



SHAWN LANE

ONLY IN HIS
DREAMS

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...Darrell couldn't remember the last time he'd enjoyed an evening like this. They'd watched all the various *Die Hard* movies, laughing and commenting throughout them. They'd switched to beers and he'd made popcorn. Really he hadn't wanted the night to end. At least Travis wasn't going home.

But Darrell had always been a cautious man. Starting anything, even casual sex with Travis, could get complicated. Since the firm was Travis's, if something bad happened between them it would be Darrell who'd be forced to find new employment.

That didn't stop him from wanting to bend Travis over the sofa and fucking him deep and slow.

Forcing the tempting thoughts from his mind before it gave him an obvious boner, Darrell stood and glanced at the clock. Nearly one in the morning. "The spare room is all set up. The sheets are clean and I left a pair of pajamas in there for you if you'd like to change. They should fit well enough for you to sleep in them anyway."

Travis stood and stretched, his rumpled white dress shirt straining across his biceps and abs. His mouth dry, Darrell stared openly. He'd found white guys attractive before, though he hadn't pursued it, but never like this. Every move Travis made riveted him. Every curve of his sensual, slightly plump lips fascinated him.

"Great," Travis said. "I'm bushed."

He let Travis go in front of him down the hall toward the bedrooms, unabashedly gawking at the man's perfect round ass. Really, his resolve to take things slow with Travis began to waiver. Maybe just a goodnight kiss would satisfy him. After all it had been sort of a date...

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BY

SHAWN LANE

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

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ONLY IN HIS DREAMS
AN AMBER QUILL PRESS BOOK

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ISBN 978-1-60272-659-8
Cover Art © 2010 Trace Edward Zaber

Layout and Formatting provided by: Elemental Alchemy

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To Ava, whose encouragement is always appreciated.

CHAPTER 1

Darrell Lincoln pulled into his parking spot, turned off his car, got out and locked it. He was fairly geeked he had been given his own parking space since being hired as the financial manager at Anderson, Llewellyn, and Stevens.

He approached the front door, office keys in hand. He prided himself on always being the first one to the office. Only Darrell, the office manager, Kim, and the three partners had keys to the front door.

Darrell was the first one in his family to have finished college and he was damn proud of his business and finance degree. Things were going so well, he was considering purchasing a home. Maybe some day he'd find a person to share it with.

He shook his head. He really needed to stop thinking in

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nonspecific gender terms. He knew very well he spoke of a man. He'd been openly gay for several years now.

Earlier in the year, the law firm had installed sensor lights so as he walked down the hall toward his cubicle the lights flared on. Darrell powered on his computer and went to make a pot of coffee. He opened the fridge in the firm's kitchen, checked on the amount of liquid creamers they had, and marked the list for the office manager for the ones getting low. This was his usual routine.

After grabbing a cup of coffee in his mug, he went back to his desk to read his emails. It was only seven so he knew no one else would be in for a while.

He checked the weather report on his favorite news station's website. They were on storm watch. Darrell rolled his eyes. Southern California always carried on about a little bit of rain. Probably would be less than a quarter inch if that.

The sound of the office front doors opening startled him. He stood up, craning over the top of his cubicle. Who besides himself would come in now? No one ever did.

Four of the firm's attorneys filed through the door. He was pretty friendly with the woman, Mary Biggs. She was probably the nicest attorney there, really. Mary and two of the men with her were associates. Darrell knew them, but they were always very businesslike. He'd never exchanged any personal information with either of them. Suited him fine, too.

But the fourth attorney happened to be Travis Anderson, one of the partners, and Darrell's big time crush. The man's golden blond hair looked vaguely mussed like from the wind. He laughed at something one of the others said, showing his perfect white teeth and dimples on either side of his sensual lips. Darrell's gut twisted and he sat down fast, hoping they didn't notice him gaping at them

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over his cubicle.

It was rare for Travis to even be in the office. Most days, it seemed to Darrell, he was in a trial. Travis was a big time, successful trial attorney, well sought after by corporate clients. He couldn't even think of a case Travis hadn't won.

This Thursday morning his crush had dressed in a dark charcoal Armani suit with a crisp white dress shirt and a turquoise silk tie. Darrell was pretty sure it was close to matching the man's eyes.

He hadn't been on a date in months, and he'd never dated a white guy, but since working at the firm, Darrell found he didn't want anyone else. Stupid, of course. He didn't even know if Travis was gay, and even if he was he didn't seem to know Darrell existed. Someone like Travis—handsome, outgoing, well-off—would never want a quiet, shy, numbers geek. Only in his dreams.

They'd not had even one conversation. Which made Darrell's infatuation that much more pathetic.

Mary, a still attractive woman in her fifties, came around the wall of his cubicle. "Good morning, Darrell."

"Good morning. I'm surprised to see you all so early."

She nodded. "We needed to meet about a big new client and this week is the only time Travis had to meet with us. He wanted to get an early start. I hope this means there's coffee."

He smiled. "Of course. You want me to bring it in to the meeting?"

Mary rolled her eyes. "God, no, we can get our own coffee. I'll talk to you later."

She scurried away down the hall toward the direction of the conference room and Darrell opened up his billing file to get to work.

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“Hi, Darrell.”

Darrell froze in the middle of typing in a code, his back ramrod straight and to the person who spoke. He knew the voice well. It starred in a number of his fantasies. Swallowing back his gasp of surprise, he turned his chair to face Travis Anderson.

Travis had removed his suit coat and had loosened the turquoise silk tie just a fraction. Just enough for Darrell’s eyes to stray to the smooth, pale throat. He then forced his gaze upward to the chiseled jawline, and ah, hell, the lips, turned up just a tad at the corners. Up to the perfect patrician nose, obviously never broken, past the high cheekbones to those incredible blue eyes framed by golden lashes. Darrell thought he might swallow his own tongue.

“Uh.” *Crap*. His first time talking to Travis and all he could make was a dumb ass sound.

Travis’s expression was vaguely quizzical. He handed a manila folder to Darrell. “Here’s the information on the new client.”

Darrell took the folder and merely stared at it, dumbfounded. Travis had never brought him client bills before. Usually if Travis had anything for him it came from the man’s admin assistant, Barnaby, a rather young, flamboyant gay man with bleached hair. Barnaby was a big flirt.

“Where’s Barnaby?” he blurted out.

Travis smiled, showing off the dimples also often featured in Darrell’s fantasies. “Called in sick. I think he just had a little bit too much fun last night.”

“Did you spend it together?” Damn, he’d just asked that out loud, hadn’t he? What the hell was the matter with him?

Travis laughed. “No.”

Darrell set the file down and picked up some papers, shuffling

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them. He couldn't look at Travis. "Sorry. I mean, I'm sure you don't...er...fraternize with the staff."

"It's not that, really. Barnaby isn't my type."

"Oh." *Oh.* Well, Darrell now knew the answer regarding Travis's sexual preference. Tamping down his disappointment, reminding himself again he'd never had a chance in a million years anyway, he plastered on a smile. "I'll get that information in the system right away."

"I appreciate that. Have a good rest of the day." And with a small wave, Travis disappeared from view.

"Idiot," Darrell muttered to himself.

* * *

Even though he got to the office first, Darrell was often among the last to leave. At least of the non-attorney members of the staff. It was a little after six that night when he finally shut down his computer and headed to the front glass doors. The threatened storm had arrived an hour earlier with light rain and the downpour had begun twenty minutes ago. Darrell had planned to be gone before the heavy rain started, but hadn't been able to tear himself away from a particular challenging client billing.

Darrell now wished he had grabbed an umbrella when he'd left his apartment that morning. His glasses would be covered in spots by the time he got to his car. Grimacing, he opened the doors and hurried out to his car, pressing the *unlock* button as he ran. He wiped off his glasses, turned the key in the ignition and cursed out loud when it just moaned.

"No! Come on." Darrell tried the key two more times. He jumped when he heard a sharp tap on his passenger window.

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Swallowing a trickle of unease, he opened the door and got out. Travis Anderson stood next to his car holding a large black umbrella.

“Hey, Darrell. Car trouble?”

He nodded. “Won’t start.”

“Why don’t I give you a ride home? You can deal with the car tomorrow when the weather’s better. Hopefully.”

His heart hammering hard, Darrell shook his head. “I, uh, don’t want to impose. I can probably call someone.”

Travis smiled. “It’s no imposition, Darrell. Come on. The sooner you agree, the sooner we can both get out of the rain.”

“Okay, thanks.” He followed Travis to the man’s Honda sedan. For some reason, Darrell had expected Travis to drive a fancy luxury car.

“Where can I take you?” Travis asked as they got inside.

His mind turned traitor on him and he almost had to bite his tongue off to keep from saying something hokey like “right here, baby.” *Get a hold of yourself.*

“Burbank.”

“Just program your address in my GPS. Or wait. Are you hungry?”

Feeling a little lightheaded, Darrell heard his voice squeak out, “Yeah.”

“Great, let’s stop somewhere on the way.”

“Sounds good.” Darrell turned his face away from Travis’s scrutiny, certain the man could read his thoughts even in the dark car. He had to remind himself it was just a casual bite to eat on the way home. A favor from his *boss*. Nothing more.

CHAPTER 2

As Darrell slid into the booth across from Travis at the Mexican restaurant they'd stopped at, he reminded himself to play it cool.

The waitress approached their table immediately. "*Señor* Travis, it is good to see you."

Travis smiled. "You, too."

"It's slow tonight with the rain." She glanced at Darrell and smiled. "Oh, you brought a handsome friend."

Darrell's cheeks heated and he was glad for both his brown skin and the low lighting of the restaurant. He kept his gaze on the menu.

"Darrell works at my firm," Travis said.

"Welcome. What can I get you to drink?"

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"I'm driving and it's raining, just an iced tea for me."

Darrell nodded. "Make that two."

"I'll be back with your drinks."

"You could have had something."

Darrell lowered his menu to look at Travis. "I'm not really much of a drinker, to be honest."

"Nothing wrong with that. What are you thinking of having?"

"The *chile relleno*."

"Good choice. I think I'll have the *carne asada*."

They gave their orders to the waitress and then Darrell started stuffing his face with the chips and salsa on the table. He had no idea what to say. He'd never been good at small talk on dates, which this wasn't, and he never felt comfortable talking with employers either.

"I have to tell you, Darrell, I've been very impressed with your work."

Darrell had a salsa covered chip about halfway up to his mouth. He paused and blinked. "Um, really?"

