded. "I don't know though. I'm afraid it might have hurt her even worse."

"I'm so sorry, Aaron. I really don't wanna hurt her."

"I don't either," he said softly. "But I can't deny how much I love you. I waited my whole life to meet you, the one person who makes me feel...complete. And I think at this stage, the one single thing I owe her more than anything is honesty."

"Yeah, I agree with that. How are you doin'?"

"Oh, I'm doin' great. I'm about to take my boyfriend on a fantastic weekend getaway. How could I not be doing terrific?" He smiled down at me affectionately. "Robin is gonna be fine too. She actually was jokin' with me by the end of the conversation. Maybe we're gonna end up being friends...someday."

"Aww, I hope so." I then stepped toward him and slid my hands around his waist. "Where's my new bathing suit?" I asked him jokingly.

"Hmm," he said as he kissed my forehead, "I decided I like you better in your birthday suit. From now on you have to go skinny dipping whenever we swim."

"Oh really? Even in broad daylight?"

"Especially in broad daylight. I can see you better then."

"So can everyone else." I laughed.

"Good point," he said, suddenly appearing pensive. "Well maybe I'll have to get you a thong or something."

At that point, I burst into laughter. "Whatever you decide is fine, cuz remember, you're the boss. Right?"

"Oh yeah. That's right! So where's my dinner? I expect to have food on the table when I get home from work."

I looked up at him seriously, thinking for a second that he really meant what he was saying, but then saw the broad smile on his face. "I gotta learn how to cook first...sir," I said meekly.

"Oh, all right then. Come with me in the bedroom and help me pack. You can undress me."

"I thought you'd never ask!"

When we pulled out of the driveway thirty minutes later, Aaron suggested that we stop somewhere to grab a bite to eat. "Let's just get fast food, okay?"

"Sure. We could get chili cheese dogs again."

"Nah. My Dad's probably still at the store right now. Don't wanna deal with him. I haven't told him yet that I broke up with Robin."

"Oh, did he like her?"

"I guess about as much as he likes anyone. He's all about appearances, ya know. He's a member of the Chamber of Commerce, the Better Business

Bureau, an upstanding Republican. I think he just wants me to marry a pretty girl and have a pretty family. Who cares if I'm happy or not."

"Maybe he'll surprise you though. Maybe he will actually support you."

"For once?" Aaron said flippantly. "I doubt it. I could win the Nobel Prize and he wouldn't notice. The only time he does notice me is when I do something to piss him off."

"I sort of feel the same way about my Dad," I confessed. "Except he's a Democrat."

Aaron laughed. "You feel like he's always critical of you?"

"Yeah, I guess, but in my case I think most of it is my own fault. I never have given him much to be proud of. I think in a lot of ways I've been an embarrassment to him."

"You think that's because you're gay?" asked Aaron.

"Maybe, but I've never told him I'm gay. I've never told anyone...except you and Joyce."

"You told Joyce?" Aaron asked, shocked.

"Yeah, well it was more like she guessed."

"Did you say anything about me?" he asked seriously, glancing over to me as he took his gaze off the road for a few seconds.

"No. No, of course not. I'd never tell anyone, not without your permission, but I did tell her I'd met someone."

"I'm kind of anxious to tell her, to be honest," Aaron confessed. "I think she'll be supportive. The only thing is that she really likes Robin."

"I know!" I agreed. "I wonder what she's gonna think of me when she hears I was responsible for breaking you two up."

"You weren't responsible for that, silly," Aaron assured me, reaching over to place his hand on my knee. "We were meant to be together, you and me. It's not your fault that I was living a lie for so long."

"Well we both were, I guess. Still I feel guilty about her being hurt. I don't wanna hurt anyone, especially not a nice person like Robin."

"I know, and that just goes to show what a wonderful person you really are. You were even willing to sacrifice your own happiness to avoid hurting her." He pulled the car into the Burger King parking lot.

"Well it wasn't just about her. I wanted you to be happy too. If you had chosen her, I'd have accepted it. Guess I wouldn't have had much of a choice though, come to think of it."

"Where are we goin', by the way?"

"To Burger King," he said, smiling at me sincerely.

"I know! But I mean afterward."

"You'll see. It's gonna be a bit of a ride. Three hours or so."

"Really? Which direction?"

"You'll see. Let's go eat."

Chapter Eleven

After wolfing down our burgers and fries, Aaron and I crawled back into the car, and he drove toward the expressway. When he turned onto the southbound ramp, I knew we were headed for Detroit. "South! What's three hours south? There are so many possibilities. Detroit's only about an hour and a half from here...so... Are we goin to Ohio, Indiana or Illinois?"

Aaron laughed. "You just can't stand surprises, can you?"

I smiled over to him evilly, suddenly entertaining a very wicked thought. "Hey, if you tell me where we're goin, I'll give ya a surprise of my own." Playfully, I then slid my hand into his lap, stretching a little to reach him.

"Ohh, tryin to bribe me huh?" Aaron laughed. "Well what would you say if I ordered you to give me my *surprise* anyway?"

"Ordered me?" I repeated. "Now you're ordering me to do stuff?"

"Yeah, that's what you want, isn't it—for me to dominate you?"

"Hey, but that gives you all the power...and me none!"

"Exactly!" he agreed.

I smiled at him broadly, then suddenly felt myself starting to become aroused. "I think you've known all along that you enjoy having the power. The first time I...um...sucked you, you ordered me to do it. Remember?"

"Yeah, I remember. Then after that I couldn't get you outta my head. I fell in love with you."

"So now that you're in love with me, you can't be dominant anymore?" I asked, suddenly becoming more serious.

"Hmm, I don't know. I guess I just care about you so much that I don't wanna ever...ya know, abuse you in any way."

"But I don't see how its abuse if you know it's what I like. I really like you being in control. It majorly turns me on. Can't ya tell?"

A sly grin then crossed his lips as he glanced over to me. "Yeah, I can tell, for sure. And ya know what? Since we first started, ya know doin stuff together—sexual stuff—it's like there is this other side of me that I'm discovering. I really like to be in control. It turns me on, too."

"I think that side's been there all along actually. Maybe you just didn't realize what it was. I knew

you were a superior kind of guy from the second I met you. Man, I couldn't even talk to you!"

"You were so cute," he remembered.

"I got so hard when I was cleaning your bathroom," I confessed to him.

"What?" he scoffed. "You're kidding. Why would that make you hard?"

"It just turned me on, I guess." I looked down at my lap and felt my face reddening.

"But why though?" he said in a very temperate tone. "Was it cuz you felt humble?"

"Yeah, I guess that's exactly it," I realized. "I felt like I was submitting to you, lowering myself to do jobs for you. It made me excited...cuz you turned me on."

"Yeah, and I could tell. I could see how you looked at me, how you looked away from me when I talked to you. At first I thought it was just cuz you were shy, but then I started to think that it seemed like you idolized me, worshipped me."

"I did!" I said, looking up at him immediately. "I did idolize you. I still do."

"Then get over here," he said sternly. "Get over here and take care of me, like you should."

"Yes, sir," I said quickly, and immediately unfastened my seat belt. I slid down in my seat and lowered myself to the floor, turning to tuck myself under the dashboard. I had to lean over the console that was between the two-bucket seats,

extending my torso as I reached my hands again into his lap. I fumbled momentarily with the button to his khakis, and he shifted himself slightly in the seat to get comfortable. His long legs were accommodating, creating a big gap between his seat and the steering wheel. His seat actually was positioned about as far back as it could go.

My heart was pounding as I carefully grasped his zipper and pulled it down. I pulled his fly open then to expose the big bulge in his boxer shorts. He was already hard! I looked up at his face, seeing that he was staring straight ahead, holding the steering wheel with his left hand while his right was draped over my shoulder. He slid his free hand up behind my head, and firmly pushed against it, guiding me down toward his crotch. I responded by pressing my lips against his hard on, kissing it reverently. He held me there for a few moments, and I felt the pressure of his hand against the back of my head. He was grinding me into himself, pressing my nose against the fabric of his boxers. He wasn't being overly aggressive really, just a little forceful. It excited me, and I kissed him repeatedly, wanting desperately to be able to reach right into the fabric and free his throbbing cock.

Finally, he allowed me this privilege when he loosened his grip on my head, and I was able to

pull away from him slightly. I found the slit in his boxers and reached into the fly to grab a hold of his hard cock. I had to push the cotton material apart, moving the opening toward the big bulbous head of his prick. When I finally made it there, his cock slipped through the hole and popped up to face me. I then pulled his fly down around each side of his shaft, tucking it under his ball sac, and his throbbing erection stood upright, pointing directly at my face.

I opened my mouth as I felt the grip of his hand on my head again. He moved me closer and I yielded to his guidance. In a very smooth movement, he then pushed me down all the way onto him, holding me there as he enjoyed the warmth of my mouth. I then began to suck. I pressed my tongue against his shaft and sucked with an intense passion, savoring the smell and taste of him. He was so very hard in my mouth, his cock head pressing into the back of my throat. He moaned a little, obviously enjoying the sensation.

