



A  
DREAMSPINNER  
PRESS

*Nap-Sized Dream*

# BLUE SKIES

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I LEFT my office and headed down the stairs to the ground floor of the building. The coffee in my cup was hot, and I sipped it cautiously as I considered everything I had to do that day. The biggest thing on my plate was the deadline for the phone directory I was developing. The comprehensive gay-friendly/gay-owned business directory was something I'd dreamed about for years. I'd gotten the funding for it six months ago, and it was almost time to send it off to the publisher. I was determined to squeeze out a few more donations. In theory, gay businessmen would be eager to support the idea, thereby making obtaining donations half as troublesome as it usually was. The sad truth was that gay businessmen were as cheap as their not so gay counterparts and needed incentive to do the right thing. The promise of a well designed ad where it was sure to be seen had proven incentive enough, but since I needed to offset costs as much as possible, it wouldn't be time to quit begging until I stuck the damn thing in the box and sent it away.

I had a couple of prospects in mind for the day; they'd wavered the last time I approached, and with any luck, Nix's Homemade Doggy Treats and Fan's Toys Aren't Just for Tots would be added to an already substantial list.

I reached the ground floor, turned and headed toward the coffee shop tucked away in the back of the building. Adam and Jay used one of the small tables each morning as

their personal office space, and I needed to talk to them. If anyone had a suggestion about last minute prospects, it'd be those two.

I made my way around the temporary walls that had been set up in anticipation of the biannual art show, one of the most popular events The GBLT-Het Connection hosted. I'd founded the company just over eight years ago. We'd come a long way from that first dingy office with butcher paper taped to the storefront windows. Several different places had been home after that, but we had moved into our permanent residence about a year ago. The Connection was now housed in the state-of-the-art facility it deserved.

The GBLT-Het Connection was a major contributor to the community as a whole, making things better for everyone and improving life for gay citizens specifically through its intervention and outreach programs. I'd started The Connection based on my belief that the best way for the gay population to be accepted was through familiarity. Being a part of society played a big part in that. My ideas, put into practice, were proving themselves out in spades. Though in the beginning I had been called everything from a dreamer to an idiot, I now spent several hours a day fielding questions from people all over the country who wanted to know what I'd done, how it worked, and how they could accomplish the same goals in their cities. It made a gay boy proud.

No time for resting on my laurels, though, I had plenty to do. I grinned when I spotted the objects of my search sitting in their usual place, sharing a laptop.

They were sitting close, heads bent over the same computer; one light, one dark, and neither looked up at my

approach, not even when I came to a stop at their table. I sipped my coffee, looking down on them, just watching. It was something special to see them work together. They owned their own web design company, working primarily for gay owned businesses, but that wasn't what was remarkable about them. I watched as they spoke low murmurs, one pointing at the screen, the other working a mouse, either one likely to type. The blond, Jay, turned to nuzzle his partner's cheek. Adam turned into the caress, and they shared a slow kiss before turning back to their work. They made me smile. I'd never seen a couple so natural with one another. They could be The Connection's poster boys for Gay America; it was impossible not to love them.

"Adam...." I hesitated to interrupt, but I needed to talk to them before I headed out. Any hints they shared might keep me from wasting a day pounding the pavement with no results. The dark head came up at the sound of his name. Adam met my eyes as he draped an arm around Jay's shoulders. His fingers traced aimless designs on Jay's arm. I tried not to stare, tried not to obsess about how lucky they were to have each other.

Love like they shared was rare in the gay community; too many guys were all about sex and not interested in making the effort it took to build a lasting relationship. It was hard not to be jealous of them. They had what I'd wanted my whole life: a real relationship filled with easy looks and gentle affection. I wanted that stability. Hell, I'd be happy to just belong to someone. Adam smiled at me and something in his expression made me feel that he saw more of me than I was comfortable with, but before I could change my mind about talking to them he nudged Jay to get his

attention. The blond man looked up with a grin. He looked so content, so happy, that it was unsettling. I didn't remember the last time I felt that good about just being alive. They made me feel old.

"Hey," I said as I returned his smile. There was no reason to pull them down into the emotional pit I'd dug for myself.

Adam took a drink of his coffee as they waited for me to explain what I wanted. His was the same Styrofoam cup with The Connection logo on it as the one I held, but Jay's cup was a plastic insulated one from home. The sight of it replaced my attack of self pity with humor, and I grinned.

"Let me guess," I said with a gesture at the bright blue cup. "Iced tea." Jay lifted it and laughed as he toasted me.