Travis smiled and nodded. He couldn't help but admire the gentle curve of the man's sensual lips as they turned just a bit upward. Darrell usually noticed men's lips first, even before he noticed their arms or their asses. And Travis had a fine ass, too.

"We had some issues with the person we had in your position before. Some discrepancy problems as well as just letting work go. I didn't like the idea of anyone losing their job, but we didn't feel like we were left with much choice." Travis paused to sip his iced tea. "To be honest, when Mark brought your resume to us I was a bit skeptical."

Mark Stevens was one of the firm's other partners and the man Darrell had interviewed with for the position in the first place. The

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third one being Nathan Llewellyn. Like himself, Mark was African American, and for a moment Darrell wondered if that might be the reason Travis had been skeptical. Almost all his life, Darrell had been dealing with assumptions about his education and work background simply because he was black and originally from south central Los Angeles.

“But,” Travis continued, “your lack of experience in a law firm didn’t end up being a factor. Your education was excellent. I wasn’t sure we could take the time to train you on our weird billing programs.”

Darrell shrugged. “They were a piece of cake.”

“I know. Like I said, obviously my reservations were unfounded.” He held up a hand. “Now, to be honest, Mark had once insisted we hire an intern who was the daughter of a friend of a friend and she ended up being a disaster, so he didn’t have the best track record.”

“But Mark didn’t know me prior to sending in my resume.”

“Exactly but I was leery of his choices at that point.” Travis smiled disarmingly. “The point is you’ve been a terrific addition to the firm.”

The waitress arrived with their meals, refilled their iced tea and disappeared once more.

“I’ve been talking with both Mark and Nathan about you.”

The bit of food Darrell had just placed in his mouth suddenly tasted like sawdust. He chewed and swallowed. “You have?”

Travis laughed. “Don’t worry. You look like I just said we’ve been planning your murder.”

His ears heating, Darrell attempted a smile. “Well, I...what were you talking about?”

“All good, I assure you. I’ll make sure Barnaby gives you the

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details when he returns to the office, but we definitely feel a raise is in order.”

Darrell blew out a slow breath of relief and maybe a touch of disappointment. Now it all made sense taking him to dinner. It was merely a way to thank him for his hard work and to tell him about the raise. A part of him, tiny though it was, had sort of hoped Travis was interested in him. Well, that was before he’d basically confirmed he was straight when they were talking about Barnaby earlier.

“Thank you very much,” Darrell said. “That’s a great surprise.”

“You’re welcome. You’ve earned it.”

Travis took several bites of his food without saying anything else for a few minutes and Darrell wondered if he should find some way to break the silence. He was sort of a social geek, really. Not that he liked admitting it. He decided in the end to take his cue from Travis, eat his dinner, and wait for the other man to say something.

Travis was nearly done with his meal when he said, “So, tell me about your family.”

“My family?”

Travis’s bright smile dimmed just a fraction. “Unless you don’t want to talk about them.”

“No, it’s just...I didn’t expect you to be interested.”

“Why?” Travis looked genuinely puzzled.

Because I am boring old Darrell and you’re sexy as sin Travis.

“I don’t know.” Darrell cleared his throat. “Um, well, my daddy-er-father died when I was fourteen, so after that Mama raised me and my two brothers by herself. She worked as a hotel maid mostly, though she did some other odd jobs now and again. My oldest brother plays basketball with the Detroit Pistons. And

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my little brother is still in college.”

“Wow, that’s pretty cool. Your mother did a fantastic job. Sorry to hear about your dad.”

“Yeah, he got in a bar fight and ended up hitting his head on the asphalt in the bar parking lot. Got a brain hemorrhage,” Darrell explained.

“Oh, my God.”

He nodded. “Yeah, it was tough.”

“Was the guy he fought with charged?” Travis pushed his mostly empty plate toward the end of the table.

Darrell piled his plate on Travis’s. “That’s just the thing. The fight was with his best friend. It got out of hand. Uncle Jim, we always called him that, never meant to hurt my father. We all understood that, even my mama. It was just a bad accident.”

“It’s amazing you and your family can be so forgiving.” Travis shrugged. “I’m not sure I would be in the same circumstances. You’re lucky to be close to your family.”

Travis looked suddenly sad and Darrell opened his mouth to ask Travis about his family, wondering if that was too much prying, when the waitress came by and handed Travis the check, slipping away after saying, “See you next time, *Señor* Travis.”

Travis plopped down money and slid from the booth. “I’m sure you’re anxious to get home in this bad weather.”

Darrell followed Travis to his car, trying to keep his gaze from straying to the man’s tight ass. He wasn’t terribly successful either. Travis might as well be wearing a sign that said, “Look at my great ass.”

“Hey, do you want me to pick you up in the morning?” Travis asked as he unlocked his car.

Darrell shook his head. “I appreciate that, but I can make other

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arrangements. Thanks for the offer, and dinner, too.”

“No problem.” Travis frowned. “If you’re sure.”

Darrell figured he’d already imposed on him enough already.”Definitely. I’ll get one of my neighbors to drop me off. And then I’ll get a garage out to look at my car.”

Travis smiled and pulled out of the restaurant parking lot.

Darrell remembered to program his address in Travis’s Garmin. It distracted him momentarily from the erection pressing against his dress slacks. He shifted in the passenger seat, turning slightly so Travis couldn’t tell he was sporting a woody. Or he hoped so anyway. He prayed the drive to his condo would be quick.

CHAPTER 3

Travis pressed the button on the opener and drove his boring Honda sedan into the garage. He could afford a luxury car, but this one was serviceable. So why get a new car before he needed it? Truth was, he'd never been one of those guys into hot cars and hotter women.

He went through the inner door between the garage and his dark, empty house, and flipped on the nearest light. He could hear the patter of rain on his patio. Sometimes the loneliness got to him. Usually he was too busy at work to think about it too much.

But at times, like tonight, he couldn't help but feel a bit sorry for himself. He'd hoped Darrell felt a little mutual attraction for him, but it seemed pretty clear to Travis by the end of their night together that the handsome black man was not interested in him.

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So much for any so-called gaydar.

It was too bad, too, because he found Darrell, with his light mocha skin and muscular build, very appealing. The man had pretty dark eyes behind which lurked a kind, gentle soul. Or Travis imagined so anyway. Darrell was only about an inch shorter than his own six foot two. Oh, he was still sure Darrell shared his sexual orientation. But apparently the flicker of interest he thought he'd seen in Darrell's chocolate eyes had been his imagination. Wouldn't be the first time.

It seemed, though, he was more out of practice than he had guessed. He shrugged out of his suit coat, pulled off his silk tie, and left them lying on the top of the couch. He went into the kitchen, grabbed himself a beer, and then went back to sit on the couch to watch some mindless television. Most of what he did was fairly mindless these days.

Today was his thirty-fifth birthday and no one had even acknowledged it. His answering machine did not blink with messages and his cell phone remained quiet. Even at work it had been forgotten. His two law partners knew the date at one time. They'd all gone to college and then law school together. Really Mark and Nathan were his only friends now. But they were too busy to remember it, obviously.

His admin assistant, Barnaby, might have remembered if he'd been at work today. Travis didn't know.

Pathetic, really, to be thirty-five with no family or friends to give a shit about you. He'd had a family once, of course. Who didn't? He'd been eighteen when his parents and older sister were killed in a private plane crash on their way back from Catalina Island. Travis and the pilot had been the only survivors. He'd been left a decent amount of money. Travis had enough to put himself

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through college and law school without having a student loan.

Five years ago, he had survived another crash, this one in a car. His boyfriend, Alan, had crashed their car into a tree trunk while drunk, killing himself and Alan's younger sister. Travis had been in the backseat and had hardly a scratch.

Having survived two fatal crashes in his life was pretty extraordinary. It reminded him of the Bruce Willis movie, *Unbreakable*, where Bruce could withstand any crash or injury save for one weakness. He didn't expect to be that lucky always, though. Maybe it was more like a cat with nine lives and he'd definitely used up two.

Alan's family blamed him for the death of their son and daughter. Travis should have stopped him from driving drunk.

It was true he'd known Alan had a drinking problem, but no one prevented Alan from doing what he wanted to do. The man had been incredibly appealing with his effervescent personality and wit, but he'd also been more stubborn than anyone Travis had ever known.

Most of their mutual friends blamed him, too. He'd been older and wiser, after all. And, as it happened, those friends had gradually dumped Travis.

He leaned back against the couch, nudged his shoes off, and set his feet down on the coffee table in front of him.

Truly, he needed to man up and stop the moaning and groaning. He switched to the online television guide and looked for a sport to watch. He didn't care which, just something he could grunt to...or whatever sports loving men did.

The landline phone chirped to life and he considered letting it go. Probably a sales person. Funny how being on the *Do Not Call list* got him more calls than ever. But, his hand swiped up the

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receiver and held it to his ear.

“Hello.”

“Hey, Happy Birthday,” his law partner, Nathan, said.

“Thanks.”

“Sorry I forgot until just now. I’ve been swamped with that Nelson case. Want to meet for a drink or something?”

“No, thanks for the offer, though. I’m having a beer. Don’t really want to drink and drive.”

“Yeah, I can understand that. Did Mark call you?”

“No, you’re the first.” And only. But he didn’t add that. Not only was it obvious, but it sounded pathetic.

“I’m sorry. I’m sure he just got busy. I’ll call—”

“No,” Travis quickly interrupted. “Don’t. I don’t need a pity call. If he remembers, he’ll call on his own.”

Nathan sighed. “Okay. I’m sorry. Maybe we can have dinner on the weekend. My treat.”

“Sure.”

“What did you do tonight?”

Travis thought of his sort of date with Darrell. “I had dinner and then came home.”

“Alone?”

“No and yes. Dinner wasn’t alone and home was.”

“Struck out?” Nathan sounded amused.

“Yeah, pretty much. He just wasn’t that in to me.”

“I can’t imagine someone not being in to you, Travis. Gorgeous, well off, kind. You’re every gay man’s dream.”

Travis laughed. “Right. If that’s the case, how come you and I have never hooked up?”

“Well...we’ve always been just friends, you know that. Just like brothers.”

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He set his beer down and ran a hand over his face. "I know. I was teasing."

"What are you doing now?"

Travis stared at the television. "Watching sports."

This announcement was greeted with several seconds of silence and then, "What?"

"Sports. Um, Ultimate Fighting or something on the Macho Channel."

