

AMANDA YOUNG

Screwed

About Amanda Young's

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Summarily fired and ostracized following the appearance of racy pictures online, Max Finnegan is ready to move on and leave the bigoted little town where he grew up. With his bags packed and his truck loaded, only one thing remains to be done. Before he can go, Max needs to reach out to his deeply closeted lover one last time and try to convince him to come along. One way or the other, Max is determined to depart in the morning—with or without the love of his life.

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Screwed

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Chapter One

Max Finnegan swallowed the last of his drink and waved at the waiter to bring him another. Ironically, the name of his favorite alcoholic beverage was the exact term for the predicament in which he found himself—Absolutely Screwed. He may have seen humor in the situation if he wasn't so hurt about how quickly his comfortable life had been flushed down the proverbial drain.

Speaking of which, my bladder is screaming. I should probably hit the head before I leave.

A glance at his watch revealed he'd been sitting in the same spot for nearly two hours. His gaze scanned the sparse crowd inside the pub, searching for someone who wasn't going to be there now any more than they were an hour earlier, or the hour before that.

Give it up. Doug isn't going to show—not now, not ever. That part of my life is over, even I am too damn pig-headed to accept it.

Before he could further ponder the hell of his own making, Noah, one of the cuter weekend waiters at Henley's Pub, set a glass brimming with mandarin vodka and orange juice in front of him. Max murmured "thanks", expecting the young man to scamper off to wait on his other customers. Instead, Noah flashed a bashful grin and slid into the booth across from him.

The younger man leaned forward, causing a hank of sunny blond bangs to fall over his forehead and shadow his doe-like eyes. "Hey, I heard about the school board's ruling and I just wanted to say how sorry I am."

Max squirmed in his seat. He imagined he could feel the gaze of every other person at the pub. All of them staring at him, whispering behind his back. "Thanks."

Oblivious to Max's discomfort, Noah kept talking. "It's really unbelievable how judgmental some people can be. I mean, how can you get fired for being gay in this day and age?"

Max took a swig of his drink and grunted. After draining half the contents in an icy rush, he set the glass back down. "Moral turpitude."

Noah blinked, fluttering his long lashes. “Huh?”

“They didn’t fire me for being gay. They claim I broke the moral turpitude clause in my contract. All things considered, I suppose they’re right.” *Even if I wasn’t the one who took the photos of me and Doug, or uploaded them all over the internet.*

“Oh...” A couple of heartbeats went by. Noah seemed flummoxed. All too soon, he shook it off and spoke again. “Well, you know that’s probably just bullshit.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Max shrugged, trying to maintain a calm outward appearance. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t already heard it all from the few people who were still talking to him. Some claimed he deserved what he got, while others waxed poetically about “the man” and how he always found ways to fuck over the little guy. In this case, Max supposed he qualified as the latter. He certainly felt tiny and insignificant. Truthfully, he’d be mortified if anyone realized how adrift and lost he’d been lately.

Talking about it didn’t help matters. If anything, the subject made him yearn to slide under the table and disappear. Living in a small town meant everyone knew everyone else’s business, but no one had come up to him in the two weeks since he’d been fired from his teaching position at Stapleton Preparatory and tried to discuss the situation. The last thing he wanted to do was talk about the embarrassment of being terminated from a job he loved—or the simultaneous loss of his deeply closeted lover.

Noah drummed his fingers on the table. “I haven’t seen Doug around lately.”

“Yeah, well...” Max shrugged. He wasn’t sure whether Noah was asking a question or making a statement. Either way, he didn’t have a suitable response. It wasn’t exactly common knowledge that he and Douglas Cox were dating, or had been before the shit hit the fan. However, that didn’t mean certain people weren’t aware of it. The lack of certainty regarding their “friendship” was the only thing that had saved Doug from suspicion during the inquest over the photos. Well, that and the fact that the second man in the photos wasn’t identifiable because it had been dark and his face was buried in Max’s crotch at the time the

snapshots were taken.

“So, I was wondering if you might be interested in having dinner with me sometime.”

In the process of swallowing another great gulp of his mixed drink, Max spluttered. Of all the things he’d expected, being asked out wasn’t one of them. While wiping his mouth with a drink napkin, Max gave Noah’s blond good looks another once over. The boy was cute—no doubt about that—but he was at least ten years younger than Max and...he wasn’t Doug.

Max shook his head. “I’m flattered, but I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Okay.” Noah frowned. “Well... I should probably get back to work now.”

“All right.” Max took a sip of his drink, which was mostly melted ice by that point. When Noah continued to sit and stare, Max added, “So, I’ll see you later then.”

“Yeah. Sure.” Noah slid out of the booth. “Take care of yourself, Max.”