I continued with my sucking for what seemed to be a very long time, not even really sliding up and down on him at all. I just kept him buried deep in my mouth and sucked. All of the stimulation to his shaft was coming from the work of my tongue, and I tightened the vacuum pressure of my mouth around him, carefully

avoiding any contact with my teeth. Finally, after what must have been at least twenty minutes, I started to notice how sore my jaw was getting. The kneeling also was beginning to feel very uncomfortable. I didn't stop though, I willed myself to continue, not wanting to even pull off of him at all until I'd satisfied him completely.

Ultimately, I did just that, for I suddenly felt him reach down to grab my head once more and heard the sound of his moaning. He was so close, I knew. Then I felt the throb of his cock in my mouth and the firing of his cumload into his cock shaft. Then he released, blasting a thick load directly into my mouth, right down my throat. I gulped quickly, tasting nothing at first, but then finally recognizing the familiar bittersweet flavor of his semen. I continued to suck him until I felt his grip on my head loosen. I'd completely drained him, for sure.

When I pulled away, I realized how breathless I had become, and I gasped, inhaling deeply. Then I looked up at him, smiling as I did so. He glanced down, returning the expression. Then I tucked his cock back into his boxers and refastened his khakis. I slid back over into my own seat then and righted myself into the passenger position.

"Oh fuck!" he said. "That was so hot!"

I smiled as I looked down at my lap, noticing I'd made a bit of mess in my own shorts. "Gonna

have to stop at the next rest area, I think. Gotta change my pants."

He laughed then. "We're goin to Cedar Point, by the way. Ever been there?"

"No! But I've always wanted to go. Cool!"

That was the beginning of an unforgettable weekend together.

It was almost ten o'clock that night when we arrived in Sandusky. The sun was finally setting, and it was a perfect, cloudless, summer night. The temperature was balmy, perfect weather for shorts, which Aaron and I both were now wearing. We'd changed together at the rest area along the way. Aaron pulled the car into the circular drive in front of the Best Western hotel. He grabbed our luggage from the trunk and we walked in together to the lobby desk.

After getting our key, Aaron went out to park the car while I waited with the luggage. I looked around the room while I waited, noticing the details. There was a sign advertising free continental breakfast every morning. The décor of the room was very tropical, displaying miniature palm trees and a mural depicting a beach scene on the wall behind me. At the desk was a couple checking in. They were both guys, about my age, I'd have guessed. I wondered for a moment if maybe they were a couple in the same sense that

Aaron and I were, but I didn't think much more of it when I saw him walk back through the door.

"Okay, gotta go to the third floor," said Aaron, and he scooped up one of our suitcases.

I carried the other and stepped in tow behind him as we headed toward the elevator. Just as the door was closing, an arm reached in, stopping it suddenly.

"Sorry!" said one of the guys that I'd noticed at the desk. "Can we share?"

"Sure," said Aaron. "Goin' up?"

I realized what a silly question this was for we were on the ground floor, and apparently

Aaron did, too, for he then added with a laugh, "Where else would ya be goin'?"

"Actually, we're goin' crazy," said our new acquaintance. He stepped into the elevator and looked over at the panel of buttons, "We're goin to three, same as you."

I smiled up at him as he said this, but when I saw him return my gaze, I instantly looked away. I guess it was just force of habit. He was really handsome, too. In fact, I'd probably classify him as being downright hot. He had very dark eyes and hair, a short spiky sort of style similar to Aaron's. He wasn't quite as tall as Aaron was, but he was a little bit beefier. His companion was a blond, about his same height.

As we waited for the elevator to stop, the blond

spoke. "Where you guys from? We're from Grand Rapids, Michigan."

"Saginaw here," answered Aaron. "I'm Aaron and this is Mark."

They both nodded at us. "I'm Brendan and this is Cody," said the dark-haired one. "I hear the weather is gonna be so perfect tomorrow. We're so psyched about it...like eighty degrees."

Aaron looked over at me. "We ought to go to the water park, Soak City."

"We're goin' there on Sunday," interjected Cody. "We're gonna do the main park tomorrow. It's supposed to be nice both days."

"Cool," said Aaron. "That's probably what we'll do, too."

"God, am I starving," said Brendan. "We're gonna order pizza."

"That sounds so good!" replied Aaron. "We haven't eaten since like five o'clock, right when we were leaving Saginaw."

"Wanna get pizza together?" suggested Cody.

Aaron looked over at me and then back to the couple. "Sure. What room you guys in?"

"Three seventeen," they answered together.

"Cool, we're in three nineteen. All right, we'll get our stuff put in our room and then come over to yours and order."

"Cool. Sounds like a plan."

The elevator door opened and we picked up

our luggage, exiting in single file. I was last to step out into the hall, which actually offered me a very nice view. I was able to closely check out Brendan and Cody's posteriors. *Not bad*, I thought to myself.

As soon as Aaron and I were in our room alone together, he pushed the door closed behind him, dropped the suitcase he was carrying and stepped over to me. He then grabbed my shoulders, spinning me around to face him. I dropped the suitcase that was in my hand and wrapped my hands around his waist. He stepped closer to me, forcing me to back up against the wall. Then he leaned in and kissed me so passionately. Softly I moaned as I felt his body press against my own. His tongue slid past my lips and into my mouth as our bodies seemed to become one with each other.

"Ya know, I think I'm hungrier for you than I am for the pizza," he whispered.

As I stared up into his eyes, a wave of emotion suddenly washed over me. "Don't you realize you're just too damned good to be true? How can this even be happening? How can I be here with you now, on a weekend getaway? How is it possible for you to ever even want me?"

"How's it possible for me not to want you?" he countered my question. "You're so cute, sweet and kind. You're funny, and you give great head."

"Ohh, okay, now I get it," I quipped. "It all

makes sense now. You just love me cuz I give a terrific blowjob."

"Nah, that's just reason number two hundred forty seven."

"What are the other two hundred forty six?" I asked with mock seriousness.

"Ah, how do I love thee?" he mused. "Let me count the ways."

I laughed at him, once again embracing him, burying my face against his chest. "Oh, Aaron, you smell so good. I think you're right about the pizza. I'd rather just eat you."

"Should we just blow those guys off and blow each other instead?"

"Tempting..." I said, "But I think that'd be kinda rude."

"Yeah, you're right," he admitted. "But after we eat...you're gonna be my dessert."

"Would you like whipped cream with that?" I offered.

"Yeah, and a big red cherry."

"Ya already got that once...my cherry, that is."

He then dug his fingers playfully into my sides, and I jerked instantly, bursting into a small gale of laughter. He smiled at me somewhat evilly as I squirmed in an attempt to pull away from him.

"God, I love you," he said. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too, Aaron—with my whole heart."

Chapter Twelve

As we stepped through the door of room three-seventeen, I noticed immediately that there was only one double bed. Cody had been sitting on the edge of it and had stretched himself out, lying flat on the mattress and staring up at the ceiling.

He pushed himself up with his elbows as he greeted us. "What took ya so long?"

"Got a little distracted," said Aaron very matter-of-fact.

"Ohh," said Brendan, who reached behind us to close the door. "What do ya like on your pizza?"

"I'm not fussy," said Aaron. "What about you, Mark?"

I smiled and shrugged my shoulders. "Anything I don't like, I can just pick off."

"You like ham and pineapple?" asked Cody.

"Sure," said Aaron.

I nodded my assent as well.

"Okay, let's get a ham and pineapple and a

plain pepperoni," said Brendan as he headed for the phone. He picked up an advertisement that had been placed on the bedside stand that bore the number for Domino's Pizza.

After the pizza had been ordered, I was a little surprised when Aaron made reference to the topic, which was foremost on my mind.

"See they put you in a single room. Gotta share the same bed, huh?"

Cody got a somewhat bewildered look on his face as he glanced over to Brendan.

"Yep," said Brendan, "but we wanted it that way."

Aaron smiled up at him. "We did, too."

"So how long you two been together?" asked Brendan. "You're boyfriends, right?"

Aaron reached out and grabbed my hand, pulling me into him. "Just a few weeks actually. Mark lives in the apartment right above me. I'm his landlord."

"How convenient!" Cody piped up. "Do you give him a good deal on his rent?"

Aaron laughed. "He gets a *cut* rate, if ya know what I mean."

"Oh brother!" I said, rolling my eyes as the couple laughed at us.

"Cody and I met at the bar in Grand Rapids...Diversions. Do you guys ever get over there?"

"Nope," said Aaron. "I've never been in a bar like that. Up until I met Mark, I had a girlfriend."

"You dawg!" said Cody to me. "You converted him!"

"Yeah." I laughed. "I'm so irresistible that I can even turn a straight guy gay."

"That you are!" agreed Aaron. "I'm living proof."