Nathan laughed. "You mean Spike?"

"Yeah, yeah, that's the one. Two guys are squeezing each other. Looks kind of kinky if you ask me." Travis shrugged.

"All right. Well, I'll let you go. I have some legal briefs I need to go over tonight anyway. I'll catch you tomorrow. Happy Birthday."

"Thanks, bye."

For a moment Travis smiled, thinking of his painfully shy friend. Behind Nathan's thick glasses and bashful smiles lurked a guy anyone would be lucky to have. But Nathan froze up if he had to speak to a man he found even remotely attractive. He knew it sometimes gave prospective dates the idea he was cold and uninterested. He and Mark had tried unsuccessfully over the years to bring Nathan out of his turtle shell.

And now, he was once again aware he was alone in his semi-dark lonely house. He was starting to consider the horrors of a dating service.

* * *

Travis, sitting behind his desk the next morning, handed the bills as well as the promotion letter to Barnaby Lassiter, his young

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admin assistant. Barnaby had been standing next to his desk for several minutes, fidgeting. He doubted the younger man knew how to stand still.

Barnaby shifted from one foot to the other and back again and then popped his gum. "Is that it?"

Travis looked up, noticing for the first time the plum blush Barnaby had splashed across his normally pale white cheeks and the matching plum lip gloss lining his lips. And then, of course, there was the eyeliner. He blinked. The dyed blond hair looked freshly done and a new salon style to it.

He cleared his throat. "Weren't you sick yesterday?"

"Uh-huh."

Travis gestured to Barnaby's hair.

"Just cause I'm sick doesn't mean I don't need to look good, boss man."

"Right." Travis nodded. It was a good thing Barnaby was damn good at his job. He handed the last document to his admin. "The first stack goes to Darrell and the last one to Mary."

There was a short knock on the door and then it opened to reveal Nathan. He carried a file in his right hand and a white paper sack in the other. Nathan's thick glasses had slipped down his long nose. After he pushed them up, his gaze briefly rested on Barnaby, before sliding away. He cleared his throat. "Sorry to interrupt."

"You're not. We're finished." He waved Barnaby away.

The blond sauntered over to the door to his office where Nathan still stood lingering in the doorway. "Good morning, Mr. Llewellyn."

Eyes downcast, Nathan mumbled, "Morning."

Barnaby disappeared beyond the door and to Travis's surprise, Nathan stuck his head around the corner to peer outside the office

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in the direction the young admin had gone.

“Something you want to tell me?”

Nathan walked in and closed the door, his face red. “What?”

“Have you got the hots for Barnaby?”

“What? No? Barnaby? No way. He’s so...so—”

“Cute?” Travis supplied neutrally.

“Yes. No. Sort of.” Nathan shrugged. “He’s not my type. Here, I brought you a bagel and cream cheese to make up for forgetting your birthday.” He thrust the bag at Travis and sat in the chair in front of the desk.

Travis had to admit that his admin assistant was hot, but he reminded him of Alan. He had adored Alan, but the last thing he wanted was another boyfriend like Alan. Never mind the secretary aspect. “So, you’ve no interest in him at all?”

“God, no. Never.” The redness in his cheeks had deepened. He held up the file he’d brought with him. “I wanted to ask your opinion about the Peck case.”

* * *

Darrell didn’t even have to turn around to know who was standing behind his chair, even before the dramatic sigh announced his arrival. He could smell Barnaby several feet away. Or rather Barnaby’s expensive cologne.

He turned to face Travis’s assistant. Barnaby flashed him a smile he was sure had been used on many a sucker. “Good morning.”

“Hi there.” Barnaby leaned on the cubicle wall. “I was told to give you these.” He handed a thick stack of papers to Darrell. “And also this.”

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Darrell took the plain envelope from Barnaby. His name was neatly scrolled on it.

“Congratulations, D. The promotion is well deserved.”

“Thank you.” He stared at Barnaby when he noticed the man wasn’t leaving. “Anything else?”

“I was wondering if you’d like to have lunch with me today.”

“Lunch? Well, I...that’s probably not a good idea.” Darrell fidgeted with his letter. He didn’t want to hurt Barnaby’s feeling or anything, but he really didn’t see anything between them.

Barnaby rolled his eyes. “It’s just lunch, D. With a co-worker. We’re not going to have an afternoon delight or anything.” He gestured to the letter. “And since you’re rich and all, you can buy.”

“Me?”

“Yep.” Barnaby glanced at his watch. “I’ll come by your desk at eleven-thirty. Don’t worry, I know your car’s in the shop so I’ll drive us.”

CHAPTER 4

Darrell wanted to kiss the ground when they finally arrived at the restaurant Barnaby had driven them to. The man was a maniac, pure and simple. His little Volkswagen Beetle weaved in and out of street traffic at alarming speeds, braking unexpectedly or sometimes not at all. As he opened the passenger door, he felt distinctly ill. Thankfully, the restaurant, a deli, had only been a few blocks from the office.

“It’s a wonder you’re still alive,” he said primly.

“What?” Barnaby gave him a blank look and shrugged.

As Darrell followed the flamboyant man inside, he had to wonder what the hell he had agreed to. Sometimes being nice was not a plus.

After they’d been seated at a plastic booth and given their

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drinks of iced tea for him and coffee for Barnaby, Darrell eyed the menu suspiciously. He wondered how clean this place was. He glanced around looking for bugs.

“Have you eaten here before?”

“Oh sure.”

Pursing his lips, Darrell studied his choices. “How’s the patty melt?”

“I’m a veggie.”

Darrell stared at him. “What?”

Barnaby waved his hand. “You know, a vegetarian. I always get a salad. I’m sure it’s fine though. I’ve been here with a few dates before and it looks all greasy.”

Darrell winced and looked across to the other side of the menu where it stated breakfast was served all day.

When the harried looking waitress came back, Darrell ordered the one-egg breakfast, scrambled, and Barnaby ordered the aforementioned salad.

“Look, Barnaby,” Darrell said as the waitress walked away, “I appreciate your asking me to lunch, but I have to be upfront with you.”

“Don’t give yourself a heart attack, man. I know you’re not interested in me.”

Darrell blinked, feeling more than a little relieved. “You do?”

“I can’t say your taste is spectacular, but yeah, I got the vibes.” Barnaby grinned and leaned his chin on his hand. “I know who you *are* interested in though.”

With a sinking feeling, he sipped his tea. He doubted Barnaby actually knew, but for a moment, he felt a sense of panic. He pushed it aside. “And who would that be?”

“Travis. *My* Travis.”

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“Travis? No, I’m not.” Darrell squirmed and looked away. Then his gaze darted right back. “*Your* Travis?”

“Relax, I don’t mean literally. But, yeah, I’ve seen you looking.”

“It’s your imagination,” he mumbled.

“Sure.”

“Well, even if I was, he’s not gay.”

Barnaby choked on his coffee. “Is that a Long Island Iced Tea? D, trust me, Travis is *not* straight.”

Confused, Darrell was silent for a moment. A moment where, in spite of his best intentions, a tiny spark of hope leapt into his heart. “But he said you weren’t his type.”

“Duh. I’m not your type either. Does that make you straight?”

“Oh.” Darrell nodded, feeling foolish. “I see.”

“You should ask him out,” Barnaby said just as the waitress plopped his salad in front of him. She likewise put Darrell’s breakfast plate in front of him.

“Need anything else?” she asked, already moving away without waiting for their answer.

“Nice,” Barnaby said.

“He’s my boss,” Darrell pointed out.

“Yeah, there is that.” Barnaby, who sat on the side of the booth facing the entrance, suddenly reached across the table and gripped Darrell’s hands. “Guess who just walked in.”

Darrell threw out a name. “Tina Turner.”

“I wish. None other than Anderson and Llewellyn of Anderson, Llewellyn, and Stevens.”

“Here? Really?” He squelched down an odd sense of panic. He wasn’t doing anything wrong. He was on his lunch break. He needed to stop feeling like a kid caught ditching class.

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“Hello, Barnaby, Darrell,” Travis spoke up as the pair of lawyers stopped at their table. “Didn’t expect to see you two here.”

“Same here.” Barnaby indicated the booth. “Why don’t you two join us?”

“Looks like you already got your food.”

“They’re fast here. Besides, if you guys join us, we can take extra time. Can’t hardly get in trouble when you’re lunching with the boss, right?” He scooted over.

“Uh...Barnaby—” The sense of panic returned full force. Somehow knowing Travis was also gay and was about to sit right next to him sent his heart to fluttering and his stomach to sinking.

“Okay.” Travis nodded and went to sit next to Darrell, just as he suspected.

“Um, maybe, we should just let them eat and get our own table,” Nathan said quickly. His cheeks were slightly pink.

“Nah, it’s cool. Come on, Mr. Llewellyn.” Barnaby patted the plastic cushion bench.

When they were both seated, the hostess thrust menus into their hands.

“What’s good here?” Travis asked, directing the question to Darrell.

“This is my first time, actually. Barnaby suggested it.”

Travis smiled and glanced at Barnaby. “Yeah, he suggested it to me, too.”

Barnaby looked suspiciously innocent. “What about you, Mr. Llewellyn? Ever been here?”

His head buried in the menu, Nathan mumbled, “No.”

The waitress came by, looking even more harried than before. “Is this a separate check?”

“No,” Travis said smoothly. “I’ll take care of it.”

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“What would you like?”

“I’ll have what he’s having,” Travis and Nathan spoke at once, but while Travis indicated what Darrell had, Nathan indicated the salad Barnaby ate.

“Fine.” She scribbled it down and hurried off.

“Matches made in heaven,” Barnaby murmured.

Darrell kicked the man in the shin. Ignoring the glare from Barnaby, he then turned back to Travis, trying to think of a neutral subject for them all to discuss. He really couldn’t think of anything. He was so bad at small talk. He didn’t like sports, and politics and religion were usually too hot of topics to discuss with people he knew well let alone co-workers.

“What were you talking about when we got here?” Travis asked into the uncomfortable silence.

“Actually—”

“Tina Turner,” Darrell said quickly, his stomach sinking thinking of Barnaby spilling the beans.

Travis smiled. “I like her music for the most part.”

“Yeah, me, too.”

“What about you, Nathan?” Travis asked.

Nathan look startled. “What?”

“Do you know Tina Turner?”

The man cleared his throat. “She has very nice legs, doesn’t she?”