"Sweet iced tea," he corrected. "Ya'll are uncivilized up here," he teased, blue eyes shining from behind the fall of blond bangs. "Missing the finer things in life makes a boy homesick." Adam made a disgusted face behind his head. Jay's addiction to sweet tea was not one of the things they had in common. Jay elbowed him, "I saw that," he said, though there was no way he could have. Adam rubbed his ribs and made a face at me. Jay turned back to the computer.

"I'm glad you stopped by this morning. I think we've got one for you," he said. "A nice big fishy." He motioned at the screen, and I walked around so I could peer over their shoulders. It was a mystery to me how they worked the same computer without killing each other. They had no sense of personal space with one another. My personal space was extra large, and the idea of it being invaded made me cringe,

but their attempt to occupy the same space wasn't the issue, and I forced myself to pay attention to what Jay was telling me. If he said he had a big tip, it was worth my time to check it out. The screen was filled with the picture of an old building, the beautiful lines of it undisturbed by the small discreet sign on one brick wall. It read Blue Skies in blue neon scrawl.

"What's that?" I asked, my curiosity tweaked. They were obviously in the process of building a website for the business, but it was impossible to know what sort of business it was by the picture.

"New place in town, guy named Robin Levitt is opening it in a few weeks. It's a gay dinner club—dancing, bands, formal/semi-formal dress only," Adam explained. "They're remodeling the inside now. You should hit the owner up for that little book of yours. He asked yesterday about local advertising ops in the gay community." One of them clicked a link; I wasn't sure who because they each had a mouse. One on the left side for Adam and on the right for Jay. I thought watching them work together might give me a migraine. Whichever one it was clicked through a few views of the inside. Though unfinished, the elegant promise in the workmanship was obvious. There were a couple more of the outside, and then Jay muttered, "Wait, it's here." One more click and, "There he is," Jay said as a picture loaded. When it was finished I blinked.

If there was something to say I had no idea what it was. My first impression of the guy was youth—he looked like he was about twenty—and the second was dimples. I was positive I'd never seen anyone that gorgeous in my life.

“He’s gay?” I asked when my thought process decided to start up again. I leaned over their shoulders for a closer look. “You’re sure?” Adam and Jay shared a look; Adam snickered, and Jay elbowed him.

“Oh yeah, we’re sure,” Jay said with an air of such innocence that if I’d really been paying attention would have set off my alarms. But I didn’t have time for Jay’s innuendoes, not with the way that guy’s wavy brown hair brushed his shoulders, his very broad shoulders, demanding my attention. The most important thing Jay said got through to me loud and clear. This Robin guy, who’d somehow managed to fly into town under my radar, was gay. I looked again—narrow hips, long legs, and big hands. For a man like that I’d learn to do casual sex. I couldn’t stop staring. While I was staring at the screen, Adam and Jay were staring at me. When I realized it, my face flushed under my freckles. Adam snickered at my blush and got elbowed again. He seemed to spend a lot of time on the receiving end of that elbow. I stepped back and straightened my tie in a belated effort to maintain my dignity.

“It sounds like I need to collect his information so his business makes the directory,” I said, ignoring the knowing grins Adam and Jay exchanged. “He should invest in a full page ad to help get things off to a strong start.” I handed Adam a small notebook and a pen. “Could you write down that address? I’ll head over there as soon as I’ve talked to Nix and Fan.” Adam wrote the information in his precise hand, his print neater than I would have given a lefty credit for, and handed it back with a grin.

“Guess we might not see you later?” He laughed, and this time his fingers wrapped around the elbow destined for his ribs. He winked at Jay, who promptly stuck out his tongue in response. I gave a noncommittal grunt and left them to their battering of one another. I ignored the sound of their laughter as I made my way toward the exit, mentally reorganizing my day. My carefully arranged schedule had been thrown into chaos by the sight of laughing hazel eyes and dimples denting the baby smooth cheeks of a guy I didn’t even know. I had a million things to do, but the only thing on my mind was Blue Skies.

I DROVE up in front of the restaurant just before noon. It occupied one of the older buildings downtown, right in the midst of the city’s ongoing efforts to salvage Main Street from becoming a ghost town of abandoned businesses and porn shops. It was on the corner, and the work that had been done to the building made it stand out from the tired, worn buildings around it. All the stores on Main Street had huge plate glass windows. The original office that had housed The Connection was just down the block. The building that would become Blue Skies had been redesigned. Where windows had once been, a wall of brick faced the street interrupted only by a pair of blue double doors under a white awning with blue pinstripes. The oval neon sign beside the doors stated “Blue Skies” with quiet dignity.