"Well we gotta take you guys to a bar this weekend then," said Brendan, "Since you've never been to one."

"Cool, that'll be fun," said Aaron. "How long did they say 'til the Pizza is here?"

"Half hour," answered Brendan.

Aaron sat down in the chair that was positioned in the corner and I moved over to him, sitting on his lap. Cody and Brendan both reclined on the bed. Brendan had his hand draped over Cody's hip and was laying behind him. They both looked up at us as we conversed. It was interesting to me to actually meet another couple, and I was so pleased that they were our age. What were the odds that we'd have ended up in rooms right next to one another like this? Come to find out, they had been dating one another for about a year and Brendan had just graduated from Grand Valley State. He was a pharmacist and had recently completed an internship with CVS Drugstore.

Cody was still in school and was in his last year

of a teaching program. He was going to be a high school science teacher. Cody lived on campus, of course, and Brendan had recently rented an apartment in Wyoming, which is a suburb of Grand Rapids. They were planning to eventually move in together.

"We practically live together now," confessed Cody. "I spend more time at Brendan's house than I do on campus."

Before long, Aaron was handing the couple his business card and advising them on loan options were they to ever consider purchasing a home. It was rather interesting to see him slip into this business mode, and I actually felt a little embarrassed to be the one member of the foursome who had such a menial job. Aaron described me as a *professional journalist*, but I quickly clarified that I only wrote obituaries.

"For now anyway," Aaron added.

The four of us had such a great time that evening that we decided to hook up again in the morning. Aaron and I stayed in their room until very late that night, and we watched a pay-per-view movie together. We had moved over to share the bed with the other couple, and I curled up in Aaron's lap as he leaned back against the headboard of the bed. Brendan and Cody assumed a similar position beside us. I felt so relaxed and comfortable lying against him, cradled in his

embrace. He lovingly wrapped his arms around me, making me feel so secure and so very protected and loved.

When we got back to our own room finally, Aaron pulled me onto himself and kissed me so passionately. He had backed me up against the bed, and with his arms around me, he gently pushed me backward so that I was beneath him. He leaned over me, continuing to kiss me, tenderly caressing my body with his hands. I felt his fingertips slide under the tail of my shirt and I spasmodically shivered at his touch. Slowly his hands slid up my torso, and he found my nipples. I giggled as he playfully tweaked them, realizing how incredibly sensitive they were.

Aaron's lips moved down my face, under my chin. He kissed me, burrowing into the erotically sensitive region of my neck. I moaned as he kissed me, feeling the razor stubble on his face against my own skin. I squirmed beneath him, but this did not deter him. He continued methodically, moving down my body slowly with his lips. He pulled away briefly but only long enough to peel my shirt over my head. Instantly he was back on top of me, and I felt the weight of his body pressing against my own. I was so aroused—so rock hard with excitement and anticipation. Very slowly and almost worshipfully, he kissed his way down my body. The feel of his lips against my

smooth bare chest was so amazingly stimulating. My nipples were erect and more sensitive than I'd ever experienced as he encircled them with his tongue. I gasped as he did so and frantically groped the bed sheets beneath me in order to keep from squirming.

Aaron looked up at me lovingly, as he slid himself further down my body. He now was on his knees at the side of the bed, and he was tugging at the waistband of my shorts. I thrust my hips upward, allowing him to quickly jerk the shorts down over my thighs. He then pressed his lips adoringly into the bulge that was tenting my boxer briefs.

"No," I whispered. "Please! Please let me suck you..."

Aaron looked up at me again, this time shaking his head. "No way. It's my turn."

"But, I thought—"

"I said, *It's my turn*," he stated firmly. "Do you think that just because I'm usually dominant that I don't wanna suck your cock? I love you, remember?"

I smiled down at him, now more aroused than ever. I reached down, grabbed the waistband of my briefs, removed them for him and acknowledged that I gladly stood corrected. Then his mouth surrounded me, the hot liquid sensation of his tongue sliding against my throbbing cock. It

was heaven!

I awoke the following morning cradled in Aaron's arms. As I shifted my body within his embrace in order to snuggle with him, he stirred a little. I remembered the way he had made such beautiful love to me the night before. Looking at his sleeping face, I smiled to myself. He was so adorable, the way he lay there so peacefully. Gingerly, I reached up with my fingers and touched his cheek, tracing his jaw line ever so carefully. Truly, he was magnificent.

The passion stirred within me as I savored the warmth of his body against my own. I felt my own arousal and began to slide myself down his torso, slowly folding back the covers that were blanketing him. As my lips found his nipples, I heard him lowly moan. I was not certain if he were awake or still dozing. Regardless, I continued.

I was so very hard as I continued to work my way down his toned body. He was wearing only a pair of boxers. Sliding my hand tentatively into the flap of his fly, I found his already-semi-hard cock. I touched it very plaintively. I smiled as I felt it twitch against my fingers. Looking up at his face, I realized that he was in fact still asleep, or at least he was pretending to be.

Very quietly, I then whispered to him, "Thank you for last night. Thank you for this weekend. I

love you so very much.” I then immediately dove under the covers to press my lips against the bulge I had been fingering. I gently tugged his hard-on out through the opening of his fly and kissed it so reverently. I didn’t wait more than a couple of seconds, before taking him into my mouth.

He again moaned, and spread his legs slightly to adjust for his comfort. My heart pounded within my chest as I felt his cock growing harder in my mouth. I began to suck on it as if it were a candy sucker or a baby’s pacifier. He smelled and tasted so wonderfully clean and masculine, and I took in the aroma, intoxicated by it.

Then I went to work. Starting out gradually I began to bob on his shaft, taking him entirely in my mouth with each down-thrust. I relaxed my throat and focused upon suppressing my gag reflex. I wanted him to feel the tightness of my throat canal around his big prick. As I continued, I soon realized that he definitely was no longer asleep. He had reached down to grab a hold of my head.

That was when he took over. He began to pump me up and down on himself, assuming absolute control. It was like when we were in the car, except even better. This time he had two hands to use! Though he was very serious about reaching climax, and he wasted no time.

Within five minutes, he hoarsely announced,

"It's breakfast time."

He drained himself inside me. What a perfect beginning for our day together.

About an hour later, we met Brendan and Cody in the guest lobby for continental breakfast.

Aaron winked at me as he said, "Two breakfasts for you today. That's a lot of protein."

At around ten-thirty, our foursome approached the main entry gate at Cedar Point. Once inside, our first stop was, of course, The Demon Drop. Being there early in the morning, there was not yet a long line, but I watched somewhat fearfully as the group ahead of us boarded. First, they were strapped into their seats and then slowly raised two hundred feet into the air. Then they were suspended briefly and instantly dropped. It seemed to me that they were free falling, and their screams seemed to confirm this observation. Miraculously, though, their cage was caught at the bottom and the white-faced teenagers exited the ride gasping and laughing.

"Oh my God!" I said to Cody. "I don't think I can do this!"

He laughed and grabbed a hold of my elbow. "Don't be a pussy," he snickered. Then he pushed me toward the platform.

Aaron got on first and I followed him, selecting the seat right next to him. As the contraption began to kick into gear, I could hear the

mechanical sound of the chain behind my head. We were being raised to our vantage point...only to then be suddenly dropped! Probably to our deaths! I clutched Aaron's hand frantically and looked over to him. He just grinned at me. I made it though amazingly. Cody and Brendan were laughing, mostly at me and at my reaction to the sudden fall.

"Let's go stuff ourselves with hotdogs and then find the biggest roller coaster in the park!" suggested Brendan.

"Are you nuts?" I demanded.

Seriously, I was game for anything though, just so long as I was by Aaron's side. It was so awesome to see this childlike side of him. Most of the time he was a serious-minded person. He had accomplished so very much at such a young age, that I think he really had not taken the time to enjoy these kinds of simple pleasures. He and I were very affectionate with one another throughout the day. We seemed to forget that ninety percent of the people around us were heterosexual. All that mattered was that he and I were together.

At one point, our foursome got separated and Aaron dragged me away to one of those photo booths. We climbed inside together and I sat on his lap. I leaned in and kissed him before the flash was activated. When we stepped out of the booth,

a straight couple was waiting. They looked down and saw our photos in the dispensing chute. Previously I may have been a bit embarrassed, but I simply looked up and smiled. "I love 'em!" I proclaimed as I snatched up the strip of four poses. We then headed back to find Brendan and Cody.

That day we went on to ride the Millennium Force, the Mantis, the Witches Wheel, the Gemini and a host of other roller coasters and scary rides. I did not think it was possible to have so much fun in one day! It was so awesome to forget about the situation with Robin and to forget about my impending visit to my parent's house. I was in a different world—one that consisted only of Aaron and me.

Again, that evening, Aaron and I made passionate love in our hotel room. We first went down and enjoyed the pool and Jacuzzi together. Then he led me back to our room and lay me out on the bed, kissing my body all over. I was so receptive of his affection and begged him to enter me. He did so with eagerness and filled me so completely. Nothing could have made the weekend better, and nothing could ruin it. Or so I thought.