* * *

Darrell blinked and tried unsuccessfully to read the blurry numbers on his computer screen. He removed his glasses to see if they were smudged even though he’d only just cleaned them. He

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put them back on and shook his head. There was no hope for it. His eyes were just too damned tired. And no wonder. It was just shy of seven o'clock. He'd wanted to get this invoice in before leaving, but he just couldn't do it anymore. He powered off his computer, stretched and yawned loud in the empty, quiet office.

As he got up from his chair, he heard a loud banging coming from down the hall. Frowning, he turned that way, peering into empty offices as he went. To his knowledge everyone else had left. He supposed it was possible the firm had a rat, which he would be speaking to the office manager tomorrow about if that were the case, but if so, the rat must be one big and loud bastard.

Approaching the end of the hall, Darrell realized the light was on in Travis's office. Blowing out a breath of relief, he poked his head around the door. Sure enough, there was the man himself seated behind his desk. He whacked a stapler on the side of the desk.

Darrell cleared this throat. "Hey, I didn't know anyone else was still here."

Travis put down the offending stapler, his cheeks slightly pink. "Hi, Darrell. Sorry, did I disturb you? Damn thing is jammed."

"No. I was just getting up to leave when I heard you. I thought I was the only lunatic here so late on a Friday night."

Travis sighed. "Yeah, I guess I should go home."

The way he said it gave Darrell pause. "You don't want to go home?"

"To my empty house? Not really." Travis shook his head. "But I can't stay here all weekend either." He stood.

Darrell almost commented on how he could hardly believe someone as hot as Travis didn't have a date, but figured he probably shouldn't say something like that. Should he?

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“What?” Travis asked, looking at him expectantly.

“I just...I would have expected you’d have dates lined up I guess.”

Travis laughed. “Hardly. But I suppose I understand what you mean.”

“You do?”

“I would have thought the same thing of you. Great looking, smart guy like you. I’ll bet you have men eating out of your hand.”

Now *that* gave Darrell some ideas. “Definitely not.” His earlier conversation with Barnaby playing through his head, Darrell decided to take a chance. It might be a huge mistake, but, life was full of risks. Or it should be anyway. “I was going to go home and grill some fish. If you really have nothing else to do, why don’t you come over?”

Travis stilled and didn’t respond for so long, Darrell wished he could take the words back or crawl into a crack in the floor. He’d just made a total fool out of himself. His stomach in knots, he opened his mouth to say something...anything. It was a joke, maybe.

“That sounds great,” Travis said. “Are you sure you have enough for me?”

Darrell felt lightheaded and giddy just that fast. He told himself to keep it cool. Just because Travis had agreed didn’t mean the man was interested in him, it could be that he was just nice. And lonely, of course.

“Yes, I have two swordfish steaks. It’ll be perfect.”

CHAPTER 5

“This is a great little condo,” Travis said, looking around Darrell’s townhome. It was a one-level two bedroom with a pretty decent sized kitchen with granite counters.

“Yeah,” Darrell said, taking a bottle of chardonnay out of the fridge and pouring two glasses. “The little part is the problem. Someday I intend to get a house with a nice yard. One big enough for a garden maybe.”

“That sounds cool. How many rooms?” Travis took a sip of the dry wine. He sat at the bar counter looking into the kitchen.

Darrell reached into a cabinet and took out a portable grill. “I’d want at least three. This place has two bedrooms and even though I live by myself I always find I could use another. Family visiting, that sort of thing. I’d like to be able to turn one into an exercise

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room.”

“You work out?” Travis wasn’t surprised. Beneath the pressed dress shirt Darrell always wore to work lurked muscular arms he itched to caress.

Darrell nodded. “When I have the time. I have a gym membership. I also play a bit of basketball and golf. But if I had my own equipment I could save the membership fees and have access to it more often. I’d like to keep a room open for the occasional overnight guest which is why I’d prefer to have three bedrooms. Plus, someday I’d like to find someone to share the house with me.”

“I’ve got a four bedroom house myself and let me tell you with just me the place gets damn lonely.” Travis sighed. He had a feeling he sounded as pathetic as he felt.

“Mind doing the salad?” Darrell asked, taking out a bag of mixed greens from the fridge as well as tomatoes and dressing.

“Nope, give it here.”

“So why the big house? I’m really kind of surprised to hear you don’t have a significant other, actually.”

Travis smiled. “Really? Why?”

The other man shrugged. “A great looking guy like you with a successful career and a nice house? Who wouldn’t jump at the chance to be with you?”

Travis felt the heat in his cheeks and knew he was both blushing and warmed by Darrell’s words. It was clear enough now Darrell did have an interest in him.

“Well, it’s been a while but I did have a live-in boyfriend a few years ago.” He tossed the cherry tomatoes, lettuce, and salad dressing in the big wooden bowl Darrell had handed to him.

“What happened?”

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“Alan died in a car accident.”

Darrell gave him a sympathetic look. “I’m sorry.”

“Yeah. It’s been close to five years now. It’s still hard not to think about him, though, you know? How about you? I’d say the same about you, Darrell. How come you aren’t seeing anyone?”

“I’ve had a few casual relationships,” Darrell admitted, flipping the fish on the grill. “Nothing really serious, though. As tough as it is to be a gay man, being a gay black man is sometimes harder. All my relationships, whatever they’ve been, have always been with other African Americans. A lot of them were still in the closet.”

“You’ve never dated anyone of another race?”

Darrell shook his head and plated the grilled fish. He smiled a little. “Not so far. I’m a little shy, to be honest. It’s kind of hard for me to go outside my comfort zone.”

Not knowing what to say to that, or if he even needed to say anything, Travis kept quiet. He wasn’t really sure if inviting him over was totally a casual, let’s-be-friends-kind-of-thing, or if Darrell wanted something more interesting. He used to be more aggressive before he’d mellowed in his relationship with Alan, but now he was completely out of practice.

“Let’s go eat in the dining room.” Darrell led the way to the table where they ate their fish in companionable silence for a while. After taking a couple of sips of wine, Darrell finally spoke. “What about you? Do you work out?”

Travis chuckled. “Nah. I was gifted with a naturally fast metabolism. Which is pretty fortunate because I never seem to have the time for going to a gym. I’ve had memberships but I never used them so I stopped wasting my money.”

“You are lucky,” Darrell agreed. “And I can see that you’re in pretty fine shape.” He looked away quickly as though embarrassed

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he'd said too much.

"Thanks," Travis said softly. "I guess I'm okay for a guy who just turned thirty-five."

Darrell's gaze flew back to his. "You did? When?"

Now he felt foolish for mentioning it. He was not a child pouting because no one cared about his birthday. "Oh, pretty recently," he said evasively.

The other man would have none of it. "When?"

"Yesterday." He knew by the heat radiating from his damn fair cheeks he was blushing furiously.

Darrell dropped his fork. "Why didn't you say so?"

He shrugged. "I'm a little old to make a big deal out of my birthday, don't you think?"

"No. What about your family and friends? They didn't celebrate with you?"

"I lost my family some years ago when I was a teen." There was just no way he was going to say he had no friends. He took a large swallow of wine.

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that as well. Tomorrow is Saturday. What do you want to do?"

"You don't have to."

Darrell smiled. "I know. What do you like to do? Do you golf?"

"Um, not really."

"Hmm. How about the ocean? You like the beach?"

Travis nodded. "Yes."

"Okay, great. How about a harbor cruise then? I've got an old friend from high school. Runs one of those three hour cruises out of Ventura. We'll go there."

"A three hour tour? Am I Gilligan or the Skipper?" Travis

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chuckled.

Darrell grinned. "I'd be the professor. Maybe you should be Mr. Howell."

"Figures you'd choose the old guy as me." He shook his head, feeling immensely better and suddenly looking forward to tomorrow. "Okay, what time should I come get you?"

"Why don't you stay here? I've got the spare room. You can stay there. We can watch a movie tonight. I've got some action flicks or some other movies. You can pick."

Travis couldn't help but note Darrell suggested he stay in the spare room. A subtle signal nothing would happen that night between them. But that was all right with Travis. He didn't want to push anything. There was a slight problem though.

"I don't have a change of clothes."

Darrell stood and cleared their now empty plates. "I've got several pairs of shorts and some shirts that would fit you. Or we can just stop by your place on the way to the harbor and you can change then."

Seemed like Darrell had an answer for any argument he had to give. "Great, sounds like a plan."

* * *

Darrell couldn't remember the last time he'd enjoyed an evening like this. They'd watched all the various *Die Hard* movies, laughing and commenting throughout them. They'd switched to beers and he'd made popcorn. Really he hadn't wanted the night to end. At least Travis wasn't going home.

But Darrell had always been a cautious man. Starting anything, even casual sex with Travis, could get complicated. Since the firm

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was Travis's, if something had happened between them it would be Darrell who'd be forced to find new employment.

That didn't stop him from wanting to bend Travis over the sofa and fucking him deep and slow.

Forcing the tempting thoughts from his mind before it gave him an obvious boner, Darrell stood and glanced at the clock. Nearly one in the morning. "The spare room is all set up. The sheets are clean and I left a pair of pajamas in there for you if you'd like to change. They should fit well enough for you to sleep in them anyway."

Travis stood and stretched, his rumpled white dress shirt straining across his biceps and abs. His mouth dry, Darrell stared openly. He'd found white guys attractive before, though he hadn't pursued it, but never like this. Every move Travis made riveted him. Every curve of his sensual, slightly plump lips fascinated him.

"Great," Travis said. "I'm bushed."

He let Travis go in front of him down the hall toward the bedrooms, unabashedly gawking at the man's perfect round ass. Really, his resolve to take things slow with Travis began to waiver. Maybe just a goodnight kiss would satisfy him. After all it had been sort of a date.

Travis turned to him as they reached the spare room, a small smile on his lips, and before he could lose his nerve, Darrell pushed him against the wall and ground his mouth over Travis's, squelching the man's gasp of surprise.

As soon as their chests melded together, as soon as his hands slid up Travis's arms, as soon as his pelvis fitted against Travis's, Darrell knew the goodnight kiss had been a mistake. Or the idea that it would satiate him had been anyway. His dick was so hard he thought it might tear through both his briefs and his slacks.

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Travis moaned low and opened his mouth to allow the intrusion of Darrell's tongue. For just a minute, second really, Darrell intended to pull away and return to his original plan, but then Travis's hand crept between their bodies and cupped his erection.

Fuck.