I parked my car at the curb and glanced around as I secured it. It wasn’t the best place in the city to leave your car unattended. I was besieged by doubts over whether I



should even include this club in my directory. Businesses didn't succeed down here; they just died. I sighed and headed up the walk. I'd come this far. I might as well meet the pie-in-the-sky dreamer who owned this pending disaster.

I could hear construction going on inside; it was so loud I didn't bother knocking. Inside it was brightly lit and didn't look much like a nightclub under the glaring fluorescents set up as temporary lighting for the work crews. Remodeling was going on throughout the club, but the current focus of the work was at the back of the building where they were building a stage. The style was reminiscent of the kind seen in the saloons that were an inevitable part of old cowboy movies. My brain staggered at the thought of what building it must be costing; even unfinished it was gorgeous.

Hardwood paneling covered the walls on both sides of the stage; and an orchestra pit stretched along the front. Directly in front of the orchestra pit was a dance floor. There were no disco balls or spotlights, just a large square of beautiful hardwood in the middle of the room polished to a high gloss. A jumble of tables and chairs surrounded it on three sides. The ceiling towered overhead; at second-floor level a balcony overlooked the room. I could just make out more tables and chairs up there in the same state of disorganized clutter.

The first floor bar was off to my right and ran the full length of the room. The wall behind it was paneled with mirrors, and glass shelves in front of that were ready to display the bottles. Dead center over the tiny sink was a blue neon sign. The script matched the one outside and said simply Blue Skies. There were no other signs or ads of any

sort. The place reeked of class. It was nothing at all what I expected, and, as it turned out, neither was the owner.

“Welcome to Blue Skies!” a voice exclaimed from just behind me. Since I expected to be approached, the exuberance surprised but didn’t startle me. I turned with a smile to introduce myself. I found myself hand outstretched and completely speechless. My first shock was that I had to look up. At six foot one inch, it was rare for me to look up to anyone, and this was not just up, but way up. The guy had to be six foot five inches or more. He was built, the broad shoulders and narrow hips in perfect proportion to his height; his legs were longer in person than they had been in his picture. His hazel-green eyes glinted gold, and his hair was a riotous mass of almost curls that brushed his collar and hung over his ears and forehead. He should have been perfect. He was perfect, except for the second shock.

He was a queen. Flaming Queen. I wasn’t sure I had words to describe the guy; he was like a forest fire of gay. His white knit shirt was so tight I could see a hint of his skin through it. His skin tone made me jealous; it was a natural golden color that would toast well in the sun, but it didn’t look baked on from an endless succession of ten-minute tanning bed visits. You could hear the sizzle start the minute the sun got near my fair freckled flesh. Though it was none of my business, it annoyed me that he exposed his to the world so carelessly. I could see the dusky circles of his nipples through the thin material. The shirt covered his ribs, leaving his stomach bare, but it wasn’t his washboard abs that caught my attention. It was the sparkle of the gem nestled in his navel. I’d never seen a guy with his belly button pierced. The effect was interesting, but it did not

make me want to drop to my knees and put my mouth on it. Nope, not at all. Low slung jeans exposed his hipbones and ended piled on his flip-flop clad feet.

When I managed to drag my eyes back up to his face, he was grinning and there were dimples. I did not have to suppress an insane urge to press him back against the nearest wall, lick his dimples, and run my thumbs over the sharp jut of his hipbones. Not me. Not a bit. I swallowed, but it didn't help. My throat was dry, and I still hadn't found my voice. He didn't seem to notice. He grabbed my hand in his. His hand was huge and mine felt lost in his. The immediate thought that came to mind was to wonder how a hand that big would feel on my dick. I shrugged the thought away and pressed onward. I could do this. I was a professional.

"I'm Robin," he said, "Robin Levitt, and this is my place. We aren't quite ready for business yet; can I help you with something?"

I pride myself on my ability to keep my cool in any situation, but his question woke some base urge in me that I hadn't known existed. Could he help me? Hell yes, he could help me. He could start by sucking my cock. He could let me suck his. He could let me tie him to my bed naked and keep him there for a week. I'd feed him grapes and wine and cheese and fuck him stupid. I returned the friendly pressure of his hand and looked him straight in the eye.