When I heard the phone ringing early Sunday morning, I assumed it was Brendan or Cody calling to ask us when to meet for the Water Park.

I realized, though, that it was not our room phone that was ringing, but Aaron's cell.

He groggily reached over to his bedside stand and groped for the phone.

"You don't have to answer," I suggested, but my comment did not deter him.

"Yeah?" he said into the phone.

As I looked over to him, I saw him shift his body into an upright position. He must have been surprised by whoever it was on the line.

"Hi, Robin," he said.

I waited as I watched and listened to him, noticing the concerned expression on his face. "What is it?" I whispered.

He listened to her, seeming not to even notice me beside him. "Well," he said, hesitating and obviously shocked by something she had said to him. "I'm coming home today. I will meet you in Saginaw." When he clicked off his phone, he stared blankly ahead, as if in a state of total shock.

"What is wrong?" I repeated. "What did she say?"

Very quietly, he then responded, without even looking at me. "Robin is pregnant."

Uh-oh.

Chapter Thirteen

There was a big lump in my throat as we rode home from Cedar Point. I sat there in the front seat next to Aaron as he drove silently, afraid to say anything to him. I was afraid that anything I might express to him would only make matters worse. Somehow, I needed to get inside his head and find out what exactly he was thinking. Did the prospects of paternity have any effect upon his feelings for me? Was he still willing to share his life with me, or would he go back to Robin for the sake of their child?

When we left the hotel, I did not even get a chance to say goodbye to Cody and Brendan. Being that we left abruptly and a day early, we never got to go to the bar with them, and we skipped the water park entirely. To make matters worse, the weather was gloomy and overcast on the ride home, the exact opposite of the sunny forecast. It seemed befitting, though, for the mood within the car was very somber. We just drove on

in silence, not even communicating non-verbally.

At one point Aaron finally reached over and rested his hand on my knee. The gesture was so touching to me, an acknowledgement that he was thinking of me in spite of the weight of his own problems. He certainly must also be thinking of Robin, and to be honest, my heart was going out to her. How devastating it must be for her to discover that she is pregnant after just learning that her boyfriend doesn't love her and that he is gay!

This sudden turn of events seemed so very surreal to me. Just hours ago life was perfect. Aaron was the man of my dreams and the fulfillment of my every fantasy. I could not believe that he was with me, telling me he loved me and wanting to openly share his life with me. Now this single revelation could change everything. Of course he must be torn, wanting to do the right thing but also wanting to follow his heart.

Maybe he was confused right now. Possibly, he was thinking that his feelings for me could just be some sort of a phase. Ultimately, he might end up writing off the entire encounter with me as being an experience of exploration. If it were true, that most people are not entirely gay or entirely heterosexual but somewhere in the middle of this continuum, then maybe he would make a conscious decision to be with a woman instead of

me. Certainly, it would be easier for him. He'd find a great deal more acceptance from society and from his family. He would be able to raise a child in a normal, healthy, heterosexual environment with two loving parents—a mom and a dad. But if he chose to be with me, what was it going to do to this poor child? How would the kid ever understand that its father was with another man instead of its mother?

I turned away from Aaron and stared out the window, watching the line of trees fly by as we cruised down the Interstate. A tear slid silently down my cheek as I realized what I must do. I could not allow Aaron to go through this sort of angst. I could not permit him to be tortured the way that he obviously was. I would make the decision easy for him. I had to because I loved him too much to see him hurt so badly.

"Are you all right," Aaron finally spoke to me and his voice was startling as it ripped through the silence.

I flinched a little in reaction. "Yeah, sure. Don't worry about me. I'm just concerned about you—about you and Robin both."

He sighed heavily and gently squeezed my leg upon which his hand was still resting. "Don't worry. We don't really even know anything for sure yet. I mean, we don't know any details about anything, or even if it is really true."

"So you think she might be lying to you?" I asked, somewhat shocked by even the thought of it. "I can't even imagine Robin lying about something like that!"

"No. No, that's not what I'm sayin'," Aaron clarified. "I just mean what if she's mistaken? What if it's not even my kid? What if it is just some twisted thing she talked herself into believing in an attempt to get me back?"

"Aaron—" This time I was the one who sighed. "I don't think that she's lying to you, and I don't think that she ever cheated on you or would ever tell you something like this unless she were a hundred percent sure it was true. She just never would do that, no matter how bad she wanted you."

He pulled his hand off me then and suddenly shot back, "Are you tryin' to fuckin' help me or make me feel worse?" He reached up and ran his hand through his hair as he distractedly looked out the driver's side window.

"I'm sorry, Aaron." I suddenly felt like such an ass. "No, I didn't mean to make it worse. The timing of this whole thing just really sucks, ya know. It really messed up our weekend."

"Yeah, well it could be somethin' that messes up a helluva lot more than just my weekend. I just figured out I was gay, and now I find out I'm gonna have a kid. It's just—unreal."

"Aaron," I said, this time placing my hand on his leg. "You're gonna be a great dad. Trust me! You're so protective, so intelligent, so everything that a dad should be. You shouldn't even worry about that. This doesn't have to be bad news, ya know. Plus, when we get back and you talk to Robin, the last thing you wanna do is to make her think that you are not supportive of her. If you think it is a hard thing for you to deal with, imagine how she must be feeling."

He nodded. "Yeah, I know. But ya know what I keep thinking about?" He glanced over quickly at me.

I shook my head in response.

"I keep thinking, *What kid wants to find out his dad is a fag?*"

"You're not a fag!" I shot back immediately. "I thought we settled that a long time ago. You're anything but a fag. You're a jock for Chrissakes. Plus why are you assuming this kid is gonna be a boy? And who's to say that the kid might not be gay him or herself?"

"Still, my point is that I don't see how I can be a good dad and be gay. It's fucked up!"

I had to look away at this point, returning my gaze to the passenger window. What Aaron was saying was so true. It was exactly what I was afraid would happen. He knew in his heart that he could not be in love with me and raise his child at

the same time. Being gay and being a parent just didn't really go together.

"Maybe she'll have an abortion," Aaron said, using a tone that sounded almost hopeful. "Maybe she won't wanna continue the pregnancy at all."

"Is that what you want?" I asked, my voice quivering at this point.

He shook his head as he stared straight ahead. "No, I don't want that. I don't think I even believe in abortion, but I just..." He sighed again. "I just want this to be a fuckin' dream. I wanna wake up all of a sudden and realize we still are at the hotel and we are lyin' in bed together with no worries."

"I want that, too, Aaron," I agreed with him, "but it's not gonna happen."

Neither of us could think of much else to say the rest of the trip home. For part of the way, I reclined my seat and closed my eyes, forcing myself to hold back the tears that were wanting to erupt. I was crying inside, not for the fact that Aaron was going to be a father, but instead for the love that we had for one another. It would not be enough to solve this particular problem. It would not sustain us through this unexpected, life-altering revelation.

It was the cruelest of ironies really, for it was due to my intense love for him that I knew I had to let him go. I knew that he really only wanted a normal life. He wanted paternity and a family. He

wanted to give his parents grandchildren and make them proud. He wanted to be accepted as an equal by his peers and to be able to set a good example for his kids. My involvement in his life would ruin all of that.

I was glad that when Aaron dropped me off at the apartment that he did not attempt to kiss me goodbye. It would have been too much to deal with. I did not want any goodbye kisses or tortured, clingy embraces. I just wanted him to go. He had to meet with Robin at some location of which I was not made aware. As I climbed up the stairway to my apartment, I thought about the pictures we had taken together the day before in the tiny booth at Cedar Point. I dropped my bag inside the door and pulled out my wallet to find the snapshot. There we were, embracing one another and smiling.

I leaned against the wall behind me and continued to stare at the happy couple. Tears finally welled in my eyes and I slid down the wall slowly, releasing the sob that was lodged in my throat for the past three hours.

When I had first laid eyes upon Aaron, he seemed to be larger than life to me, and any thoughts that I had about developing a relationship of any sort between the two of us were pure fantasy. For weeks I had secretly worshipped him, entertained daydreams that

were way beyond the scope of reality. I'd hoped for only a single opportunity to serve him—a chance to translate my imagination into even a solitary real-life expression. What ended up happening was so much more though. Instead of merely having a rendezvous, our involvement with one another had developed into a full-blown love affair.

There had been a part of me that was afraid to believe that any of it was actually true. How could a guy like me ever hope to capture the attention of a self-confident, successful and nearly perfect guy like Aaron? I was so sure that one day he'd give me the brush off and go back to his girlfriend. Why would Aaron give up the security of all he'd ever known just to be in a relationship with me? He vowed that he loved me, and my heart soared. I wanted to believe that this love was something so powerful that everything else was merely a distraction. Recent events, however, brought me face-to-face with the reality that I'd been trying to ignore. He was too good for me.