And that's just what he intended to do. He tore his mouth away with effort and asked the burning question in his feverish mind. "Do you top, bottom or both?"

It sometimes broke the flow of things, Darrell knew, but it was a question that would ultimately need to be asked.

Travis blinked, his sky blue eyes glazed with passion mixed with confusion. "Both," he finally said.

Thank God.

"Great." His lips returned to Travis's now plumped lips from his kisses and he reached to the man's pants to undo the zipper. His heart nearly stopped when he remembered he didn't have the goods. "Damn it," he growled.

"What?"

"You don't happen to have a condom and lube, do you? Or even just the rubber will do."

Travis's cheeks reddened. "Um, no."

"Well, damn. I don't have condoms or lube." Until that moment he hadn't needed the supplies well...for a very long time. It was way too late to visit a store. He knew of a drug store nearby that was open all night but—

"Darrell." Travis's hand stroked his jaw, turning his attention back to the object of his lust. He raised a blond brow. "We still have our hands."

Darrell grinned. "We sure do." His fingers, which had stilled on the zipper of Travis's pants, now got moving again. He quickly

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took care of the zipper, and pushed the offending garments, both pants and boxers, down far enough and closed his hand around the man's large erect cock.

"Ah, God." Travis closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wall, breathing heavy. His long golden lashes resting on his pink-tinged cheeks was one of the sexiest things Darrell had ever seen. His cock pulsed in his own pants, reminding him it wanted some necessary attention, too.

Releasing Travis's cock for just a moment, he quickly undid his own pants, and grasped hold of both their cocks, stroking the lengths, rubbing the heated flesh against each other. Jolts of electric pleasure shot through his dick, tightening his balls. It had been too long, he was so turned on, it wouldn't take long.

Darrell separated their bodies just enough so he could look down at his fist, working furiously on their erections. A pale drop of pre-cum dotted Travis's cock. The contrast of his dark brown cock rubbing against the other man's pale, slightly pink one sent a thrill up his spine. He wrenched his gaze from their cocks just long enough to thoroughly kiss Travis, thrusting his tongue into the moist heat of the man's mouth, thinking of how soon, maybe as soon as tomorrow, he'd be thrusting his dick in Travis's ass.

Travis tensed and gasped, drawing his attention once more to their erections. Darrell pumped them harder, faster, watching them jump, and feeling them pulse in his grasp. His own release tore through him, wringing him dry even as Travis's cock shot out creamy white jism to join his more clear fluid.

Releasing his grip on their cocks, Darrell dropped to his knees on the floor. Travis leaned against the wall panting heavily.

"Damn," Travis said in between pants. "That was...wow, you're not shy there, are you?"

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“Hmm?”

Travis laughed. “I always thought you were pretty shy, you know, and if anything was going to happen between us, I’d have to make the move.”

Darrell grinned. “Yeah, I am shy. At the office.”

“Apparently.”

He chuckled. “And I was going to take things slow.”

CHAPTER 6

“I didn’t mean for you to drive to the harbor,” Darrell protested the next morning. He sat in the passenger seat of Travis’s sedan watching the man take a bite of his Egg McMuffin. They’d just stopped at McDonald’s after first stopping at Travis’s house in Glendale for an overnight bag.

Without even having to broach the subject, he’d quickly noted Travis had packed the bag with condoms and lube, too. Which, Darrell admitted, put him in a very good mood.

“I don’t mind,” Travis assured him. He smiled briefly and returned his gaze to the freeway.

After their little hallway romp, he’d let Travis go to sleep in the spare room, unsure if he should simply ask the man to share his bed for the night. To sleep only, of course. With his past casual

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relationships the subject of staying over never came up. Judging by the overnight bag and necessary supplies, Travis intended to stay over again that night, and Darrell had fully intended to ask him to, if he hadn't decided that on his own.

Darrell finished his own breakfast sandwich and stuffed the wrapper in the paper sack. The sky was slightly overcast, but his friend who owned the boat advised him that wouldn't be an issue for their harbor cruise when Darrell called him that morning.

"Ever been on one of these?"

"Alan and I went whale watching once a few years ago. I did pretty well, but Alan ended up puking all over one of the crewmen of the boat. They weren't amused." Travis chuckled.

Darrell laughed, too, though he couldn't entirely squelch a bit of jealousy that sparked at the mention of Alan. He knew Travis's former lover was gone and all, but from the few times the man had mentioned him it seemed clear theirs had been a great love. Darrell had never had that.

"How about you? I'm guessing with a friend owning the boat, you've been out a lot."

"Not as much as I once did, but yeah, I used to. Casper and I were once friends with benefits," Darrell admitted.

Travis shot him a sharp look. "The boat owner?"

"Yeah. His dad owned the boat before him. He bought it from his dad when his dad decided to sell the business. We were never serious or anything. Casper is bisexual and I think pretty much used me to experiment with." Darrell shrugged. "Anyway all that has long been over."

"Okay." Travis frowned a bit, but kept his eyes on the road ahead of him. His body had gone a bit rigid as well.

"Something wrong?"

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“No. Not really.”

Darrell watched him silently for a bit. “Yeah, there is. What?”

“Just didn’t realize this guy was a former boyfriend.”

“Casper was never my boyfriend. I told you, just friends with a few benefits. Nothing major. Blow jobs. We never had full sex.”

He directed Travis to the harbor where Casper docked his boat, and he pulled into the parking lot and parked the Honda.

The sky was still partly cloudy, but the air had warmed up some. They grabbed windbreakers out of the trunk and headed down to the landing where Casper stood waiting for them.

Casper was a six foot four African American man who’d played high school football. Like Darrell, Casper hadn’t come out as gay until college. Though they’d been friendly, they’d never had enough in common to become a couple and had eventually decided they were better off being friends sans benefits.

Up until the idea came to Darrell for the harbor cruise he hadn’t actually seen Casper for several months.

Darrell noticed immediately the way Casper’s gaze swept over Travis with obvious interest. His gut twisted. He hadn’t given much thought to Casper being attracted to Travis. He guessed he should have because the man was gorgeous.

“Hey, Darrell, how are you doing?” Casper smiled and patted Darrell playfully on the shoulder. “This must be Travis. Darrell spoke very highly of you, Travis. I’m Casper.”

“Nice to meet you.” Travis shook his hand.

“Well, come on, the boat’s ready if you are.” Casper led them through a gate and down a steep wooden walkway to where his boat, *Barracuda*, was docked.

While Travis boarded first, Casper pulled Darrell aside. “I packed a picnic lunch for you just like you asked. It’s in the galley.

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Once I get out of the harbor and on to the open sea, I'll make sure to leave you two alone."

Feeling much better, Darrell smiled. "Thanks, man, I owe you big time."

"If things don't work out between you and him, I want his number."

Darrell opened his mouth to say, "Fat chance," but thought better of it and just shrugged. He followed Travis on to the boat.

* * *

Travis let the cool sea breeze hit his face, smiling into the wind. They'd been out on the water for about an hour now and they'd viewed all sorts of wildlife including a bunch of dolphins following in the boat's wake. It had been a great day.

He'd been a little nervous at first, knowing Darrell had something of a history with Casper. But Casper had basically left them alone shortly after they got started.

"This is great, isn't it?" Darrell asked, leaning a hip against the railing.

"It's perfect, thank you. It's the nicest after birthday I've ever had."

Darrell chuckled. "I'm glad. I have to admit I was a little leery when I suggested it. I've not done the dating thing very well. I'm pretty shy and as a general rule keep to myself and a few friends and family. I've never dated a white man before."

Travis nodded. "I've never dated an African American either. I guess this is new for both of us."

"I've never dated my boss either."

Travis's cheeks flamed. "Well, if it makes you feel better, the

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whole job thing is the first time for me, too.”

Darrell touched his arm lightly. “It does. How did you meet Alan?”

“At the grocery store, actually.” Travis smiled at the memory. “He asked my opinion on cereal. Really, he admitted it was just a way to introduce himself to me. Said he’d seen me at that store a few times. Anyway, we ended up going for coffee.”

“Speaking of eating, follow me.” Darrell smiled and tugged his hand to follow him to where the galley of the boat was. Travis saw a picnic basket had been set out on the small table inside. “Sit down there and I’ll break out lunch.”

Travis sat on the wooden bench and waited to see what Darrell would produce. His grin widened when the first item that emerged from the basket was two champagne flutes followed by a half-sized bottle of champagne.

“You think of everything,” he murmured.

“My attempt at being romantic.” Darrell ducked his head.

Travis reached for his hand. “It’s sweet. I like it.”

Darrell smiled shyly. “Yeah? Good. I’ll pour us glasses.”

The small bottle had a twist-off cap rather than a cork and he quickly filled the glasses and handed one to Travis. He was finding it rather nice to be wooed. He’d done most of the wooing with Alan. And it was something he wouldn’t have expected from Darrell.

“Now, we have chicken salad sandwiches, apples, chips, and potato salad.”

“Yum.”

Darrell sorted out the food and they ate and drank, just enjoying each other’s company and the views of the ocean and Channel Islands just outside the galley window.

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“Thank you again. This was really great.”

“Did you have nice birthdays with Alan?” Darrell asked as he repacked the picnic basket.

Travis shook his head and smiled a little when Darrell’s eyebrows shot up. “Alan was pretty self-centered. Don’t get me wrong, I loved him, we had a nice life together, but his attention span wasn’t great unless it centered around him. He’d forget my birthday all the time but if I forgot his he’d go ape-shit.”

“Well, that sucks.” Darrell ducked his head again. “Sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.”

He laughed. “Don’t apologize. It did suck. I overlooked a lot where Alan was concerned. Probably too much, really. But you know what? Enough about Alan and more about sucking. As in me sucking you.”

Darrell’s dark eyes widened. “Here?”

Travis glanced toward the door. “I don’t see Casper, do you?”

“No, but he could come along any time.” Darrell’s teeth tugged his bottom lip, clearly torn. Both embarrassment and interest shown in his eyes.

It was rather bold of him, really. Travis didn’t make a habit of sex with others nearby, but he wanted to give pleasure to Darrell.

“I won’t if you’re uncomfortable,” he forced himself to say.

Darrell’s uncertain gaze lingered on the door to the galley for a moment more before he slowly nodded.

His heart hammering, Travis asked, “Okay?”

“Yes.”

Travis rose from the bench and went to Darrell’s side. He leaned down to place a quick kiss on the man’s too-tempting lips, then he went onto his knees next to him. “Just stay sitting there.”