"Russell Dreyer. I'm CEO of The GBLT-Het Connection, and I'd like to make you an offer, if you have a few minutes." I was proud of how steady my voice sounded and how firm my grip was, giving no hint at all of the heat wave I was suffering below the waist. Robin laughed lightly. He didn't let

go of my hand, instead he stroked the back of it with his free hand. His hazel green eyes glinted gold at me from under lowered lashes, as he deliberately flashed his dimples.

“Honey, I’ve always got time for a pretty boy to make me an offer.” He winked and led me away by the hand to what I supposed would turn out to be his office, but what I hoped would be his bedroom. My eyes were drawn to the strip of bare skin showing between the hem of his shirt and the low ride of his jeans. Except that it wasn’t bare: a tribal-style tattoo stretched across the small of his back, black swirls against golden flesh. I watched the movement of it as he walked, admired the sway of his trim hips. My mouth watered and my cock ached. He glanced back at me with a smirk, eyes flashing, as if he knew exactly what I was thinking. I smiled weakly in return and tried to pretend he was wrong.

THE room was his office, and it was huge. I didn’t know what the future plans for it were, but at the moment the single paper-covered desk set far back against a wall and the sofa in the center of the floor were swallowed by the empty space. The hardwood floors echoed as we walked across them. I looked around, and though the original woodwork was impressive, the plaster walls were cracked and peeling. There was so much paint flaking off the trim it reminded me of a shedding snake. The ceiling was high, not all the way to the second floor, but high enough that the lights hanging from it made as many shadows as they did pools of light.

“Wow,” I said, my voice neutral, “it’s big.”

Robin's laugh rang out, and he dropped down onto the couch. He propped an elbow on one knee, rested his chin in his hand, and looked at me. His dimples dented his cheeks though his smile wasn't visible. I shifted, uncomfortable under his intense gaze, and though I was broiling in my suit coat, I'd never been so happy to have it on and buttoned closed. My cock was so hard even that might not be enough to keep my secret. When his eyes met mine, my face flamed and he laughed again. "Turnabout's fair play, honey," he teased.

I couldn't argue with him, I'd been staring at him since I'd laid eyes on him, even though I have a type and he was not it. Not that tall, golden dimples are not my type; they could be... well, they were, especially coupled with such long legs and an incredible ass, but I couldn't get my mind wrapped around the whole flaming gayness of him. His looks and his mannerisms were a contradiction I couldn't reconcile. It made me distinctly uncomfortable. I didn't think that anyone should hide who they were, but being that blatantly gay was bad for the community. Our responsibility as gay citizens was to focus on joining society and gaining acceptance, not thumbing our noses at it. Robin's behavior was over the top and worked counter purpose to what I was trying to accomplish through The Connection.

Robin patted the couch beside him. "Come sit down, gorgeous, and tell me why you're here." I stared at the empty place on the couch next to him. I wasn't sure sitting there was a good idea, but it was important to remember I was working. I wasn't there to make social connections, and I couldn't leave without talking to him. I sat down, on the other end of the sofa, well out of a normal person's reach.

Robin laid his arm on the back of the couch and idly rubbed his fingers on my shoulder. We stared at one another in silence. I wanted to scoot closer; I wanted to feel the press of his body against mine and know the taste of his skin. I blinked in an effort to return to reality and reached into my jacket for my notebook.

“I came by to ask if you were interested in listing your business in our directory.” I opened the notebook and settled down into familiar territory, ignoring the brush of his fingers on my coat the best I could. “Let me explain.”

ROBIN, it turned out, was a shrewd businessman. He’d given me the information for the directory and bought a two-page color spread for the club. He’d told me to get the guys doing his website to do the ad for him. Adam and Jay. I frowned. They’d set me up in a big way; just wait till I got my hands on them. The idea of revenge didn’t occupy me for long. My thoughts kept returning to Robin and his club. While Robin’s flagrant gay behavior rubbed me the wrong way, his idea for his business was the embodiment of what The Connection was trying to accomplish.

“Everyone worries too much about hooking up,” Robin had told me, his cat’s-eyes sincere behind his shaggy bangs. “Hooking up is the easy part, damn near anyone can get fucked. What about after? What is there for gay couples to do after they hook up?” He sighed dramatically. “There aren’t a lot of options. Hanging out at those places, focusing on getting high and getting laid, isn’t good for guys who are together. That’s where Blue Skies comes in.” His smile was

sweet and dreamy, and my stupid heart turned over in my chest. “After you’re in love, it should be nothing but Blue Skies,” he said, staring over my shoulder like he could see something no one else could. His fingers still smoothed the shoulder seam of my suit jacket.