“You, too.” Guilt pinged Max’s conscience for not being nicer to the kid, but he didn’t exactly feel sociable at the moment. Although he was flattered by Noah’s attention, he didn’t quite know what to do with it. No matter what Doug had done, he was the only man Max wanted.

Since there was no hope of getting what he desired, Max would settle for exercising his hands in the dark. He refused to contemplate pining away for Doug for the rest of his life, but it would take time before he was ready to move on.

He’d been in love with Doug since the day they met nearly five years earlier. While his hurt didn’t eclipse all the good times they’d shared, it certainly put a damper on the recollections. Eventually the shadows would recede and he’d be left with bittersweet memories. He only wished those reminiscences didn’t hurt so much at the moment.

Chapter Two

Max rested his head on the steering wheel, reluctant to get out of the vehicle and go into his house. In hindsight, the high hopes he had for the evening now seemed desperate and pathetic. Why had he believed Doug would meet him at Henley's and risk them being seen together when the man wouldn't even pick up the phone?

Maybe, deep in his subconscious, he'd thought Doug would come running after the last voicemail message Max had left. It wasn't as if Max had left many of them—his pride wouldn't allow him to call more than a couple of times—but he'd felt Doug might want to know he was relocating. There certainly wasn't any reason for him to stay in town now that he was unemployed.

Fortunately, he'd lucked into another position teaching world history at a public high school in Maryland. He wouldn't be able to start his new job for three months, until the beginning of the next school year. The pay was considerably less, but it was better than nothing, and he had a couple of friends from college who lived in the area.

Reaching out to Doug was the last thing he needed to do. At the very least, Max had hoped to clear the air between them and say goodbye. Their relationship might not have ended under the best circumstances, but they'd shared a lot of good times in the years they'd been together. The thought of leaving without ever seeing Doug again hurt worse than the protracted silence he'd endured after being outed in one of the most dramatic ways possible short of being caught fucking on the school lawn.

Apparently even the merest shred of closure was outside of his grasp.

There's no worse fool than an old fool.

At the moment, he felt every single one of his thirty five years, plus some. While he would have preferred to place blame on the alcohol for his churning stomach, the truth wasn't so pretty. He simply couldn't face another night of lying in bed alone, his fingers tracing the cold sheets on Doug's side of the bed while he remembered better times and thought about the murky future awaiting him.

Although they'd never technically lived together, Doug had stayed over at Max's house more often than not, always finding some excuse not to go home. Neither of them had given a second thought to Doug's vehicle being parked outside the house on numerous occasions—not when the home Max had inherited from his grandparents was situated so far outside the town limits that his nearest neighbor was over two miles away.

Otherwise, they never would have risked spending the night together so habitually—or making love whenever and wherever the urge hit them. It wasn't as if they had fucked like bunnies, but they'd certainly taken advantage of the rural location. Some of Max's favorite memories involved him and Doug making love under the stars.

If only they'd been a little more circumspect, then Max would've still had a job and a lover. He wouldn't be dragging home from a bar with the stench of liquor on his breath and the air of failure clinging to him like cheap cologne. He'd probably be curled up in Doug's arms, satiated and sleeping the sleep of the well-fucked.

Instead, another restless night awaited him.

Finally, after his back began to ache from sitting bent forward so awkwardly, Max sat up and pulled his keys from the ignition. He climbed from the vehicle, stuck the jangling bundle of metal into his pocket, and slammed the door closed behind him. The loud clatter quieted the crickets for a fraction of a second, then they started up again, chirping louder than ever.

Max dragged his feet, making the loose gravel crunch under the soles of his sneakers. He skirted around one of the two large bushes flanking the porch and stopped dead in his tracks. Having forgotten to leave on the outside light, the man sitting on the cement steps was nothing more than shadow. Nevertheless, Max didn't need to see in order to identify the visitor. All he had to do was inhale. There was only one man he knew whose cologne smelled so spicy and yet sweet all at the same time.

"What are you doing here, Doug?" Max crossed his arms over his chest and glared at the blackened silhouette. He refused to acknowledge the way his heart

raced with expectation or the sweat coating his palms. They were the byproduct of too little sleep and too much stress. Nothing more.

Doug rose to his feet, his shadow elongating. His right arm lifted and then dropped back to his side. "I don't really know."

Well, that's as clear as mud. "You were supposed to meet me at Henley's."

"I know. I got your message, but I couldn't... I couldn't go in there."

"It was a dumb idea anyway." *God forbid I should want to meet my lover in public...*

"No, it wasn't dumb at all. I'm just a coward."

Max wasn't going to disagree with the man, even if his gut screamed for him to console his lover. *Ex-lover.* "Where's your truck, Doug? I didn't see it when I pulled in."

"I parked it behind the house."

"Oh." Max didn't need to ask why.

Doug shifted his feet, kicking gravel. "Can we talk?"

"Isn't that what we're doing?"

"Inside, I mean."