Darrell swallowed, his Adam’s apple sliding down his throat.

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He undid the button of Darrell's beige slacks and lowered the zipper, deliberately brushing the man's erection with his fingers. Travis smiled at the sight of Darrell's navy briefs. Reaching in, he pulled the heavy, hard cock through the opening in his pants. A creamy dot of pre-cum appeared on the fat brown head. "Yum."

Darrell shook and placed his hands on Travis's shoulders. At first he thought Darrell intended to push him away, but then he realized he was drawing him closer. He closed his mouth around the smooth tip, drawing it inside the moist warmth.

"Oh, God," Darrell whispered almost reverently.

Cupping the man's ball sac, he pulled him in deeper, pausing just long enough to stop his gag reflexes from kicking in. Darrell's shaft was long, thick, and delicious. Travis worked the hard rod in and out, squeezing the heavy balls, and loving the low moans coming from Darrell.

"I'm...*Travis*."

He knew the other man was close so he sucked harder and deeper still. He placed one hand on Darrell's butt cheek, lightly caressing it even and urged him closer.

Darrell threaded his fingers through Travis's hair and pumped. When he stiffened, Travis opened his throat, anticipating the flood of cum that filled his mouth. He waited until Darrell went limp before he gently eased him out of his mouth. He leaned back on his haunches and surveyed his handiwork, or rather, the aftermath. Darrell's eyes were half closed, his lips curved in a small satisfied smile.

"It was good then?" Travis teased.

"Very good." Darrell adjusted himself and re-zipped his pants. "A little embarrassing though. I certainly hope Casper didn't walk by."

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Travis used the bench to hoist himself up. “Honestly, I wouldn’t know. Never even looked at the door.”

Darrell’s warm gaze settled on Travis’s crotch. “What about you?”

“Well, I admit it’s a little uncomfortable right now, but I think it’ll go down pretty quick.”

“You don’t want me to...you know?”

He laughed. “No. Let’s enjoy the rest of the harbor cruise. There’s plenty of time for that later when we get back.”

CHAPTER 7

Darrell jolted awake and for a moment looked around blearily, wondering where he was. He blinked.

“Hey, finally woke up, huh?” The sound of Travis’s deep, sexy voice had him fully awake in seconds. They were just getting off the freeway exit near his condo.

He brushed a hand over his face. “Sorry, man, I didn’t mean to fall asleep on you.”

“No worries, I had the radio on.”

“Car rides always make me sleepy,” Darrell admitted.

“I don’t mind driving. I often wished I’d been driving the night Alan died.” Travis sighed. “I don’t know that I would have done much better. We’d both been drinking. We were damn stupid.”

“People make mistakes.”

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“Yeah, and that was a doozy.” He grimaced. “I never drive if I have even one drink now. Unless it’s been hours like today.”

“Are you hungry?” Darrell asked.

“Not terribly. Why don’t we order a pizza later or something?”

“Sounds like a plan to me.” He pushed the button on his garage door opener as they approached it. One of the best parts of his condo is it had come with a two-car garage, so he always had a space for a guest to park. Not that he had that many guests, of course.

Back inside his condo, Darrell felt a little nervous again. The day...the weekend actually...had been amazing. Never in his dreams had he imagined Travis Anderson would be spending the weekend with him. Hot guys like Travis had never shown any interest in him. So, he supposed, it was fairly natural to be nervous.

“Where should I put my overnight bag?” Travis held the duffel bag he’d packed earlier when they’d gone to his place.

Deciding not to be coy, Darrell said, “In my bedroom. This way.”

He’d been tempted to let Travis go down the hall before him so he could look his fill at that very fine ass. But he was supposed to be leading the way. When they reached his room, he pointed to the opposite side of the bed he liked to sleep on. “You can set it down there on the floor next to the bed or there’s a chair there, too.”

Travis hoisted it on the chair and unzipped it, his back to Darrell.

Feeling unsure again, Darrell fidgeted. He thought it would be too crude to say something like...“pull out those condoms”...even if that’s what he wanted to say. Should he offer Travis a drink? Ask him if he wanted to watch a movie? Order that pizza? He wasn’t sure Travis wanted to get naked as soon as they returned.

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He did, of course. He hadn't been able to think about much else, really.

Finally after what seemed an eternity but probably was a few seconds, Travis turned around to look at him. Darrell's breath stilled, his pulse raced. Travis held a strip of condoms in one hand and a bottle of lube in the other. His absurdly beautiful turquoise eyes sparkled.

Darrell's mouth went dry. He wet his lips with his tongue, feeling heat infuse his cheeks and flow through his torso straight down to his already rising cock. Clenching his fists to get himself somewhat under control, he smiled. "Great minds think alike."

Travis threw the supplies on the bed and tugged off his shirt, revealing his toned, slightly tanned chest and abs.

Oh, yeah.

He unbuttoned his own shirt, shrugging it off his shoulders. Darrell moved slowly, more interested in watching the beautiful man in front of him discard his clothes. Travis's long, elegant fingers moved to the snap of his jeans. It seemed almost like slow motion to Darrell as the zipper slowly lowered.

Darrell's hard, aching cock pressed painfully against his own pants. He unfastened them and barely kept from telling Travis to turn around while he slipped the pants off his ass.

Travis lowered his pants to his ankles. He toed off his Vans and then stepped out of the jeans. He stood in only navy boxers. He smiled. "What about you?"

"Me?" Darrell stared.

"Your pants."

"Yeah... Yeah." Darrell shucked both his pants and briefs. His freed erection curved slightly up, eager to get down to business.

Travis scooted his boxers off, turning around and bending over,

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showing off the pink puckered opening between the two perfect globes of his pale white ass.

For a moment, Darrell just gawked. The man was beautiful. Sleek and graceful and toned. His gaze shifted slightly to the bed. Sure there would be time for that. But for now he couldn't stop imagining taking Travis against the wall.

"Stay there, just like that." Darrell grabbed the lube off the bed and tore off a single condom. He walked up behind Travis and spread his hands over the smooth cheeks.

"What do you have in mind?" Travis murmured.

Darrell pushed him flat against the wall. "That give you an idea?"

Travis exhaled and spread his legs a little as he braced his hands against the wall. "Damn, the wall's cold."

"Sorry," Darrell said. "I'll warm you up."

He tore open the condom and rolled it over his aching shaft. Darrell massaged the firm cheeks beneath his hands. He leaned forward and placed a kiss on Travis's quivering back.

"Mmm."

Encouraged by Travis's low moan, Darrell trailed his lips up his shoulders to the pulse of Travis's throat. The man smelled clean, like soap. His mouth closed over a soft earlobe, his teeth sinking into the delicate flesh.

Darrell smoothed his hand down the front of Travis's thigh and then lightly brushed the man's erection.

Travis pushed back enough to rub Darrell's sheathed cock. Jolts of powerful lust shot threw him. He couldn't hold back any longer. He oozed lube onto his fingers. First he liberally coated himself before slipping two digits into Travis's puckered entrance.

The other man removed one hand from the wall and crept down

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to his cock. Darrell swatted it away. “Not yet.”

Travis returned his hand to the wall, but pushed back against him impatiently. “Fuck me.”

Needing no other urging, Darrell replaced his fingers with the head of his cock, pushing in slow and deep, easing in until he slid all the way, flush with Travis’s perfect cheeks. Travis inhaled, quivering just a bit beneath him.

He waited just a second, reveling in the feel of Travis clenching around his dick. But as good as it felt, he couldn’t hold still for long. With one hand clutched around Travis’s middle and the other closing around the man’s heavy erection, he began to thrust, long and slow, angling himself in the exact position to nail Travis’s prostate.

“God, Darrell. Please.”

Darrell closed his eyes and increased his pace. Fingers of pleasure fluttered up his spine, tightening his balls. A low growl escaped his lips. He released Travis to push him harder against the wall, slamming into him again and again.

Travis aggressively pushed back, matching him thrust for thrust. His hand slipped from the wall to grab his cock, stroking it.

“Travis.” He groaned, ramming one last hard and deep thrust as his orgasm slammed through him. He pulled Travis close, his back against Darrell’s chest, as the man’s cum splattered the wall.

Reluctantly, Darrell withdrew, relaxing his hold, but not letting go of Travis entirely. He nuzzled his neck. “God, that was great.”

“I agree.” Travis leaned back against him and yawned.

“Hungry? Ready for that pizza?”

“Yeah.” Travis turned to face him and they exchanged several breathless kisses that almost caused his cock to rise again.

When they broke apart, Darrell suggested, “Why don’t you rest

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in bed for a bit? I'm going to take a quick shower and then I'll call."

"Excellent plan."

* * *

Later in the week, Darrell was getting ready to shut down for the day. He was heading over to Travis's house for dinner and to spend the night. Since the prior weekend they'd spent almost every night together. He hadn't seen Travis today as he'd been at a trial all day, but he couldn't wait.

Things were going well. He was a little worried about the boss-employee dynamic. If their relationship didn't work out, he'd be forced to find another job. He liked working for Anderson, Llewellyn, and Stevens. Darrell was not a fool, though, and he realized a bad breakup with Travis would cost him his job.

He didn't think Travis or the others would fire him, but more likely he would quit, too uncomfortable to work there.

But he was getting way ahead of himself. They'd just started seeing other and certainly weren't close to having difficulties.

"Hey there." Barnaby's head appeared around the cubicle wall.

"Hi, Barnaby. I'm surprised you're still here."

Barnaby nodded. "Doing some overtime. You look happy. Love life treating you well?"

Darrell smiled a little at Barnaby's knowing smirk. "Pretty good."

"At least things are going well for one of us."

Darrell pushed away from his desk and stood. "Problems? I'm surprised to hear it. I'd expect you'd have a different man at your beck and call every night."

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Barnaby shrugged. "Have fun tonight. Don't do anything I wouldn't."

Darrell studied him for a few seconds. There was something definitely off about the young blond. "You're quite subdued."

Barnaby's raised one eyebrow. "Me? Hardly. Have a good night."

He decided he wouldn't push it. Though he'd been getting friendlier with Barnaby lately they still weren't good enough friends for him to be too nosy.

Darrell had just gotten into his car when his cell phone rang. His caller ID indicated it was his little brother, Micah. "What's up kiddo?"

"Nothing much. Just wondering if you wanted to go see a movie or something."

"I'm busy tonight, actually." It felt strange to actually be able to say that.

He figured his brother thought it was strange, too, considering the lengthy silence. He cleared his throat. "Micah?"