“Do you have that?” I caught myself asking, jealousy an unwelcome and unreasonable burn in my gut. “Blue Skies, I mean.” His face dimmed and the wounded look in his eyes made me want to gather him in my arms, to soothe away the memory of whatever had caused it. My lust was suddenly converted, woven into an entirely new design by something that went deeper than the way my cock had been talking to me since I met him.

“Not anymore,” he’d said, and I almost reached for him, but it was crazy. Nothing that had been happening to me made sense. I’d panicked and fled, thanking him on the way out for his business and tossing out a promise to call if I needed anything else. I escaped without meeting his eyes again. I was ashamed of how I’d run away, but I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t take the risk of having a man like him as a part of my life. I made the ride back to The Connection in silence, not even the radio breaking into my thoughts.

I clutched the steering wheel with both hands, my knuckles slowly turning white, and stared at the road. Slanted green-gold cat’s-eyes haunted me. I refused to acknowledge them. Robin was sad and lonely under his bright façade, but that wasn’t my problem. Most of us were, and I’m not in the business of rescuing damaged gay boys. I didn’t have room for them, not in my schedule, and not in my heart.

WEEKS passed and one afternoon found me standing in my office staring down at a card in my hand. The engraved invitation was beautiful. Sky blue and engraved with silver filigree on the front, the only script was in the bottom right corner: Blue Skies. And when opened the beautiful calligraphy flowed over the page. It read: “A Grand Opening and you are invited,” and all the details followed. It had as much class as the club.

I still couldn’t reconcile the understated elegance of Blue Skies with the flamboyance of its owner. I hadn’t seen Robin since my initial contact with him to register his business in the directory. I’d spoken to him by phone several times, but despite the warm invitation in his voice I’d kept our acquaintance impersonal and businesslike. I could still see those slanted eyes looking at me, feel the warmth of his fingers on my shoulder, but I couldn’t get past my discomfort with his flagrant behavior.

I couldn’t put the card down; opening it and closing it, I turned it over and upside down. It mesmerized me. It was hard to stay away from Blue Skies and its eccentric owner, hard to talk with him on the phone and hear that lilt of hope in his voice just to crush it again and again with my inability to respond. I looked at the time and date—this Saturday. I was free. I could go as a show of support; after all, he was a client. I could just make an appearance, have a drink, and then slip out. It was a novel idea for a club, and it would be good for the community if it succeeded. It was interesting to think about a gay club where guys kept their clothes on and



no one was fucking in the bathroom. I wondered how popular a place like that was really going to be. He might need my show of support.

The decision was still hanging in the balance when I started down stairs, the card in my hand. Adam and Jay were at their table and I wandered over to sit with them. Jay signaled for the guy at the counter to bring me a coffee. I was staring at the invitation again and didn't even realize it until Adam reached over and snagged it from my hand. He and Jay looked at it together and then he tossed it back.

"We're going," he said, reaching for his cup. "It sounds like a good idea." I glanced at them, sitting shoulder to shoulder as usual. Jay's eyes were soft with affection as he leaned into Adam.

"Robin likes you," Jay said, his tone disapproving. "He keeps asking about you." I shifted uneasily in my chair. I accepted the coffee from the waiter and occupied myself making sure it was black and strong the way I like it best.

"He shouldn't." I sipped the hot liquid before meeting their eyes. "You guys know he's not my type. You shouldn't have set me up like that." I wanted to add that I hadn't thought about him, but I couldn't tell a lie that big. The truth was I couldn't stop thinking about him. It wasn't just how sexy he was, either. The whole business venture was brilliant and spoke of a mind worth getting to know. I wondered who managed his finances and how someone as young as he was found the backing to take on such a monumental project. I wanted to know what he liked to read and what he did to pass the time. I wanted to know how his hair smelled and what his waking-up face looked like.

“That’s stupid.” Adam wasn’t one to mince words. “You know, we used to be like you: proper, respectful, never pushing what we are in anyone’s face.” He hesitated, and I watched as Jay took his hand and squeezed it, encouraging him. “We rarely showed affection for one another in public. We were at a party one night, and when we left I took Jay’s hand and kissed his cheek. We didn’t get a half block before we were attacked. They held Jay and made him watch while they beat the crap out of me.”

Adam stopped talking and put an arm around Jay, tugging him closer. “They didn’t try to kill me, just beat me up enough to land me in the emergency room. The doctor was concerned and cautioned us to be more discreet, that flaunting our preference wasn’t safe.” The anger in Adam’s voice wasn’t a part of the memory, it was fresh and raw. His eyes flashed with it. “Holding hands and sharing a kiss is flaunting? Fuck them, Russell. There is no appeasing them, no way to edge around their defenses and win the day, not when a kiss on the cheek can incite them to violence.”