"Sure." Max walked by Doug, their bodies so close he could feel the heat pouring from Doug's skin for a fraction of a second. He resisted the urge to reach out to the other man and trudged up the porch steps. After unlocking the front door, he pulled it open and waved Doug in ahead of him, although he doubted the other man could see more than a dim outline of his arm moving. "Come on in."

He waited until Doug stepped inside, disappearing into the inky interior of the house, before pulling the door closed and feeling around for the light switch. His fingers connected with the small protrusion and pushed it up, filling the living room with white light. After blinking away some temporary blindness, Max turned to find Doug standing in the middle of the room with his hands shoved into the pockets of his faded jeans. The older man fidgeted, shifting from one foot to the other, and looked about as nervous as a virgin on prom night.

Although the situation was anything but joyful, the comparison put a smile on

Max's face. Unfortunately, the expression only seemed to cause Doug further discomfort. He paced over to the window, staring outside as if he expected the boogeyman to jump through the window and shout "gotcha".

Tamping down his sorrow, Max moved deeper into the room. Awkward energy filled the space between them. Normally, he would have rushed over to Doug and embraced him, hugged and kissed away the solemn man's insecurities. Sadly, that was no longer an option. As much as he wanted to believe there was hope for him and Doug to work things out, Max knew better. The very way Doug held himself, his broad shoulders rigid with tension, forecasted bad news.

Max's arms hung at his sides, his fingers opening and closing in a futile search for something to do. Feeling as if they were worlds apart rather than mere feet, he crossed the room and slumped down on one of the two club chairs flanking the overstuffed couch. Without looking, he waved toward the sofa. "Have a seat, Doug. I promise not to pounce on you."

With a tight-lipped smile, Doug left the window and sat on the edge of the sofa closest to Max. "I should be so lucky."

The joke fell flat and lifeless between them, their comfortable banter eradicated in the wake of misfortune. Max smiled and nodded, but he had a feeling the expression on his face looked as rigid as Doug's attempt at a smile.

Sitting back, Max regarded his lover. Although he'd turned forty a few months earlier, Doug was still a devastatingly handsome man. Coaching soccer kept him active and fit. The subtle lines around his mouth and deep-set brown eyes gave him character, rather than enhancing his age. His dark hair was still as thick and lustrous as it'd been in the photos of his youth. Looking at him now was both a joy and a curse. Max wanted to hate the man for his turning his back on what they'd shared. Instead, sorrow swelled inside him. Doug was trapped inside a hell of his own making, fear and anger clouding his judgment, and there was nothing Max could do to change it.

Never one to beat around the bush, Max decided to end the charade. It was painful enough being near Doug without dragging the encounter out any longer

than need be. "You obviously didn't come here to kiss and make up, so why are you really here, Doug?"

Doug flinched. "That's hardly fair."

"Who told you life is fair? Cause I've gotta say, they were lying through their teeth. I'd say I've gotten a firsthand account of that lately, wouldn't you?"

"Unfortunately so." Doug leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees.

"That's partly why I'm here. I have some news."

"Well? Don't keep me in suspense."

"I found out who took the photos."

"Who was it?" Max swallowed the overabundance of moisture clogging the back of his mouth. As curious as he was about the person who'd single handedly destroyed his life, he wasn't sure he wanted to know. What use would it be to have a name and a face to put with the cinders of what was once a comfortable existence? He wasn't the kind of man who resorted to violence and there was no legal recourse to be found. In the heat of the moment he'd decided to be spontaneous and jump Doug in the backyard. While he'd never imagined the lofty consequences of that one poor decision, he had no one to blame but himself. There wouldn't have been any photos if he hadn't acted so impulsively.

"Does the name Daniel Franklin sound familiar?"

"Jesus." Daniel Franklin was a C minus student who coasted on his daddy's money and the man's uncanny ability to buy passing grades whenever need be. Max refused to hear reason, ignoring the subtle insinuations of ample compensation in exchange for letting Daniel breeze through the class during a final parent/teacher conference shortly before final exams the previous January. Because Max flunked the kid, he'd been stuck having Daniel for the spring semester as well, the very one he'd been unable to complete. "Well, I can't say I'm shocked. I suppose the school replaced me with a teacher who's more willing to play ball with wealthy parents."

"I'm sorry, Max. It was a shitty thing for someone to do."

"How'd you find out anyway? Daniel was a lazy student, but he wasn't stupid. I'm sure he didn't volunteer the information."

“Another teacher, Rita Mulroney, overheard Daniel bragging to one of his little friends about his father hiring someone to spy on you.”

Max snorted, forcing his impotent fury down into a little ball of misery deep inside himself. “Figures. The bastards couldn’t even do their own dirty work.”

Doug scooted forward and reached out to Max, laying his hand on Max’s knee. “I know this doesn’t make up for anything that’s happened, but I figured you would want to know.”