When I had thought that my relationship with Aaron was too good to be true, I was right. Something inside of me just knew that if he and I had been meant to be together, this pregnancy never would have happened. In some sort of unexplainable way, it was a type of divine intervention. It was a sign that the bond that

Aaron and I shared was not something that was supposed to endure.

That evening as I lay in my apartment alone, feeling isolated and empty, I turned my phone off and did not even use the television or computer. I just lay there, staring up at the ceiling tiles and replaying flashes from my memory. I saw the two of us making love for the first time. I remembered him sneaking into my room and crawling in bed with me. I remembered riding the roller coasters at Cedar Point, the blowjob on the freeway, the chili cheese dogs. Mostly I remembered the security of his embrace. I could smell him, literally tasting his scent. I had never known that I could feel that safe, not until I had found myself wrapped up in his arms.

It occurred to me then, what Robin must have felt when Aaron had broken things off with her. She must have spent many lonely hours replaying memories of her own. The two of them had been a couple far longer than I had been in the picture. Even now, she must be going through a torturous hell of her own, not knowing the direction of her future. She must be contemplating her options, whether or not to raise a child on her own. The sooner I could alleviate her of this terrifying uncertainty, the better. I had to remove myself altogether so that Aaron would do the right thing.

It was such a hard pill to swallow, really. I

knew that it was what had to be done though. I knew that I had to make this sacrifice, not because I was trying to be some sort of martyr, but because it was the right thing to do. It was the only thing to do. Aaron, Robin, and that baby were a family. I could not interfere with that. I could not allow him to be placed in a position where he was going to have to make a choice. Even if I did decide to fight for him now, I would not want to win under these circumstances.

How would I do it though? Surely if I just immediately cut all ties with him, he would realize that I was trying to be a hero and would stop me dead in my tracks. He would make it clear to me that it was not my decision to make. He was the one who had to determine what was right or wrong for himself. Yet, I did have the right to make decisions for me, and if I convinced him somehow that I was no longer interested in being a part of this triangle, then he'd have to respect my wishes.

That is what I would do. I would just tell him that it was far too much for me. I can't take the drama of it. I cannot handle sharing him with anyone else, especially not his own child. Who could possibly compete with a situation like that? His child would be his priority and I would always take a back seat. I had to convince him that this was not a scenario that interested me. I want a

man whom I do not have to share.

As I thought upon these things, I began to formulate a speech in my head. I was rehearsing what I knew I had to say to him. The tears flowed freely as I phrased and re-phrased each sentence. "I'm glad we had some fun together, but it just isn't cool. You aren't what I want. Just let me out of my lease and then maybe we will be able to be friends of some sort...maybe in the future. Right now, though, I just want my freedom."

It was after midnight when I finally dozed off. I did not even hear Aaron's key in the door when he let himself into my apartment. As he crawled into bed with me and wrapped his arms around me, I was no longer thinking about my speech I'd just finished memorizing. All I could do was to bury my face into his chest and feel his heartbeat. I clung to him there until morning, when I got up to face another day.

The sound of the shower must have awakened me that next morning. Aaron was already up and getting ready for work. I groggily made my way to the kitchen to start a pot of coffee. As I started to gain my bearings and to remember the night before, I suddenly realized that I had probably made a very big mistake. I never should have stayed in bed with Aaron. I should have asked him to leave, but instead I snuggled up to him. I

embraced him when I should have pushed him away. How was I now going to stick to my self-sacrificial plan to dump him?

He was wearing only a towel when he approached me from behind. Lost in my thoughts, I hadn't even heard him enter the kitchen. As I spun around and looked up at him, my heart skipped a beat. It excited me so much to see him naked like this. "Um...mornin', I didn't even hear you get outta bed."

"I was tryin to be quiet. I didn't wanna wake you."

"I gotta go to work anyway, so it's a good thing I did wake up. How did it go last night?"

He sighed as he stepped toward me. "You're so cute with your hair mussed up like that."

"Bed head," I explained, "and I would hardly call it *cute*. You didn't answer my question."

"She's gonna go back to Grand Rapids on Thursday, and I'm goin with her."

"Oh, really? Are you two gonna get back together? I mean, I understand...I was gonna talk to you about—"

"Fuck no, we're not getting back together. Don't be crazy! I'm with you now. How could you even ask such a thing?"

This time I sighed. "Well, I was thinking, maybe it just isn't gonna work out. Maybe...um...maybe we jumped into this way too

quickly."

"Mark, I'm only going to Grand Rapids with Robin so that she can get an abortion."

His statement stunned me. "I thought you didn't believe in that," I started to protest.

"It's not my decision. It's what she wants. She is the one who has to carry the baby. It's her body, and it's her choice."

"You didn't tell her how you felt, did you? You never even told her you wanted her to have the baby."

"I never said I wanted her to have the baby. All I said was that I wasn't even sure I believed in abortion. But it doesn't matter. Like I said, it's her decision to make, not mine. Still, I'm gonna go with her to support her. That's the least I can do."

"Of course, of course you should go with her. But, Aaron, I think if you want her to have the baby you should tell her so."

He stood there, towering over me with droplets of water glistening in his short hair. His smooth, chiseled chest was almost breathtaking to me. His square shoulders framed his masculine body in such a way that I felt so very weak and small in comparison to him. The words that came from his mouth, though, betrayed this apparent aura of confidence.

"Mark, it's for the best," he said meekly. "By this weekend, it will all be over and then you and I

can just get on with our lives — together.”

“No!” I responded, suddenly finding courage from somewhere inside of me. “That is such bullshit! I don’t want it this way. It’s like you’re making this all my fault.”

“What?” he asked, rather incredulously. “What the fuck does that mean? I’m not making this about you at all.”

“Yes you are. You’re saying that you’re just gonna let her go ahead and have the abortion so that it’ll be easier for you to be with me. Well I can’t live with that. No way! Ya know, I don’t think this is working out, Aaron. I’m not sure that we didn’t just rush into everything way too fast to begin with.”

“We are not having this conversation,” he retorted. “I can’t deal with it right now.” He spun around to turn away from me.

I shouted, “Aaron, I want out of the lease! I want out!”

He stopped in his tracks and turned back toward me again. “Mark, I can’t believe you,” he said calmly. “You are so damned selfish. Ya know the only person who is even making any of this about you is *you*. Why don’t you just grow up, step back and let me deal the situation, and then we can get back to dealing with us.”

I stared at him in shock and disbelief. He honestly believed the words he was saying to me.

He truly thought I was being selfish about the situation. He was buying into the notion that I was just being an immature, self-serving little brat. But wasn't that what I had wanted? Hadn't I wanted him to get a little angry and defensive so that he'd do the right thing? It was for his own good, for his own future. I knew that if he just went to Robin and told her how he really felt about the pregnancy, she would never abort. Then they could have this child together and Aaron would have a chance at genuine happiness.

Still it hurt to hear him say the words. I was biting my lip as I looked up at him, trying so hard not to lose my composure. "Call it whatever you want, Aaron—immaturity, selfishness—but I'm just sick of Robin always coming between us. I'm sick of sharing you with her, and now that there is possibly gonna be another person to factor into the equation, I'm positive that it's just not what I'm even interested in."

"You fuckin' prick! So you're sayin that now, after I was willing to give up my whole lifestyle, risk my friendships and family and possibly even my job so that I could come out of the fuckin' closet, you're just gonna dump me? Just like that, huh? And it's all because you can't be the center of attention! Ya know all this bullshit about you bein submissive, it's just a goddamned act! You aren't submissive any more than I am. You're just playin'

mind games. Well whatever, dude! I can't deal with this right now! I've got a closing to be to in forty-five minutes. If you want out of the lease, pack your shit and go." He then turned away and headed back toward the bedroom.

I just stood there in stunned silence, feeling my face reddening.

Chapter Fourteen

Work was so difficult for me that day. I kept replaying the images of my argument with Aaron inside my mind. It was the only disagreement we had ever had with one another, and it was going to remain as such for I could not allow a reconciliation to occur. I knew that after Aaron's temper subsided, he would be trying to rectify the situation. I bet he'd even try calling me today to apologize. He would tell me that he understood my feelings, and he'd assure me that I did not need to worry. He'd remind me that nothing could ever come between us, and that even being a father would not make him love me any less.

I smiled to myself as I thought of the kind words he was sure to say to me. He would want me to know that his heart was big enough to love his partner and his child at the same time. He'd tell me how talented he was at multi-tasking. He'd brag about himself, and of course, I would not be

able to argue. I worshipped him. All of it was true.

Yet, I knew I could never take his call when he did attempt to contact me. I could never allow him to sacrifice his life for me in that way. Within his heart of hearts, he wanted a family. I would only ruin this dream for him. I had to just disappear.

When lunchtime rolled around, I turned on my cell phone and dialed my voice mailbox. Sure enough, there was indeed a message from him. His words were almost verbatim what I had imagined them to be.