Jay hugged him close, and Adam turned, bringing their lips together. The kiss was long and tender, Adam’s hand caressed Jay’s face, and the obvious love between them made me ache. Since meeting Robin I’d become hyper aware of how alone I was, how lonely. It didn’t make any sense; I had only met the man once. How could that one meeting have made such an impact on me?

“I’m not against reasonable displays of affection,” I said in an effort to defend myself. “I feel the same way about het couples. You know that. There is a certain sense of decorum that should be observed in public by everyone. That’s what

enables society to function; without restraint among individuals you'd have anarchy." The couple broke apart and they turned to look at me. Jay laughed silently against Adam's neck.

"Dude, we aren't suggesting it's okay to go marching naked in the street painted with rainbows and sparkles," Adam said, his humor barely restrained. Jay made no such attempt, and his shoulders shook with his mirth. "You worry too much, Russell, that's all. Stuff like that matters, but sometimes it seems like appearance matters more to you than anything else, and that's not right. It's just as wrong as some dude in a pride parade wearing nothing but his pride. Do you really think society is going to crumble because Robin has his navel pierced and has a little hip action going when he walks? How would you like to be judged solely by that stick up your ass?" Adam reached out and patted my hand, presumably to soften his words, but watching he and Jay pack up and leave for the day only made my confusion worse, and I barely acknowledged them when they said goodnight.

SATURDAY night I found myself standing outside the club. Blue Skies rang with music and laughter. There was a steady flow of people in and out, and a valet to whisk your car away to the parking lot behind the building. I hadn't seen it when I was there before, but the valet explained that Robin had purchased the building behind Blue Skies and replaced it with a small parking deck. The parking deck benefited the

entire downtown. Once more I found myself impressed with his ingenuity.

The valet told me that parking was free to Blue Skies customers but cost a dollar an hour for everyone else. I wondered what the additional parking would mean for other businesses on the street since one of major issues had always been a lack of available parking space. True revitalization of the downtown would be a boon to everyone; it would be an amazing thing for Robin to be the catalyst to that success.

The idea of Robin as a part of the town planning committee made me laugh. How could they keep him out? He was doing single-handedly what they had failed to accomplish in all the years I'd lived here. I imagined him calling the chairman "honey" and sprawling in his chair, gemstone glinting in his navel, and chuckled again.

I went into Blue Skies and was greeted at the door by a tall young man in a perfectly tailored tuxedo. His wild hair had been tamed for the night, though it threatened revolt every second. Slanted eyes danced at me while I gaped, unable to even shake his hand or find my voice to formulate an appropriate greeting. Broad shoulders stretched the shoulders of the jacket beyond reason and a cummerbund, the exact shade of golden brown in his hazel eyes, encased his trim waist. His huge hand wrapped around mine and he pulled me close, leaning to whisper, "Somethin' got your tongue, baby?" His delighted little laugh came out in a puff of hot air against my ear, and I almost swayed into him. At the last moment I pulled myself together and took a step back, though I didn't take my hand out of his. I grinned.

“Wish something did,” I quipped back, letting my gaze linger on his finely made mouth. Even as the words escaped me, I felt the heat rise in my cheeks. I seemed to lose all sense of control when I was around him. It was ridiculous, but when he tugged me by the hand I followed without question. I didn’t watch the way his hips moved under that tuxedo or imagine them unclad or what those long legs must look like spread out on a bed. I thought about nothing but the fact he had the temperature set too warm for a club and I should mention it to him. But when he stopped at a secluded table where two people were already seated, and I said nothing, it was only because my mouth was dry from the heat. Robin pulled out a chair for me.

“These are my guests of honor; they made me famous with their work on my site!” Robin beamed at Adam and Jay. They were tucked on one side of the table, sitting almost on top of each other. “I’ll send you all new drinks. I have to work. My boss is such a slave driver!” He laughed and I stared. His eyes, his laugh, his hair, everything about him was a magnet pulling me toward him. The strength of the attraction made me frown, and I sat. His hands on the back of the chair moved to my shoulders. His fingers slid under the collar of my jacket, and his thumbs rubbed the bare skin of my neck. I thought I would melt, simply slide under the table into a puddle. That was all, his thumbs on my skin and my dick was talking to me. Drinking was a bad idea.