“I did. I just didn’t realize how useless I would feel afterward. It seems like there should be something I could do...” Max stood, brushing off Doug’s hand in the process, and strode to the window. He stared out at the backyard -- the scene of the crime, as it were -- and bit into the inside of his cheek so hard he tasted blood.

Although he heard Doug’s footsteps and felt the man move in close behind him, Max refused to turn around. All it would take was the slightest bit of kindness and he’d lose it. Having an emotional break down in front of Doug might have been acceptable at one point in their relationship, but it damn sure wasn’t the last impression he wanted to leave.

The reminder of all he’d lost made his throat close and his chest tighten. His nose burned, warning him of impending tears.

Chapter Three

Warm, familiar hands landed on Max's shoulders and began to knead his tense muscles into submission. While neither of them had ever been big on talking about their feelings, they'd each had their own special way of relaxing the other after a long, hard day. Max had preferred to alleviate Doug's worries with seduction, while Doug always worked Max's stress away with a soothing massage. No matter how innocent the rubdowns began, Max could always count on them devolving into sweaty, sinful sex.

That wasn't going to happen this time.

Max stiffened. "Stop."

Rather than releasing Max, Doug slid his hands beneath Max's arms and around his chest, hugging him tight. He buried his face in the curve of Max's throat. "I've missed you. You have no idea how much."

"I've missed you, too." Max closed his eyes, so very tempted to give in and make love to Doug one last time. The hot, humid breath wafting over his neck only served to tease him, reminding him of how Doug's moist lips felt against his naked skin.

He turned in Doug's arms and tilted his face up, beyond ready to feel his lover's mouth upon his own. He gazed into Doug's eye, caught a glimpse of the sadness and regret in those deep green orbs, and felt his desire shrivel up and die. As badly as he needed a distraction from reality, he refused to give in to the bone-deep yearning to be held and comforted when he was so confused about where things stood between them. If all Doug wanted was a last fuck, then Max needed to know.

Max turned in Doug's arm, facing the man he thought he would spend the rest of his life with before everything went to hell in a hand basket. "Tell me something, Doug. If you care about me so much, why couldn't you meet me at Henley's?"

Doug dropped his arms, a frown marring his handsome features. "You know why."

"Maybe. But I'm asking you to explain it to me again."

"What for? You already know the answer."

Max shrugged. "Humor me."

"I grew up in this town. I know these people. Coming out at this point in my life would be a shock to them."

"So you care more about your reputation, about what neighbors and acquaintances think of you, than being there for me when I needed you. Right?"

"No. *No!* I just don't see why my personal life is anyone else's business."

"It's not, Doug. But you've avoided me ever since those photos came out. You haven't even returned my phone calls."

"You only called me once and I'm here, aren't I? I might not have come to the pub, but I did come here. You had to know I wouldn't just let you leave town without saying something."

"I called you twice."

"The only message I got from you was earlier tonight."

"I didn't leave a message the other time, but you have caller identification."

"Yes, I do. And you know how often I remember to check it."

"That's true." Max's mind raced, going over the last two weeks. Was it possible he'd written Doug off, when he shouldn't have? "You could have called me though. Or stopped by to see how I was doing. I thought things were over between us."

"I didn't want to make things worse, Max. Everyone has been speculating about the "other guy" in the photos. I knew they would add two and two together and figure out it was me if anyone saw me hanging around with you."

"So, yet again, your reputation takes precedence over my feelings?"

"No. Damn it, Max. I just didn't want to get the rumor mill going all over again. I hoped things would go back to normal between us once the initial uproar died down. Of course, that was before I found out you were leaving."

Max leaned against the wall behind him for support and drew in a shaky breath. "I can't stay. Even if I could ignore the looks and whispers, there's no work for me here. I have to earn a living."

"What about the neighboring counties? Surely someone's looking for help."

"I already checked. None of the public schools within driving distance are hiring."

"Dammit." Doug smacked the windowsill, rattling the glass. "I don't want you to go."

"You could come with me. Start over with a clean slate."

"That's easy for you to say. You have a home and a job waiting for you."

Max clenched his teeth together so hard he was afraid he would feel one of them crack at any second. When he was sure he wasn't going to scream, he said, "I don't know how you can say any of this has been easy on me. I was publicly ridiculed over those photos. I lost my job, my lover... I thought we were going to grow old together, but you deserted me just when I needed you the most." Max snapped his mouth closed, appalled by the crack in his own voice.

"I'm sorry I let you down, Max." Doug exhaled and seemed to deflate right before Max's eyes. "You have no idea how much I regret these last two weeks. If given the choice, I would do them over in a heartbeat."

"What would you do differently? Would you tell everyone it was you on your knees, sucking my dick in those pictures?"

"What? No."

"Why not?"

"What good would have it done to get us both fired?"