“Mark, please forgive me. I’m so sorry. I never should have yelled at you that way. I do understand how you feel, but listen—you don’t have to worry. I swear to you, it’s gonna be all right. I’ll do what you said. I’ll tell Robin the truth about how I feel, and then we will just work it out. We’ll find a way to be together and be a family. I can be a dad and your partner at the same time. Thousands of people do it! And you know how talented I am. I can do anything I put my mind to. I can be the best damned father in the world and the best lover to you...both at the same time! Let’s just forget about this morning. I will go talk to Robin tonight, and then when I’m done I’ll come over and we can have dinner together. It will be a celebration, all right? We can celebrate the fact that I’m gonna have a kid, or if Robin decides she still wants the abortion we can celebrate that we made

it through our first crisis together. Call me back, though. Leave a message on my voicemail telling me everything's cool, and I'll see ya tonight. I love you so much! Bye."

Tears were running down my cheeks when I set the phone down on my desk. I did not call Aaron's voicemail though, as he'd instructed. Instead, I picked my phone back up and dialed Joyce's number. "Hey, Joyce, this is Mark. Can you meet me for lunch?"

"Aaron's letting me out of the lease," I said to Joyce as we sat across from one another in a booth at Tim Horton's. "And I'm movin back home, to my parents'."

"What?" gasped Joyce? "Why on earth? What's happened, Mark? What's goin on?"

I stared up at her, my eyes misting over with tears. "A lot of shit. It's so terrible, Joyce. I just gotta get away. I don't think I can even make it through the end of the week at work..."

"What, sweetie? What happened?" She reached over and placed her hand on top of mine. "Tell me, kiddo."

"Well, ya know that guy I told you about?"

"He broke up with you, didn't he? That bastard."

I shook my head. "No, no it's not like that. I actually broke up with him. But...um...I had to."

She looked puzzled. "But why?"

"Well, he had a girlfriend."

"That prick. Honey, you're better off without him!"

"No, I mean he *had* a girlfriend. He ended it with her, but then just this week he found out she's pregnant."

"Oh my God! So he decided to go back to her?"

"Not exactly. I sorta decided that for him. I mean, I know he wants to be a father. I know it's what is best for everyone, but it just hurts so badly."

"Mark, you can't decide something like that for someone else. If he broke up with her to be with you, then he must be gay. Going back to his girlfriend just because she's pregnant is not gonna change who he is. You oughta' know that."

"But I don't really think he's entirely gay. I think maybe he's bi."

"Who is he? Give me his name, Mark. I'll talk to him."

I shook my head vehemently. "No, it's already decided. It's best if you don't know who he is. I just...um...needed someone to talk to."

"So you're gonna give up your job and your apartment and everything, and just move back to wherever it is you came from. Petoskey, is it? Mark, just because things didn't work out with this guy, it doesn't mean you gotta give up your

whole life."

"I have to, Joyce. It would be too hard to have to see him every day and not be with him anymore."

"So it's someone you work with?"

I shook my head. "It doesn't matter who he is. It's over for us, and I'm really kinda glad you never met him."

"Well have you told Aaron yet that you're moving?"

I was a little startled by her question, but then realized she didn't know that Aaron was the very person we had been talking about. "Um, yeah. He told me he'd let me outta my lease. I don't know what to do about work. I can't just up and quit without any notice, but I can't stay here either."

"Well you can stay for awhile, can't you? At least finish out the week."

I sighed. "I wish that I could. Maybe if I had a place to stay..."

"Sweetie, you can stay at my place any time, but I don't see why you can't still stay at your apartment. Your rent's paid 'til the end of the month, isn't it?"

"Well, if I could just stay at your place for a few days, I would appreciate it so much, Joyce. If I could do that, then maybe I can explain more of it to you later. I just gotta get out of that apartment."

"Sure, Mark. Of course, you can stay with me."

I'd love it. But this whole thing just doesn't make any sense."

"Okay, well I gotta get back to work," I said, pushing my chair back. I pulled out some money and placed it on the table. "Here's for lunch. Thanks so much, Joyce. I'll come over after work."

"Okay, honey. You gonna be all right?"

I forced a smile. "Sure. See you tonight."

When I explained to my boss that I had a *family emergency* and had to resign my position at the paper, he was actually very understanding. He told me to take some time off to deal with the situation and that he would hold my position for me as long as possible. I told him how deeply I appreciated it, but stressed that I did not anticipate that I'd be able to return.

"You never know what the future holds, kid. Don't burn your bridges."

So I left it at that, and only had to work through Tuesday. This was good news for me because it meant that I only had to spend one night at Joyce's house.

I left work that Monday afternoon at about five o'clock and headed straight for my apartment. I grabbed a suitcase and filled it with some clothes and basic necessities and then sat down at my desk to write Aaron a note.

Dear Aaron,

I got your voicemail today. Sorry I didn't call you

back like you wanted, but I was very busy. I think it'd be best if we just went our separate ways. You've got a lot to deal with here with Robin and the baby, and I want to just remember the wonderful times we had together before all this came about. I hope Robin doesn't decide to get an abortion because I know both of you are gonna make wonderful parents.

I'm enclosing a check for next month's rent. I will come back sometime between now and the end of the month to get my things. Please don't try to contact me, for I am not going to be in town. I don't even work at the paper anymore, so you cannot reach me there.

You truly were my hero, and I always will cherish what we had. Thank you for making me feel so great about myself, and thank you for loving me.

Good luck to you and your new family.

Mark

When I got to Joyce's house that evening, she pressed me to tell her more about my situation. I avoided her questioning by simply telling her I really wasn't up to talking about any of it. So the two of us curled up on the sofa and watched a Jim Carey movie together. Joyce told me how sad she was that I was gonna be leaving, saying that she'd never find anyone who would replace me as her best—and only—employee. I was definitely going to miss her as well, but on the other hand, I was glad to be going back to my parents' for a while. This way I'd be there for my dad's birthday party,

and I would get a chance to see a lot of my friends from home.

I didn't know for sure what I'd do about a job. I could always go back to working at the supermarket until I landed something better. I also knew the editor for our local newspaper. With my degree and experience, he may be able to offer me something.

When I left Joyce's house the next morning, I knew I probably would never see her again. I would have to come back to Saginaw one last time to get my furniture from my apartment, but I would do it during the day when I knew Aaron would be at work. Then I was never going to return here again. I just couldn't. It would be so painful to be around Aaron when I knew that he had to move on with his life without me.

I got out of work at one that afternoon and did not go back to my apartment or to Joyce's. Instead, I headed right for the expressway. I hadn't checked my voicemail at all since I got the call from Aaron the previous day. I also had not even turned on my phone. Probably Aaron would try to leave me some messages, but if I just ignored them long enough, he'd eventually give up.

The long drive north gave me plenty of time to think. I played the car stereo, listening to a Westlife CD and crying my eyes out when they sang *No Place That Far*. It was too bad that real life

wasn't like a song. I knew that Aaron would not swim a hundred rivers or climb a thousand walls just to be with me. How could I even entertain such a ridiculous fantasy? In the end, he'd be thankful to be rid of me. All I ended up doing for him was complicating his life.

It astonished me how easily I had believed that our love for one another was the only thing that mattered. When he was *coming out* to Robin and acknowledging that he had gay feelings, I thought that honesty was the one single thing that would ultimately heal all wounds. I thought that it was the key to his genuine happiness. If he could just be the person that he truly was, then everything else would fall into place. What I did not consider, though, was that he was not the same as me. I was a fag. I would be very happy to live my entire life without children or a family. I'd be content to always be a second-class citizen. It didn't matter so much to me if other people thought less of me.

He was better than that though. He was the type of guy whom no one would ever suspect. Literally, everything about him was masculine and confident. He epitomized the American ideal. He was a red-blooded jock who liked sports and beer straight from the bottle. He got high once in awhile, threw his dirty underwear on the floor at the end of the day, and playfully slugged the arm of his jock buds when they were partying. He

invested in the stock market, was always in control of his finances and career and achieved every goal he ever set out to accomplish. I knew all of these things about him the instant that I met him.

When I first cleaned his apartment and knelt there at his toilet, I knew he was better than I was. I knew as I straightened his shoes and made his bed that it was appropriate for me to serve him, for his status in life was above me. Now it was because of this reality that I had to let him go. I had to allow him to move on without me.

But what about all the things he'd said to me? What about his experiences with Joey and his confessions to me that he always knew in his heart that he was gay? What about the fact that he'd said he never could be truly happy living his life with a woman, when he knew in his heart that he was attracted to guys?

Maybe he was going to have to make some sort of compromise. There was no reason that he could not live his life as a straight guy, raising his child together with Robin, while at the same time satisfying his sexual desires on the side. I mean, that is precisely what he'd done with me when we first met. He was still with Robin then, but he'd let me give him a blowjob. He could do that in the future as well. There would always be fags like me who worshipped him. He'd always be able to

hook up with someone when he felt the desire to dominate a guy or to be intimate with a gay dude.