He leaned down until his breath was brushing my ear once more. “I hope you’re still here when I get a break, baby.” And then he was gone, his hot presence at my back fading into the crowd, his electrifying touch gone from my skin. I had to force myself to stay in my seat and not go after

him. I attempted to corral my thoughts into some coherent order, but my brain was still muddled when I met the gazes of the amused young men across the table from me.

“Hi,” I muttered and didn’t blush at all when they simultaneously burst into laughter. “Shut up,” I growled. “Just shut up.” I drank the frilly icy pastel drinks set in front of me. I collected the umbrellas and plastic monkeys and colored toothpicks stabbed through fruit. I ate the meal they brought; the porterhouse steak and baked potato were cooked to perfection. The band playing that night was a local one. I was surprised that Robin hadn’t gone for a bigger name since it was his big night, but I couldn’t fault his choice. The band was great and played original songs interspersed with the mandatory Top Twenty. The subdued lighting was perfect for the atmosphere of the club, and there were couples on the dance floor. The huge room was filled with music and chatter, the sounds of silverware on plates and ice in glasses. People smiled, laughed, and spent money; Robin’s opening was a huge success.

He was a huge success. I watched him work the room, his smile bright, his hair curling more and more over his ears and collar as the club filled and so many people dancing and milling around raised the temperature. He talked with his hands expansively, his Texas roots showing with every ya’ll, honey, and darlin’ that dripped from his lips. He had no sense of personal space, leaning in to hug or touch almost everyone he talked to. Straight guys drank shots with him, pounded him on the back, introduced him to their girls, who giggled and willingly accepted a hug. Gay dudes drank shots with him, tried to feel him up, and failing that, introduced

him to their partners. He'd tsk and give the suffering partner an affectionate hug.

"Naughty!" he called back as he whisked away to another group. "Behave!" Watching him was like watching a force of nature. I noticed that even though he affected a lot of guys the way he did me, he didn't appear to have the same reaction that I got from him. That warmed me in ways it had no right to.

"He's incredible," Jay told me from his perch on Adam's thigh. He and Adam had indulged in a moderate amount to drink, and he had left his chair in favor of Adam's lap. They flirted and cuddled but as of yet there had been no outright groping. I still wasn't comfortable with it, but they ignored my pointed glares, completely at ease with one another.

I couldn't argue with Jay, Robin was incredible. He was also so gay he dripped rainbows when he walked. They just didn't understand. I couldn't. Gay was my sexual orientation, not my identity. I couldn't let who I fucked dictate who I was, and I wouldn't be happy with a partner who did. They read my thoughts in my expression.

"You are a judgmental bastard," Jay told me, climbing to his feet. He grabbed Adam's hand and pulled him up. They left me sitting there in the semi-darkness, the remains of my dinner in front of me and the booty pillaged from my drinks spilling bright colors across the table. I wondered if they were right about me, but if they were, it didn't matter much. There was little chance I was going to suddenly change at my age. I needed a sedate partner, someone willing to help with the business and who could handle himself professionally. I sighed and got up from the table. I'd find Robin and tell him

good night, wish him luck. I'd ruined Adam and Jay's night. I didn't plan on messing anything else up.

I turned toward the door just as another group came in; there wasn't anything to set them apart from the people already in the club, no bald heads or black leather. Still, there was something about the way they wore their suits, something about the way their eyes moved over the crowd that made the hair on the back of my neck rise. I saw other people turning to look at the four men accompanied by a couple of women. They lingered in the doorway, each woman on the arm of a man, but the two other men obviously not together. Robin approached them, his face beaming. The band was between songs, and when one of the men spoke the excellent acoustics of the room carried his words to every corner.

"It's a fag club."

Robin hesitated, and I saw his shoulders square. It's true there wasn't anything outside the club to indicate that it was a gay club, but the advertising was clear on that point. Gay couples were the primary focus of Blue Skies, though everyone was welcome if they could behave. I was halfway to them before Robin reached the group, his hand outstretched, dimples flashing.

"Hi! I'm Robin, welcome to Blue Skies." Before he could say anything else they spit on him. Not one of them, they all spit on him. Their fancy tuxedos, designer dresses, and carefully coifed hair had failed to make them civilized.

"Fucking faggot." It was the last thing the guy who'd spoken previously had to say that night, because my fist was in his mouth. He flew backward into his companions; the



girls screamed. There were four men, and they weren't small, but I didn't back down, stepping forward even though Robin clutched my arm trying to get me to calm down. It wasn't happening. They'd come into his place, invaded his space and they spit on him. And for what? A swish? I was going to kill them, and I hit another one.