"That's what I thought. You wouldn't change anything that matters. You'd still be hiding in the closet and I'd still be leaving town in the morning."

"I would change everything that's important. I would've been there for you when you needed me, instead of letting fear keep me away from you."

"You care about me so much, Doug? Prove it. Come with me."

"I can't." Doug shook his head. "I love you. The last thing I want to do is lose what we have. But I'm too damn old to start over again."

"That's bullshit, and you know it. You're scared. You've been trapped inside the closet so long you don't know how to step outside it."

"You're right; I am scared. But, Max, I can't just drop everything and run away

with you. I have responsibilities here. People who depend on me.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way.” Max scrubbed a hand over his head. He gazed at Doug, wishing so hard that the man he loved was willing to fight for them. As it stood, there was no middle ground to be found. Neither one of them was willing to compromise.

“Me, too.” Doug’s shoulders slumped. “I don’t know what you want me to do.”

“Nothing. If that’s the best you have to offer, then I want *absolutely nothing* from you.” Max strode across the room and opened the front door. “On second thought, there is something you can do for me. You can leave.”

“You’re making a mistake.” Doug stopped next to Max. “I may not be perfect, but you know I love you.”

Max looked the man he loved right in the eyes and willed himself not to fall apart. “Apparently not enough.”

Doug stared, while Max forced his expression into a neutral mask and gazed right back. After barely a moment, Doug looked away and walked out the door without another word.

Max waited until he heard Doug’s pickup start before he softly closed the door and leaned back against it. He inhaled once and then again, trying to curb the bitter ache building in his chest.

Chapter Four

Doug only made it a mile down the road before the ramifications of what he had done hit him. He slammed on the brakes and pulled over to the side of the road. His hands trembled as he pushed the gear shift into neutral and let the engine idle.

What the hell am I doing?

Was he going to give up Max for what amounted to a job and a handful of friends and acquaintances who would probably turn their back on him the minute they found out he preferred cock over pussy? Could he let the best thing that had ever happened to him leave town without him?

No.

Hell no.

The very thought of never seeing Max again was like a punch to the gut. Doug's stomach twisted and knotted into a tight ball. He couldn't let Max go. The man was his everything. Doug loved him more than he loved himself—which was why he'd stayed away from him lately. Rumors of a man coming and going from Max's house would have only fanned the flames of gossip and caused Max more grief. Doug didn't want that. If anything, he longed for the world to leave them the hell alone.

However, what he wanted and what was going to happen were two very different things. If he was going to keep his lover, things would have to change. As much as he still believed his sexuality was nobody's business but his own, loving Max meant stepping forward and letting his persuasions be known. He'd never be the kind of man who waved his freak flag in a parade, but surely he could discreetly let it be known that he was a gay man in a committed relationship with a man he loved.

Frankly, the very thought of allowing people that deep into his life scared the piss out of him. For Max, Doug was willing to try.

Maybe it wasn't too late to teach an old dog a new trick after all.

Doug shoved the shifter into first and turned the truck around, heading back toward Max's home. He very nearly pulled around the back of the house before he remembered that he no longer gave a damn about his vehicle being recognized.

He hopped out of the truck and slammed the door behind him. Doug didn't bother to knock. Filled with purpose, he strode inside and looked around for Max. Not seeing his lover, Doug called out for him. "Max!"

From the left, the sound of Max's rickety bed squeaking echoed down the hall. Max appeared over the threshold, dressed in light blue cotton sleep pants. His eyes widened when they landed on Doug. "What are you doing back here?"

Any explanation he might have come up with disappeared in response to the hopeful, yet wary light in Max's beautiful eyes. The blame for Max's caution weighed heavily on Doug's shoulders. He rushed forward, closing the distance between them, and swept Max up in his arms. "I came back for you."

"Why?" Max stood stiffly, not returning Doug's embrace. "I think we both made our positions clear before you left."

"I changed my mind." Before Max could respond, Doug swooped down and covered Max's lips with his own. One hard caress led to two, then three. By the time Doug kissed Max a fourth time, Max finally began to loosen up. The tension drained out of his body and his lips parted, opening to Doug without any further hesitation.

Doug drove his tongue inside Max's mouth and was met with equal enthusiasm. Their tongues wrestled for control, batting back and forth. Doug tightened his arms around Max and lost himself in the feel of his lover pressing against him. Their predicament was forgotten, the worries cast aside like yesterday's garbage. All that mattered was being with Max—loving him until they were both weak and boneless. In Max's arms, Doug didn't care about what anyone else thought or did. Max was the only person whose opinion held importance.

Two weeks didn't sound like that long to go without his lover's touch, but it had seemed like an eternity to Doug. He couldn't believe he'd only been a

hairsbreadth away from living out the rest of his life without this.