I remembered how I felt when he went skinny-dipping with me that one night. Swirling around in the water after dark, it was so incredibly surreal. That one memory alone would be enough to sustain me for the rest of my life. To have experienced that feeling was something that was literally incomparable. We'd had our moment together. It was the greatest gift I had ever been given—just to be with him that way, even if only for a short time.

It was almost six o'clock when I finally arrived at my parent's home in Petoskey. My mom was so glad to see me. She had made a big meatloaf dinner for me with lumpy mashed potatoes and gravy. She knew the things that I liked. I had convinced them that things were not working out well with my job and that I just needed to come home to start over. Once I got myself a job, we could focus upon getting me into a new apartment in my hometown. Perhaps my mom knew in her heart that I needed to be close by. I hated not seeing her every day. I hated the fact that she worked so hard all of her life and then turned around to make sacrifices for me, her only child. Being near her would allow me the opportunity to give back a little. I could look after her and my dad both, as they got older. I guess that was one of

the benefits of being single your whole life. You did not have all of the familial obligations that come with a spouse and children. You can be there for your parents in ways that straight people often cannot.

Mom had worked so hard planning this big birthday party for my dad. He was turning fifty on Saturday. It was good that I'd be there to help her as well. They had a big back yard in which they'd set up canopy awnings to cover the food tables. There was going to be a country band—friends of my mom, actually. There would be tables set up for playing poker, and they'd have horseshoes and bad mitten. The spread of food was gonna be out of this world—ribs, barbecued chicken, burgers, hot dogs, a ton of salads and desserts. Mom already had started cooking some things before I even arrived. I volunteered to do the cake. Mom was gonna order one from the bakery, but since I was there she was thrilled to let me do it. I always was pretty good at cake decorating.

I thought about how close I'd been to telling them the truth about myself. I was going to bring Aaron with me this weekend and introduce him as my partner. Boy, wouldn't that have been a shocking birthday present for my dad? Things did not work out that way, though, and probably for the best. This was Dad's day and it would not

have been right to dump something like that on him when he was supposed to be celebrating. There was a part of me, though, that knew in my heart that both Mom and Dad already knew that their kid was homosexual. Really, how could they not have known? I had never had a girlfriend. I'd never done really well with all of the manly type things that my Dad wanted me to be interested in. I wasn't a hunter, didn't do too well in sports and abhorred any kind of mechanical work. I never got into fixing cars or other stuff like that. Instead I did all of this domestic stuff. I was good at cleaning, and I enjoyed working in the kitchen. I was still learning to cook, but I was great at decorating cakes and baking. I loved plays, musicals, and almost all the things that you would associate with being gay. Yeah, they were stereotypes, but still they should have been very obvious clues to my parents.

The fact that Mom and I could sit together and cry through a romantic comedy should have given her some sort of an indication that I had a very non-typical emotional side. It was atypical in the sense that it was not what you'd generally expect from a guy. This same emotionalism would really sometimes piss off my Dad. He'd get so annoyed that his kid was so damned sensitive. I think he felt it was his duty to toughen me up. Believe me, I tried so hard to be for him what he wanted. I

joined track when I was in high school, and actually did quite well. I knew he'd have been much prouder if I'd participated in a contact sport. He didn't really even see that track was physically challenging or competitive, yet at least it gave him something to cling to. It gave him some sort of bragging rights.

When I got involved in drama, my mom was the one who was most supportive. I mostly did behind-the-scenes work on the plays. For my senior year, I stage-managed *Brigadoon*. I actually was too shy to ever get a lead role. I also was editor for our class yearbook. I think this involvement was what sparked my interest in journalism. I knew right then that writing was my calling.

But this weekend had to be about Dad, not me. I had to quit ruminating upon Aaron and focus my attention on making this an awesome party for my father. I wouldn't even start to look for a job yet until the first of next week. Instead, I'd stay at home and help Mom with all of the party preparations. We had three full days to get it all together. I wanted this day to be really special. I wanted it to be a party that my father would never forget. As it turned out, it ended up being exactly that.

Chapter Fifteen

Paul and Anne Matheson, my parents, had been married for twenty-six years. They had lived their entire adult life in this same small, northern Michigan town, for the most part in this very home. My mom became pregnant two years after marrying my father, and they bought this house. It was the only home I had ever lived in my entire life, until I went away to college. My dad had worked all of his life in the same factory. He had worked at this job longer than he'd been married to my mom, and of course, longer than I'd even been alive.

Mom was a receptionist for a local dentist. Actually, she was promoted to the position of office manager after having worked for him for over a decade. She had taken this entire week off, using a few days of her vacation time, in order to prepare for the party. Saturday morning she was already in the kitchen at seven when I got up.

"Up an at em already, huh?"

"Yup, today's the day. God, I'll be glad when this party is over. Honey, that cake is beautiful! You did such a great job."

"You think he'll like it? I got a picture of that deer off the internet."

"Oh yeah, it's perfect. Your dad's gonna love it."

I walked up to her from behind and wrapped my arms around her. "Mom, I love you so much. I'm so glad to be here to help you with this."

"I'm glad you're here too, honey. But you never really told me what happened in Saginaw. Why'd you just drop everything to come home all of a sudden?"

I sighed as I leaned against her back. "It's so complicated, Mom. I just...um...well, I just had to get away. I was getting so overwhelmed."

"But you seemed to really love that job. It's what you'd worked for all those years, and then you just gave it up. Just like that, I can't understand—"

"I know, but I had to. I just couldn't stay. Someday I'll explain everything to you. I promise."

"Well, you know you can tell me anything, don't you?"

I nodded, even though I knew she could not see me. "Yeah, I know. Thanks, Mom."

We then busied ourselves with the preparations

for the party. Mom had me start by helping her roll the meatballs. She was making a big chafing tray of her famous homemade meatballs as one of the appetizers. She had already completed the ham roll-ups and the cheese-cracker trays. After we got the meatballs into the electric skillet, I began to cut up vegetables for the relish tray. All of the salads were already done and in the garage refrigerator.

"Hope it doesn't rain today."

"No, it's gonna be in the eighties today. Perfect weather."

"Thank God! I got Dad a present last night."

"Really? I'm sure he'll love it. What'd ya get him?"

"Um...well, I always have such a hard time buying for him, but I wanted this to be special. I got him one of those really nice Coleman stoves...for camping."

"Oh that's perfect. He needs a new one actually."

"Yeah I know. I remembered him saying that. He can use it at deer camp."

Just about then, Dad strolled into the kitchen.

"Happy birthday, Dad," I said.

"Oh...thanks." He headed for the coffeepot. "Half a century. Geesh, do I look that old."

"You're as handsome as the day we met," Mom said.

I left the room straight away.

It was about two o'clock that afternoon that the guests started to arrive. The morning had flown by so quickly because I was so busy helping mom with all the food preparation. The cake I had made was three-tiered, almost like a wedding cake. It had a big hand-drawn picture of a deer on the top layer and the sides of each layer displayed the message *Happy 50th Paul*.

It was so cool to see all of the people that I had been away from for so long. My best friend during high school was a girl named Traci. I had talked to her on the phone the night before and invited her over for the shindig. It was gonna be so cool to see her again. I wondered what she would ever think of me if I told her the truth about me. When I was in Saginaw, I hadn't thought that I'd ever have to tell anyone from back home. I had not expected to be returning any time soon.

When Traci did arrive at the party, I was busy refilling the ice chest. "Oh my God!" I shouted, "Look at you!" There she stood all 4'7". She had dyed her hair blonde, which was in stark contrast to her usually red color tone. "You look fantastic!" We embraced one another and I went to mix her a drink.

"What are you doing back here, Mark? I thought you finally got the hell outta this

godforsaken town."

"No place like home, ya know."

"I guess so, but what about your job and everything? I thought you liked it down there."

I shrugged. "We'll talk later. What do you want? Vodka and squirt?"

She nodded. "You should fix yourself a drink, too. All work and no play —"

I laughed. "Maybe in a few minutes. There's gonna be a band here tonight. I think they are starting at six."

"Cool. What kind?"

"Country," I said, making a face.

She laughed. "That's cool. I like some country. Plus what did you expect? It's for your dad, ya know."

I smiled.

It was surprising how many people actually showed up for the party. There were well over a hundred fifty guests all together. As the day progressed and the food started to dwindle, Mom and I finally started to relax a little. The cake was a huge success and the ribs were to die for. Dad seemed to really like the camp stove I got him, and he got a lot of other presents, too. Many of them were gag gifts from his friends. He was such a good sport.