When the police came, the intruders were gone, and I was tucked away in Robin's office. I never saw them. Once they'd been assured that the customer who'd called the police had overreacted, the officers left with soft drinks and snacks in hand. Their egos had been thoroughly stroked by Robin's effusive praise for how quickly they'd responded. He came back to the office with an ice bucket and several clean bar towels in hand. He settled on the couch next to me and reached in his pocket and pulled out a steak in a Ziploc bag.

"You might want to put this on that." He indicated my right eye which was now almost swollen shut. I took it after he slid it out of the bag and looked at it. Filet mignon. I tried to lift a brow but it just made me wince. Fuck, my face hurt. Trying to beat up four dudes? Bad idea. "Only the best for my hero," he told me, lifting my hand to press the steak to my eye. I gave a goofy smile, which was the only kind I could manage considering how swollen my lips were. He helped me lay down and pressed a cold towel to them, then sighed and took my hand. His was large and warm, the nails neatly trimmed and buffed to a shine. Mine was bloody; punching people in the face was also a bad idea. Except for this one thing: the expression on Robin's face when he looked at me was making me dizzy. He cleaned my hands and bandaged my knuckles.

“You didn’t have to do that,” he said, “There are bouncers.” He motioned at himself. “I’m kind of one myself.” The idea of him tossing someone made me laugh and wince—it hurt. I shrugged. Besides, he was wrong. I *did* have to do it.

“They spit on you,” I managed to say. He laughed though there was a shadow in his eyes I hadn’t noticed before. He patted my hand where it lay in his, the bandaging stark white against my skin.

“Darlin’, I’ve been spit on before, been through lots worse than that,” he assured me. “Spit washes off.” I stared at him with my one good eye.

“Why?” I asked. He was so happy, open, and friendly it was hard to imagine anyone ever mistreating him. He shook his head as if he thought my brain was addled from the fight.

“Do you really have to ask that?” He hesitated, and then staring down where his hand held mine, he continued, “I tried to be someone like you once. I have the head for it.” He glanced up briefly and a dimple flashed. “I have plenty of smarts, but I just can’t. No matter what I do, it... this... *me*... just comes out. So I gave up. I can’t change my personality. Why should I have to try?” His fingers started to slide from mine, but I tightened my grip, ignoring the sting in my knuckles. He finally lifted his eyes to meet mine once more. “I understand them,” he said. “I know why they did what they did, but you? You don’t approve of me and you.... That was pretty extreme, what you did out there.” There was a teasing lilt in his voice, and I realized he knew why I had

stayed away, what my problem was. I felt no better than those who had spit on him.


“I’m sorry.” I moved the cloth so I could talk to him, but he put it back, firmly closing my mouth.

“Sorry? For being my hero?” he teased. “How silly of you. And if you are going to apologize for your personality, don’t bother. I’m quite sure you can’t help it, baby.” He winked at me, and his dimples were back full force. “Besides, I do believe you had an epiphany.” His cat’s-eyes danced at me, and my body heated despite the pain I was suffering. I was pretty sure he was right, and that I was going to let him drip rainbows all over me anytime he wanted. I wanted to tell him, but all the alcohol I’d consumed was taking affect. The pain was dulling, and my eyes refused to stay open. I decided I wasn’t up for another fight and let them close.

“Just blue skies.” I muttered. I felt his lips on my forehead, and as I drifted to sleep, he whispered, “Nothing but, baby. I promise. Nothing but blue skies.”

DIANE ADAMS wrote her first stories in high school, but life interfered and the notebooks were packed away and forgotten. There were jobs, a series of them, and children... a series of them as well and not a lot of time left over for daydreams. A few years ago, after the first of the series of children were almost grown Diane discovered fan fiction and a dreamer was reborn. She enjoyed some success as a fan fiction writer, gathered a strong following, and won quite a few awards. It was nice, but the real dream was to have that same success as a writer of original fiction exploring worlds of her own creation. That dream is, at long last, coming true.

She tweets at [https://twitter.com/d\\_adams](https://twitter.com/d_adams). You may contact Diane at [diane.adams@virtualdelusions.com](mailto:diane.adams@virtualdelusions.com).

The background of the entire advertisement is a black and white photograph showing the silhouettes of two men's faces in profile, facing each other in a romantic, intimate pose. In the upper left corner, there is a white diamond-shaped logo containing a black spiral design.

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