With a groan, Doug pulled his lips away from Max's. He mouthed the prickly stubble on Max's jaw and continued down to the smooth line of his throat. Moving upward, Doug took advantage of the spot under Max's right ear that was particularly sensitive. "Missed you."

"Missed you, too." With a shiver, Max slid his hands down Doug's sides and grabbed his hips, pulling him closer. "So much."

Doug ground his stiffening tool against Max and relished the feel of Max's answering erection. The way Max responded to the simplest touch was a boon to Doug's ego. More than anything else, he wanted to be the one who continued to make Max squirm and moan until they were both old and gray, and unable to get it up any longer.

Max slowly backed into the bedroom, dragging Doug along with him. When they reached the bed, Max released his hold on Doug and sat on the edge of the bed. He pushed up Doug's shirt and nuzzled his stomach. "It never fails to amaze me just how much I need you."

"Oh, sweetheart." Guilt besieged Doug anew. He'd thought he was acting in Max's best interests by staying away, but clearly nothing could be farther from the truth. "I need you, too. I'm so sorry I wasn't here. You have no idea how much it killed me to keep away from you."

Max gazed up at Doug, his forehead wrinkled in confusion. "Why did you? Make me understand."

Doug sighed. "Fear, mostly. I admit I was scared of being outed, but I really didn't want to make things worse for you either. The gossip was vicious enough without me adding fuel to the fire. A part of me hoped that things would die down and our lives could go back to normal."

"Oh, Doug." Still sitting, Max wrapped his arms around Doug and hugged him. "Even if the gossip stops, things will never be the same."

"I know that." Doug cupped Max's stubbly jaw and ran his thumb over the slight cleft in his chin. "I guess I just didn't want to face it. Stupid, huh?"

"No." Max turned into Doug's touch and kissed the center of his palm. "I just

wish you would've talked to me about it. You could have called or something."

"I wanted to, but my control was hanging by a shred as it was. I knew that if I heard your voice my willpower would have been shot to hell." Doug shook his head, disgusted with himself. It had been so easy to rationalize his behavior when he didn't have to look into Max's eyes and explain his twisted logic. "Can you forgive me for being such a meathead?"

"On one condition."

Doug held his breath, waiting...

Max released Doug, dropping his arms to his sides. "The next time you plan to make a decision that affects both of us, why don't you pause and come to me and talk about it first?"

Doug exhaled. "Yeah, I can do that."

"Well, all right then." Max fingered the trail of fine hair beneath Doug's belly button. "What do you say you finish what you started? It's been too long since your big, fat cock stretched me out. I bet I'm practically a virgin again."

Surprised at the joke, Doug burst out laughing. He bent and softly kissed Max. "What the hell did I ever do to deserve you?"

Max grinned. "You're just lucky, I guess."

"You can say that again." Lucky didn't even begin to cut it. Doug was unbelievably thankful Max was willing to forgive him and take him back.

Max's nimble fingers popped open the button of Doug's jeans and slid down the zipper. "I'd rather show you."

Speechless, Doug shivered as Max slid his fingers beneath the denim and pushed it over Doug's hips.

Leaving the fabric bunched around Doug's thighs, Max ran his cheek over Doug's boxer-covered groin and mouthed the stiff line of his erection through the thin cotton. "You smell so good."

Damp heat penetrated Doug's boxers and teased his senses. He had to grit his teeth to keep from begging Max for more. Thankfully, before his self control shattered, Max eased the cotton and elastic down. Doug's dick sprang forward, bobbing beneath its own cumbersome weight.

“Hello there, big fella.” Max wrapped his fingers around the base of Doug’s shaft and pulled the meaty knob toward his mouth. He tongued the hypersensitive ridge around the crown, dipped his tongue into the slit, and made Doug’s nerve endings sing.

Doug stared down at his lover and watched as his prick slid between Max’s lips and slowly disappeared into the wet recesses beyond. Tight, wet, warmth bathed him from tip to base. He wanted to move, to pull back and push forward until Max was forced to swallow him. Instead, he palmed Max’s head, caressed the rough stubble covering his scalp, and let Max set the pace.

Max bobbed up and down, using agonizing suction and a damp, wily tongue to drive Doug out of his ever-loving mind. He seemed to search out and lick every hot spot, while the hand around the base of Doug’s shaft squeezed and worked in rhythm with Max’s mouth.

Doug wasn’t sure his dick could get much harder. His balls were high and tight, and ready to blow. Watching his dick slide in and out of Max’s succulent lips was killing him. If Max kept at it, Doug knew he wouldn’t last much longer. As much as he wanted to shoot, coming in Max’s mouth wasn’t an option. He had other plans—starting with worshipping every inch of Max’s body and ending with fucking his lover into a well-satisfied coma.

As good as it felt, the blowjob needed to stop before it was too late. “Max.”

Max hummed around Doug’s shaft. “Hmmm?”