The band did start playing shortly after six, and by this time, everyone was starting to feel pretty

good. My dad was looking a little red in the face, and I could tell he'd had quite a bit to drink. I noticed that the beer keg was starting to foam heavily and realized that it was almost empty, so I headed into the garage to get the second keg. We had it stored in there, sitting in a big metal barrel of ice. I walked over to the keg and grabbed it by both sides to hoist it out of the bucket. Damn! It wouldn't budge. Shit, this thing was so heavy. I stopped and looked around, trying to think of what to do. I'd just go get someone to help me...simple.

As I turned to go back into the yard, I stopped dead in my tracks. I could not believe what I saw there before my eyes. Aaron!

My mouth dropped open as I stared up at him. He was not alone though. Robin was with him. "What are you doing here?" I whispered.

"What am I doing here?" he repeated boldly. "Well, what do you think I'm doing here? I heard you were havin' a party so I came to help you celebrate. You need some help with that keg?"

"Aaron—" I said, suddenly feeling myself on the verge of a sob. My eyes were filling with tears as I stared up at him. "How did you find me?"

He laughed. "Ya know there are such things these days as telephone directories. Your parents were not hard to find, especially since they've lived in this town for like thirty some years."

I nodded. "Yeah, I guess I didn't do such a great job of disappearing, huh? Well, I understand. You have a right to tell me off, and since I wouldn't take your calls, you've come to do it in person. Go ahead, I deserve it."

"I'm not here to tell you off."

My dad walked around the corner. "You bringing the keg?"

"Yeah, Dad, sorry. I couldn't lift it, but my friend Aaron is gonna help me. Aaron, this is my father. Dad, this is Aaron Culver. He was my landlord in Saginaw." They shook hands with one another and then Dad looked over at me.

"What do ya mean, you couldn't lift that keg?" He laughed.

I could tell immediately that he really was starting to feel the effects of all the alcohol he'd consumed. "It's a fuckin' keg of beer, go pick it up and bring it out here."

"It's too heavy, Dad, I can't pick it up."

Aaron stepped over to the keg and grabbed a hold of it. "I've got it. Where do you want it?"

"No!" said my dad. "Put it down. Mark, I told you to do it. Go be a man and take that fuckin' keg of beer out to the party."

I looked at him, exasperated. "Okay, sure. Maybe it was just stuck or something. I can get it." I walked over to the keg, standing next to Aaron and grabbed a hold of it again. I pulled up on it

with all my might and it would just barely move. "Dad, it's too heavy. I'm sorry, I can't pick it up."

"Jesus Christ!" he said. "I'll get the keg myself. Why don't you go bake a fuckin' cake or something?"

Now by this time, my emotions were already strained pretty much to the max. I had been on the verge of crying before my dad even had walked into the garage. His unkind words to me were just enough to tip the scale and I felt my face redden as the teardrops started to run down my cheeks. I turned away from my dad and headed for the garage door. Just then, Traci and my mom approached.

"Wait!" said Aaron from behind me. "Mark, wait a minute."

I spun around to look at him and he was standing directly in front of my father. He looked at my dad, staring at him eye-to-eye. "Sir, with all due respect, you oughta be ashamed of yourself. Do you have any idea how much this guy idolizes his father?" He pointed in my direction. "And for you to talk to him like that..."

"And after all he did to help throw you this party," interjected my mother. "Paul, what did you say to him?"

"I'm just sick of it," slurred my dad. "I'm sick of him bein' such a damned pansy. All I asked him to do was move this keg from the garage outside. He

couldn't even pick it up."

"For Chrissakes, Paul, I bet that thing weighs a hundred fifty pounds. Come on, let's go back outside and enjoy the music. I'll get a couple of guys to bring the keg out."

"No!" said Aaron. "I think you owe your son an apology."

"And who are you?" my mother said to Aaron, not in a disrespectful tone, but with one of genuine curiosity.

"I'm Aaron Culver...Mark's partner."

"Mark's partner?" she asked. "His business partner or something?"

"He's my friend," I interrupted. "Aaron is my friend, and he came here for the party. He was my landlord when I lived in Saginaw. And this is Robin. She's Aaron's girlfriend."

Robin smiled. "Nice to meet you, but I'm actually Aaron's former girlfriend. He is with someone else now."

My mom just stood there, staring at the two of them, and then glancing back over to me. "Well, it's nice to meet you both. Any friends of Mark's are friends of ours. Why don't you come out and get a bite to eat. We have tons of food, and the ribs are great."

"I've heard what a good cook you are," said Aaron. "I appreciate the offer, but we actually aren't gonna be here that long. I just stopped by to

pick something up."

Now my mom looked really puzzled. "Okay..." she said, sort of laughing. "And what would that be?"

"Your son."

She looked over to me and then back to Aaron. "What do you mean?" My dad was also staring at Aaron inquisitively.

"I mean I am in love with your son, and I'm not leaving here without him!"

I swear to God, that at that particular moment, time came to a complete standstill. All of the tension dissipated and everyone just stood there in stunned silence. I walked over to Aaron, stepping between him and my parents. "What did you say?" I whispered.

"I said, I love you, Mark Matheson, and I'm not leaving without you."

I looked over to Robin and saw the tears in her eyes as she watched her former lover publicly proclaim his love for someone else. I saw Traci standing next to her, mouth agape in stunned disbelief. I looked back at Aaron, and the entire world disappeared. It was just he and I standing there together. "I love you, too," I said meekly, "with all my heart."

"Jesus Christ!" my dad said.

I honestly didn't care. I stepped toward Aaron just then and felt the powerful strength of his

embrace as he wrapped his protective arms around me.

"Mark," he said to me, "it almost killed me when you left, but I know why you did it. You did it because you thought that I'd be happier with Robin, raising our child with her. But the truth is, Robin already knows I'm in love with you and could never be happy if I had to go back to living a lie. She also knows how much I want this baby..."

"And I want it, too," said Robin tearfully. "I'm not having an abortion."

I had to wonder just then exactly what my parents and Traci were thinking about this drama. This was better than *Days of Our Lives*!

"Mark, you've got to come back. I talked to Joyce. She knows everything, and she told me about the things you said to her. I know you only left because you thought it was the right thing. Running from the truth though, that is never right. We are who we are. We love each other! We are meant to be together!"

"I know!" I sobbed. "I felt like my life was over."

"No, our life has just started...you and me together. And Robin is gonna be a part of it, and so is the baby. We are gonna be a family."

Robin stepped toward us and placed her hand on my shoulder.

I let go of Aaron and turned to embrace her. "Robin, I'm so sorry if I hurt you."

"Never be sorry for love," she whispered. "With love there are no regrets."

I released my hold on Robin then and turned back to Aaron. "Will you forgive me for the things I said? Will you forgive me for saying all those horrible selfish things?"

"What things?" He smiled. Then he grabbed a hold of me once more and pulled me into himself, planting the most passionate kiss upon my lips that I'd ever experienced. He did it right there in front of everyone, including my father, who I think I heard storm out behind me. Happy Birthday, Dad, I thought.

Chapter Sixteen

Five Years Later

I pulled into the circular driveway of the daycare center, checking my watch as I did so. It was ten minutes past five. I was so anxious to see him again. It was weird how I got excited like this every single day when I stopped to pick up little Zach. I walked through the doors.

“Daddy Mark!” he yelled and ran to greet me.

I scooped him up in my arms and kissed him repeatedly on the cheek. “How was school today, kiddo? Did you miss me?”

Zach was so cute, a miniature version of his biological father. His spiked blond hair and bright blue eyes were enough to make my heart melt every single time I saw him. He jabbered to me incessantly all the way home.

When I pulled into the drive, I noticed that Aaron’s truck was already there. He must have

gotten home earlier than normal. Zach and I headed for the outside staircase to our newly remodeled upstairs apartment. Robin lived downstairs where Aaron had converted the two lower apartments into a single big one. She was away this week on vacation with her fiancé. They were renting a condo in southern Florida.

I scooped up Zach as we approached the base of the stairs. I always carried him up because I was perhaps a tad overprotective of him. I did not want to ever risk any harm to this little angel. He wrapped his little arms around my neck as he continued to jabber to me about how much he did that day in preschool.

As I stepped through the apartment door and rounded the corner, there stood Aaron, the love of my life. He was wearing rubber gloves and holding a toilet brush. I smiled at him broadly. "What are ya doin'?"

"Hey, Daddy Air-win! What ya doin'?" repeated little Zach.

Aaron leaned in to kiss him, holding his hands out beside him to avoid making contact with the grubby toilet brush. "Just doin' a little cleaning."

I laughed at him as I set Zach down beside me. "Turn you on to clean up after me, huh?"

Aaron smiled. "More than you'll ever know."

I beamed at my landlord, knowing that life couldn't get any better than this.

About the Author

Jeff Erno currently lives in southern Michigan. He began writing stories in the late 1990's and presently has two published novels, *Dumb Jock* and *Puppy Love*. He is a book reviewer and the co-owner of the Reviews by Michele 'n Jeff website. <http://michelenjeff-reviews.blogspot.com/>