"You working late?"

"No, I have a date."

More heavy silence. "A-a date?"

God, was he that pathetic to his family? "Well...uh...I'm seeing someone."

"You mean you have a boyfriend?"

Darrell grimaced. "You don't have to sound quite so incredulous. Yes, I think I do, yes."

Micah chuckled. "Sorry, I just, well, you're not that outgoing so I was a bit surprised that's all. When do we get to meet him?"

"Meet him?" Darrell shook his head, forgetting for a moment Micah couldn't see him. "It's a bit early for that."

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“Bring him to the family dinner a week from Sunday.”

Darrell’s stomach twisted. “I’ll think about it.”

“You know Mama will insist as soon as she hears.”

Oh, hell.

“She’s not going to hear, Micah.”

Micah merely laughed. “Talk to you later.”

Darrell glared at his phone and tossed it on the seat next to him.
If he didn’t get going he would be late.

CHAPTER 8

Travis reluctantly opened the passenger door of Darrell's sedan. He'd just parked and turned it off in front of his mother's house. They'd been seeing each other for two solid weeks now and somehow Travis had been talked into this family dinner.

Given his experience with Alan's family, Travis was more than a little nervous. Of course, at one time he'd gotten along with Alan's family. Before Alan's drinking got to be too much for any of them to handle, really, and before the accident.

Resting his hand against the roof of the car, Travis studied the single-family home situated in the Los Angeles suburb of Culver City. Darrell had told him his older brother bought the house for his mother five years before. It was a simple ranch-style painted a pale blue with white trim.

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“Okay?” Darrell asked.

“Sure.” He forced a smile and followed Darrell up the walkway to the house. He was a trial attorney who faced tough opponents every damn day.

Get a grip.

Darrell reached for his hand and gave it a quick squeeze. He twisted the knob. “Mama? It’s Darrell.”

They stepped down a short hallway and turned left into what was apparently a living room. On an elegant mauve sofa sat a middle-aged African American woman, with her ear to a phone. She smiled briefly at them.

“Jen? I have to go, my son has arrived. Yes, I’ll call you later. Bye.” She rose and came toward them. “Darrell, how lovely.”

“Mama, how are you feeling?”

Mrs. Lincoln was an attractive woman with high cheekbones and sparkling dark eyes. She wore her hair pulled tight into a severe bun and was dressed in an A-Line black skirt with an ivory blouse. She offered her cheek to her son, who quickly kissed her.

“I’m all right. I do have a smidge of a headache. This must be your...friend.”

Travis heard the slight hitch in her voice, but he pretended not to and smiled, taking the hand she gave to him.

“Yes, this is my mother, Olivia Lincoln,” Darrell said to Travis.

“Travis Anderson, Mrs. Lincoln.”

“I’m pleased to meet you, Travis. As I’m sure my son has told you, he’s never brought a man to meet us before. I’m glad you could join us for dinner.”

“Thank you for inviting me.”

She smiled. “Well, I’m going to go check on dinner. Micah is getting it ready. It’s just simple spaghetti.”

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“Sounds great.”

Mrs. Lincoln left the living room and Darrell turned to him. “You look nervous.”

“I am,” he admitted.

“It’s fine,” Darrell assured him. “Nothing to worry about. Would you like a drink? We should have beer or wine.”

“A glass of wine would be great.”

Darrell patted his shoulder. “Red okay? I think she has some pinot noir.”

“Great.”

And then he was alone in Mrs. Lincoln’s living room. He wondered if he ought to sit. Besides the mauve couch, there were two chairs. One green easy chair and one rose colored high back Queen Anne style chair. He decided the easy chair would be much more comfortable and lowered himself into it.

He straightened when he heard footsteps. Travis hoped it would be Darrell, because his palms were sweating at the prospect of making small talk with Mrs. Lincoln.

“Here you go,” Darrell said, coming into the room. He handed the glass of wine to Travis. “Looks like dinner is ready.”

Travis stood. “Good, I’m starved.”

* * *

After dinner, Travis followed Darrell out into his mother’s backyard. She had a large running fountain shaped like a fairy. Next to that was an extravagant vegetable garden.

“Mama spends a lot of time out here,” Darrell explained.

“It’s really nice.”

Darrell closed his hand over Travis’s. “I think it went well.

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Mama and Micah both seemed to really like you.”

Travis smiled. “Yeah? I hope so. I was on my best behavior.”

“I admit I was a bit nervous.” Darrell glanced toward the back door and then pulled Travis closer. Their lips met. It was a soft, gentle kiss Travis suspected was meant to be brief. But he opened his mouth and the other man’s tongue plunged in and his arms closed around Travis’s waist.

Travis put his arms around Darrell’s neck even as the kiss deepened.

The sliding glass door slid open and Darrell tore his mouth away, almost pushing him. They broke apart in a hurry, Travis feeling the heat in his cheeks. Damn, when did he go back to being embarrassed at being gay? He didn’t like the feeling, even though he supposed he understood where Darrell was coming from.

Mrs. Lincoln cleared her throat. “Micah could use some help in the kitchen with dessert, Darrell.”

Darrell smiled sheepishly. “Be right there.” He went past his mother into the house.

Travis waited for her to follow her son, but instead she walked farther outside and closed the slider. Small talk time. “Your garden is really spectacular. I’ve never been able to grow anything.”

“Thank you. It’s my pride and joy. Other than my sons, of course.” She came to stand next to him by the fountain. “I wonder if I might have a word with you.”

“Sure.”

“This isn’t an easy subject so I’ll just get straight to the point. I’d prefer it if you stopped seeing my son.”

Travis froze, his spine stiffening. Of all the things he had expected her to say, which really he’d had no clue what he *had* expected her to say, that wouldn’t have been in the top five. So,

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stupidly, he stared.

She held up a hand. "Let me explain before you judge me a monster. I've been forced to raise my three boys pretty much alone their whole lives. Even before my husband was killed he was hardly much of a father to them. I try to focus them on the positive, but the truth is my husband drank away much of the money he earned at his odd jobs. He was killed outside that bar because he and his friend were always at that bar. My point being, I've worked hard to be both a father and mother to those boys."

Travis sensed when she paused that she expected some sort of acknowledgement from him, so he said, "Okay."

She didn't look at him, but rather at the fountain. She crossed her arms across her chest. "Being African American, Darrell automatically faced prejudice in this world. When he told me he was gay I admit I was pretty upset."

He didn't say anything this time, but he knew already the direction she was going. Or thought he did anyway.

Mrs. Lincoln sighed. "I was afraid for him being black *and* gay. I love my son, so I had to accept. I thought, maybe someday, long into the future, Darrell would bring home a man he wanted to have a relationship with, but I expected that man to be African American like Darrell."

Travis exhaled slowly.

"I don't want my son hurt and I can't help but believe that adding yet another thing against him can't be good."

"And you think being with me is a thing against him?" he asked with a calmness he didn't really feel. He'd had experience with a lover's difficult family. Alan's family had been different, of course. They expected him to save Alan from himself.

"I'm not trying to be cruel, Travis, but an interracial

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relationship as Darrell's first real relationship is not good for him. That is why, I'm asking as his mother, for you to stop seeing him. Now, before things get more involved."

The back door opened and Micah called out, "Dessert is served."

* * *

Darrell drove away from his mother's house feeling distinctly uneasy. Travis had become very quiet over dessert. He responded when spoken to, and had even offered a smile or two, but something had definitely changed. His gut twisted with tension.

"Thanks again for meeting my family."

"Sure."

He swallowed. "You must be pretty tired."

"Yeah, I am," Travis said softly. "In fact, you know, I have an early case Monday and there are some documents I left at home. You should probably take me home instead of to your place."

Uh-oh, not good.

"Of course we can stop at your place," Darrell said, purposely misunderstanding.

"No, I mean, just take me home."

"Travis—"

"I'm just tired, Darrell."

He wanted to say Travis could sleep at his house, but guessed he would be fighting a losing battle. The muscle in his jaw jumped as he tightened his jaw. "Okay, no problem."

Darrell wanted to ask what happened. Was it something his family said to him, but he was getting too upset and he didn't want to deal with it while he was driving.

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When they reached Travis's house, the man got out without looking at him. His hand hesitated on the car door. "See you Monday, Darrell."

CHAPTER 9

Darrell stared unseeingly at his computer screen. He'd barely seen Travis since the Saturday they'd gone to meet his family. It was now the following Thursday.

He closed his eyes. He was going to have to quit. If this was Travis's way of breaking up with him, and it was pretty damn cowardly Darrell thought, then he would have to quit. It had been a terrible idea to get involved with Travis in the first place.

"Stupid," he muttered to himself and shut off his computer. It was late. After six already. He might as well go home to his lonely empty condo.

"Hey, D, you leaving?" Barnaby stopped in front of his cubicle. "I was just heading out myself."

"Is Travis still here?"

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“Yeah, he’s in his office. Came back from that trial about an hour ago. Closed the door and haven’t heard from him since.” Barnaby shrugged. “I got a date so I’m blowing the place. You want to walk out with me?”

Darrell nearly agreed. But...this was bullshit. If Travis didn’t want to see him anymore the man was going to say so. He’d been moping around all week and hadn’t gotten a straight answer, but he sure as hell wouldn’t leave the office tonight without one.

“No, I’m going to see Travis. Have a good night, Barnaby.”

Darrell walked down the long hallway to Travis’s office. He hesitated outside the door, his fist raised to knock. Then he lowered his hand. Suddenly he felt less sure, more defeated. He wasn’t the aggressive type. Not over stuff like this. It was true though, he’d never had experience with broken relationships.

Grimacing, Darrell rapped on the door.

“You can go home, Barnaby,” Travis’s voice called through the door.

He twisted the knob. “It’s not Barnaby.”

Sitting behind his big oak desk, Travis looked up from his paperwork. “Oh, hi.”

“Look, I don’t want to take up a lot of your time.” Darrell closed the door and came forward.

Travis nodded and gestured to a chair in front of his desk. “Have a seat.”

He took the chair and folded his hands in his lap, feeling awkward. He ducked his chin for a moment, but then raised his gaze to look at Travis. “Can I ask what I did?”

Travis set the pen he held tightly in his grasp on his desk. He inhaled. “Darrell, I’ve been trying to figure out how to tell you. I guess it’s not easy.”

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“You don’t want to see me anymore,” Darrell supplied.

“I think that would be for the best.”