“Stop.”

Max pulled back, his fist still wrapped around Doug’s erection, and glared up at Doug. “Why?”

“Do you *not* want me to fuck you?”

“As if...” Max stood and shucked his sleep pants, leaving him gloriously naked in front Doug. “All you had to do was speak up.”

“I just did.” Doug eyed the bobbing length of Max’s dick. “Get on the bed. I want you now.”

“Yes, sir,” Max said with a mock salute. He moved to the bed and laid crossways on the mattress, leaving his legs dangling over the edge. “Well, here I

am. Come and get me.”

Nothing could have sounded better. Doug kneed open Max’s thighs and stepped between them. He bent forward and kissed Max, grinding against him. The feel of their hard shafts bumping and rubbing against each other was delicious. Just the right amount of friction to tease the hell out of them both, without being enough to send them plummeting over the edge.

Before they could get carried away, Doug ended the kiss and worked his way down Max’s body, kissing every bit of skin in sight. He laved the salty juncture of neck and shoulder, mouthed the firm, rounded contours of Max’s pecs, and sucked the budded peaks of each nipple. His tongue explored Max’s firm abs and slanting obliques, dipped into the shallow reservoir of Max’s belly button and made his ticklish lover wiggle. He made love to the turgid length of Max’s juicy cock and the heavy balls beneath, sucking one nut into his mouth and then the other, switching back and forth until Max was writhing and begging for more.

By the time he retraced a path up to Max’s tempting mouth, Doug was harder than he could ever remember being. He was damn tempted to roll Max onto his stomach and start all over again. He would have acted on the impulse if he thought there was a snowball’s chance in hell of either of them holding out long enough for him to finish. As it was, he was pretty sure neither of them were willing to wait another minute. His own balls were hugging tight to the base of his shaft, warning him that the upcoming ride might be a short one. Following two weeks without Max, and gorging himself on the mouthwatering banquet laid out before him, Doug couldn’t say he was surprised. A man could only take so much before his balls unloaded, with or without his permission.

When the time came, he was determined to be buried balls deep inside the man he loved. Nothing else would do.

Doug released Max’s lips and stood on weak and trembling knees. While his desire rode him harder than jockey headed for the win at the Kentucky Derby, he stripped off his shirt and shoved at the jeans still straddling his thighs, kicking them away from him. His poor dick bobbed and ached, flushed dark and swollen to what looked like twice its normal size.

Naked, he reached into the top drawer of the nightstand for lube and came up empty. "Shit. There's no slick."

Max cursed. "Fuck it. I don't care. I want you now."

"Are you sure?" Doug closed the drawer and regarded his lover. Max looked as ready for action. His slim prick was ruddy and weeping against his groin; a small puddle of precum pooled beneath the fat head. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't." Max lifted up on his elbows and glared at Doug. "It's not like I'm a damn virgin."

"Still..." Doug hesitated. "It's been a few weeks."

"Would you just come over here and fuck me. Please. I need it. I need *you*."

"All right. Hang on a second." Doug quickly considered what he could do to help ease the way and knelt at the edge of the bed. "Grab your knees."

"Oh God." With an impatient moan, Max did as Doug asked. He dropped back on the bed and yanked his legs back against his chest. "Hurry."

Doug parted Max's cheeks, holding them open with his thumbs. He laved the soft flesh behind Max's sac, moving ever closer toward his true target. Once he reached Max's tightly clenched pucker, Doug flattened his tongue and licked over the entire surface. He buried his face between Max's cheeks and licked and sucked at Max's hole, letting his saliva coat the tiny whirl of skin and taut muscle. Max's flesh slowly softened and yielded beneath Doug's exuberant persuasion.

"Jesus, Doug." The muscles in Max's thighs flexed. "Oh God."

Doug kept going, lapping at the taut ring of muscle he longed to pillage and reclaim. When Max's crease was slick with moisture and his hole loose and glistening with spit, Doug pulled back and rose to his feet. "Ready?"

"God, yes!" Max wrapped his long thin fingers around his shaft and started stroking. "Fuck me before I finish without you."

With a growl, Doug spit in his palm and rubbed the extra wetness on his cock. The friction of his hand coasting over his own swollen knob was a necessary torment. Gripping the base of his shaft, he lined the wide head up with Max's ready entrance and pressed forward, sliding inside Max one excruciating inch at a time. He maintained eye contact with Max to assure he didn't hurt him and took

notice of every grimace, not matter how slight, and every flutter of Max's lashes when something felt good.

Max's neck arched, pressing the back of his head into the mattress as a deep cry spilled from his throat. "Sweet Jesus."

Doug paused, his concern for Max momentarily overriding his lust. "Too much?"

"No." Max lifted his head and met Doug's gaze. "Don't stop."

As soon as he was able, Doug released his grip on his cock and caught Max's legs in the crooks of his arms. He used them to jerk Max forward, until his ass was hanging over the edge of the bed and fully impaled on Doug's meaty rod.

Closing his eyes, Doug took a deep breath redolent of the smell of sweat and sex, and tried to calm his racing libido. Held tight in Max's snug embrace, Doug was even more convinced his self-control wouldn't last long. All he could do was make sure Max came first. Considering the way Max's channel rippled and clenched around Doug's cock, he didn't think it would take much to make Max come.

Confident he could out long enough to satisfy his lover, Doug opened his eyes. He rolled his hips, pulling halfway out before sliding in deep once again. He repeated the slow stroke, staring down at Max all the while.

Max pumped his cock, his fingers clasping the head and uppermost inches. His abs flexed and his breath hitched every time Doug went deep. The air whooshed from his lungs at each retreat. Sweat gleamed on his skin and darkened the fine hair beneath his arms.

Doug bent forward and covered Max's lips with his own. He thrust his tongue into Max's mouth and mimicked the action with his hips. Max wound his arms around Doug's neck and kissed him back, while Doug continued to thrust in and out of Max's ass.

Max twisted his lips away from Doug. Panting, he said, "Harder. Give it to me harder."

"Yeah." He could do that.

Doug rose up above Max. He tightened his grip on Max's legs and picked up the pace, pistoning into Max. The bedsprings protested, squeaking to high heavens.

He set up a rhythm of long, deep strokes; each one was more satisfying than the last. Max seemed to think so as well, because he was breathing harder with every push and tugging on his sweet cock like it was on fire.

Perspiration beaded on Doug's forehead and tickled the back of his neck. The small of his back itched with moisture. Nothing was as pressing as the lust boiling in his balls and the ultimate satiation of the man beneath him.

"Oh yeah." Max rubbed his free hand over his own chest and pinched his left nipple tight between thumb and forefinger. "You feel so good."

"You do." Doug gritted his teeth, dangerously close to coming.

"Just a little more." Max moaned. "*Please...* Make me come."

Doug's fingers dug into Max's thighs. He pushed them back against Max's chest and thrust faster, harder. He swiveled his hips, desperate to bring Max off. He couldn't wait to see Max come, to watch the lightning flashing in his eyes as pleasure stormed through his body. Pleasure Doug supplied.

"Oh, God. Doug!" Max wailed and shot, his ass clenching around Doug's prick. Creamy ropes of cum fountained out of his dick and spilled onto the smooth plane of his stomach.

Doug's willpower snapped like a dry twig under a heavy boot. He thrust home once and then again, burying himself to the balls as his cock jerked within the tight clasp of Max's body, spilling into Max with short, hard spasms.

Overwhelmed by sensations, he slumped forward and buried his face in the curve of Max's throat. There were some moments in life when Doug would have been perfectly happy to stop time. This was one of them. He couldn't remember a time when he'd ever felt closer or more in love with Max.

Max wrapped his arms around Doug and held him close. "Jesus. That was almost worth all the angst. *Almost.*"

"I wouldn't say that, although it was damn good." Doug turned his head and brushed his lips over Max's stubbly cheek.

Max sighed. "It always is with us."

"Yes, it is." With reluctance, Doug lifted off Max and bent to pick up his discarded shirt up off the floor. He used it to wipe them both off before he collapsed onto the bed beside Max. For a moment, the only sound was their respiration and the crickets chirping outside.

Max rolled onto his side and rested his head on Doug's chest. "What happens now?"

"I don't know." Doug's mind spun with thoughts of all the things he needed to take care of. "I suppose I'll give the school notice and then finish up the rest of the year. There are only a couple of weeks left. In the meantime, I need to pack up my house and start looking for a new job." Max's silence unnerved Doug. After a moment, he could take the silence no more. "That is, as long as you still want me to come with you."

"Don't be an idiot." Max caressed Doug's stomach, running his fingers over the fine hair beneath Doug's belly button. "Of course I want you to come with me. I just don't want you to ever regret doing it. You have a good life here. I hate that you have to give it up for me."

"I don't have to do anything." Doug caught Max's hand within his own and brought it to his lips. He turned it over and kissed the center of Max's palm. "I could stay here, keep my job, and life would go on as usual. The only difference would be how miserable I am. You're the best thing that ever happened to me. Without you, there is no life for me here. I won't lie and say I'm not worried about the future—starting over at my age is damn scary—but I'm willing to give it my all as long as we're together."

Max snuggled closer. "Just try and get rid of me."

About Amanda Young

Amanda Young is a multi-published, erotic romance author. Since she tends to write whatever strikes her whimsy, all of her novels fall into various subgenres. Among her many available titles you'll find contemporary and paranormal settings, as well as gay and straight themes. To learn more about Amanda, please visit her website: www.AmandaYoung.org.