“Why?”

The other man frowned. “Why?”

“I thought we were doing pretty well. Now, all of a sudden, you’ve shut down on me. I think I have a right to know what happened.”

Travis looked away.

“At least look at me.”

Travis did, then, but he didn’t look happy about it. “You want to know why, okay. I think you do deserve to know, because I really do like you, Darrell. A lot. Your mother asked me to stop seeing you.”

Darrell stared at him dumbfounded. “She what?”

“She said she didn’t approve of us.”

For a moment, he thought maybe he had entered *Twilight Zone*. He shook his head. “I don’t get it. Why didn’t you just tell me this? And why would you listen to her, Travis? It’s my life.”

“I know, but she’s your mother.” Travis sighed and ran his hand through his blond hair. “I really hate the idea of coming between you and your family, Darrell.”

Darrell was torn between relief that Travis’s problem with him was incredibly fixable and irritation at his mother for interfering in his budding relationship. He supposed he should have guessed.

“So basically when my mother told me she accepted my being gay she meant as long as I didn’t become involved with someone. I guess it’s easy to accept someone when they don’t have a partner, but not so easy when you’re faced with it.”

“Well, she specifically mentioned my being white.”

For a moment he saw red, but after blowing out a breath, he

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forced himself to calm down. "You'd think someone who had lived with so much prejudice her whole life wouldn't resort to it herself."

"Darrell—"

"Travis, while I appreciate you not wanting to get between me and my family, that's really not a problem. The only one who can cause problems with me is them. You aren't the cause."

"You say that now, but what about down the road? What if it got bad enough that they didn't want to see you or in order for them to see you, then you had to go by yourself?"

"That's still on them, not you. Look, my mother would probably have trouble accepting anyone I wanted to be with unless they were an African American woman ready to have a bunch of babies. That's not ever going to happen."

Travis reached across the desk and took hold of his hand. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you about this before."

He nodded. "I know. Just don't let my mother win. She doesn't get to say who I'm with. And believe me, I intend to have a long talk with her. I like you a lot, Travis. I mean, I really like you, and I think we could have something really great together."

Travis smiled. "I feel the same."

Darrell returned the smile, his mood much lighter than it had been all week. "Good, because I think I should quit."

"What?"

He almost laughed at the look of surprise on Travis's face. "Think about it. We are involved in a relationship now and it's only going to get more serious. This past week, I've been miserable working here and you've avoided me like the plague."

"I can do better."

"With my job skills and a great reference from here, I should

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be able to find a good job somewhere else.”

“Damn, I hate this.”

He smiled. “Me, too, but you know I’m right.”

Travis sighed. “Maybe.”

“I like working here, but I like you even more. Look, a guy like you liking a guy like me? It just doesn’t happen. You’re the kind of guy I had a crush on in high school. Pretty, athletic, popular.”

Travis opened his desk drawer, fiddled with something inside, and then stood and came around the desk. He knelt in front of Darrell and took both of his hands in his. “You’re wrong.”

“What?” Darrell blinked.

“I’m the lucky one. You’re really terrific. I’ve been attracted to you since you first walked into the office for your interview.”

“Yeah?”

“Oh, yeah. But like you said, you were an employee. And you were so damn shy sometimes. I’d try to get you to talk to me and you’d freeze up.”

“When was that?” Darrell asked, bemused.

“All the time. At the coffee maker, in the hallway. Remember the Fourth of July potluck? I tried to talk to you, but you ended up in the corner of the room talking to Mary.”

“I’ve never been good at talking to hot guys.” Darrell felt his cheeks warm. Hell, he was embarrassed even now. *Stupid*. “I used to think me being with someone like you would be only in my dreams.”

“I guess we’re both kind of crazy,” Travis said with a laugh. He rubbed his thumb over Darrell’s bottom lip, giving him goose bumps. He rose up on his knees and pulled Darrell’s mouth down to his for a deep, sensual kiss.

When the kiss ended, Darrell felt a bit lightheaded. “Um,

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maybe we should go to my place to continue this. Or yours.”

Travis winked. “I’ve got a better idea.” He leaned back on his haunches and reached into his pocket. He handed two items to Darrell, a pre-lubed condom and a little tiny travel pack of lube.

Darrell’s gaze met his. Travis’s grin was downright decadent. “What? Here?”

“Most definitely.”

“But—”

“No one else is here. Just us. And pretty soon you won’t be working here. Where’s the harm?”

He grinned. “You’d make a good devil trying to buy people’s souls.”

“Not your soul, Darrell. Just your ass.”

He swallowed heavily, too aroused to say much else. His balls ached even as his cock rose in his briefs.

“I’ll lock the door,” Travis whispered. He stood and walked over to the door of the office and turned the lock.

Darrell stood and unfastened his belt and dress slacks. He lowered them slowly to the floor. When he went to loosen his tie, Travis stopped him.

“No, leave it.” Travis approached him and laid a hand on Darrell’s left ass cheek. He squeezed it gently and then slid his hand around to the front Darrell’s briefs. His hand dipped in and cupped his erection.

“Oh, God.”

Travis walked around to the front him, never removing his hand. He leaned forward and ran the tip of his tongue along the seam of Darrell’s lips. Darrell quaked, his fractured breath shimmying out.

The other man grabbed Darrell’s pale blue tie with his other

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hand, yanking it just a little until their shirt covered chests were plastered together. The heat radiating from Travis was enough to scorch him. He moaned low in his throat, the sound a cross between a growl and a gasp just as Travis covered his mouth with his own.

Travis shoved Darrell's briefs down to his knees and then with another little pull on the tie, he maneuvered him so he was facedown on the desk, his bare ass on display for Travis's eyes.

"You have a great ass," Travis murmured.

He heard a rustle of clothes and turned his head enough to see Travis lowering his pants and boxers. The sight of the man's pale hard cock pointed in his direction made his ass clench in anticipation. He realized he still held the condom and lube, so leaning on one elbow, he offered them back to Travis, who snatched them out of his hand with a saucy wink.

"Face front," Travis said softly.

Darrell turned his head away and had a view of Travis's desk chair. He gripped the edge of the chair and waited for whatever Travis had in mind. Anticipation was killing him.

Hot fingers brushed the crack of his ass just before he felt the flick of a tongue across the right cheek. He closed his eyes, praying he wouldn't come right then. The warm, wet tongue trailed from his cheek to where the fingers parted his entrance.

The tongue darted inside, teasing with almost delicate tiny strokes. A prodding, slicked finger joined the tongue, spreading and pleasuring as they went. The finger slipped past his ring of muscle.

"Oh. My. God." A giddy warmth filled him at Travis's rumbling chuckle. But then he breathed in sharply when another finger slipped inside him.

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Almost abruptly Travis withdrew his tongue and fingers and straightened behind him. He heard the tear of the condom wrapper and spread his legs a little farther apart. He wiggled his ass just a bit, which earned him another chuckle and a playful swat on a cheek.

“Patience,” Travis whispered just before his hand grasped Darrell’s achingly hard cock.

Patience? With Travis’s hand now stroking up and down his shaft all he could think of was finding his release and preferably with Travis’s dick in his ass.

And then...Travis pushed inside. With very little hesitation, he slid in all the way. Darrell didn’t mind. He gripped the desk hard and thrust back against his lover, urging him deeper. He wanted a fast and furious pounding, too on the edge for a slow, gentle fuck.

Travis didn’t hold back, he snapped his hips with quick, penetrating thrusts that hit Darrell in just the right spot. His eyes drifted closed. With each thrust forward, he pushed back, riding the cock inside him hard. His forehead beaded with sweat, his body felt ready to burst into flames, even as his release licked up his spine.

“Travis.” He gasped, his face smashing onto papers on Travis’s desk as he shot all over his lover’s hand.

Travis tensed behind him, his movements speeding up to a frantic pace. With a guttural groan, his fingers dug into Darrell’s hip as he, too, orgasmed.

A short time later, his lover eased out of him and then sank down into the chair in front of the desk. His big hand gave a squeeze to Darrell’s ass.

“Need help?”

Darrell grinned and shook his head. He scooted down the desk

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and then turned around. He pulled up his pants, stuffed himself back inside, and sat on the edge of the desk, looking down at Travis in the chair. The man was rumpled and disheveled, his blond hair mussed, his pale cheeks pinked, and his deflated cock still bare with his pants around his knees.

Definitely the stuff of his dreams.

“What are you smiling at?” Travis asked, but he was smiling, too.

“I was just thinking how I never would have imagined having sex with my boss in his office. Not in a million years.”

Travis’s lips twitched. “An interesting perk, wouldn’t you say?”

“Oh, yeah.” He grinned. “Makes me think maybe I shouldn’t quit after all.”

“Yeah, see.”

Darrell laughed. “We should probably get you dressed and close up the office before someone sends security in here to see why the lights are still on.”

“To hell with them.” But Travis stood and leaned over for a very thorough kiss. “I have to say, you certainly weren’t shy just then.”

He shook his head. “No, I wasn’t. Shameful is what I was.”

“Definitely. Or is that shameless?” Travis laughed, a warm, rich laugh that washed over him from the top of his head all the way to his toes. Darrell didn’t think he’d ever get enough of that laugh.

He grabbed Travis’s tie and pulled the man’s lips toward his. Yeah, he had to be dreaming.

SHAWN LANE

Shawn Lane believes love and passion know no boundaries. Shawn writes both erotic love stories involving men in historical or contemporary settings and interracial romances between men and women. Shawn is always looking for new stories and new characters to create while holding down life in California.

* * *

**Don't miss *Ticket To Ride*
by Shawn Lane,
available at AmberAllure.com!**

Chad Storm's longtime on-again, off-again boyfriend has a ticket to ride on a plane to Maryland and out of Chad's life for good. But someone decides on a more permanent end to their relationship. Former lead singer of the rock band, Lightning, Chad is working on his comeback album when he finds the body of his murdered ex-lover floating in his swimming pool.

Lieutenant Jack Reeves, from the homicide division, has never heard of Lightning, but now he has a gruesome murder to solve. The more he learns of Chad, the more intrigued he becomes, and his protective instincts kick in when Chad begins to receive strange phone calls—from the dead man.

Jack doesn't believe in ghosts and knows someone is trying to mess with Chad, leading him to think someone close to the singer could have murderous intentions. But his attraction to Chad takes him off the investigation.

Drawn to each other, Chad and Jack begin a steamy affair, and that brings the ruthless killer out of hiding...

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