



A
DREAMSPINNER
PRESS

Nap-Size Dream

ROOM FOR ONE

COOPER WEST

TOBY was used to housemates. He'd railed against renting out his spare bedrooms at first, but five years after the fact, he could barely imagine living in an empty house. Some people were better roomies than others—a few had lasted a couple of years, while some he kicked out within a month. It was the hazard anyone who rented rooms faced, but on the whole, Toby had lucked out, and he knew it.

Still, it did not lend him to being generous to musicians.

“No.”

“Toby, I swear, he has a steady job!” Steff whined, walking behind Toby in the kitchen like they were in a conga line.

“No.”

“Seriously! He’s worked at the cable company for, like, years!”

“No! No no no! Last time I had a musician tenant, I got stiffed not only for rent, but for the tickets for breaking the noise ordinance!”

“David isn’t like that.” Steff pouted, and she was cute when she pouted—everyone agreed on that—but Toby was not giving up the fight.

“What, are you fucking him? What?”

Steff smacked his shoulder. “No! I’m still steady with James. This is a friend of his.”

“His *musician* friend,” Toby snarled, stirring his soup. It was still lukewarm, so he shoved it back into the microwave.

“I sometimes wonder if your ex was a musician,” Steff grumbled and leaned against the kitchen counter, staring at the floor.

Toby carefully did not answer. His tenants as well as his friends knew he was essentially divorced from his ex, Alan, and that Toby had bought him out of his half of the house, but he could not really afford it at the time so took in boarders to cover the mortgage note. They all knew that, but only his closest inner circle knew what a brutal bastard Alan was. Alan had left town pretty quickly after the breakup and was unlamented by everyone who knew him. There were people in town who remembered Toby and Alan as a couple, but they were usually smart enough not to bring it up. Toby’s own support network of friends who knew the whole truth consisted of his sister Mary, who lived across town, and a few other people scattered across the country. He preferred it that way.

“Could you at least consider it? If you don’t have anyone else lined up?” Steff finally sighed in defeat.

“The ad just went on craigslist yesterday. If I don’t have anyone in a week, I’ll talk to your musician.”

“He’s not *my* musician...” Steff grumbled as she shuffled out of the kitchen.

TOBY cursed the economy that let people rent three bedroom houses for little more than he was charging for a room. The only difference was that he included all utilities in the price, and did not require tenants to sign a lease. He liked the freedom to kick people out once they proved problematic, and his tenants liked being able to leave without any penalties once their situation improved.

He was lucky that his photography career had taken off. Giving up ever making a name for himself in the fine art world, he turned at first to catalog work, then made a name in erotic/fetish photography. It was to the point where watching two outrageously gorgeous people tie each other up and fuck like bunnies was nothing more than a working day to him, but the money was really, really good; because while everyone had a webcam, few people had the right lighting. In the course of five years he paid off the debts Alan left him with and had more than enough coming in to cover the mortgage and bills. At this point, tenants were almost a luxury item, and he usually ended up renting to people he wanted to help out just because he could.

Alan spent years isolating Toby from everyone and everything he loved other than photography, so now Toby wallowed in having an extended network of tenants and former tenants, some of whom were almost like family to him. People in the house meant he was not alone anymore; people in the house meant he was safe.

There were rare bumps in finding tenants, though, and this was one of them: everyone seemed to be settled down, the apartment complexes near the university were offering killer deals for the summer, and Toby could not get a respectable bite off of craigslist to save his life. So, he was back to Steff's friend-of-her-boyfriend musician guy, David VonHeffan or VonHorken or Von-H-something.

"So, you've got a steady job and references." He looked at the information form he'd had David fill out. The guy nodded enthusiastically in answer. He was medium build and pretty, with soft broad lips and gorgeous, deadly blue eyes, and a tuft of wild hair cut short on top. Toby guessed he was in his late twenties, which put him about five years younger than him. He was wearing jeans and a T-shirt and a hoodie, though, making him appear younger.

"Why do you need this room?" Toby put the paper down on the couch next to him and watched David shift uncomfortably in the lounge chair across from him.

"Well you know I'm in a band? Or was. Am?" He waved a hand around uncertainly, and Toby tried not to be distracted by his long, elegant fingers. They were almost feminine. "We were all renting a house, but not really. Jason—our bass player—was renting it, and we were roomies... and then things kind of blew up with his girlfriend, and we all got kicked out. I've, uh, been couch surfing for the last two weeks."

Toby imagined he did not lack for offers to share a bed, either, but instead of saying so just smirked. David picked

up on it, though, grimacing and running a hand through his hair, making it stick up even more.

“Yeah, yeah, I could, you know, work that for a while. But I need my own space. I don’t just play, I write the songs for the band. I need privacy to do that.”

“You lost your bass player, though, right?”

“Sure, but we’ll get a new one.” He stopped and studied Toby with his fierce eyes. “Look, what else do you need to know? For me to get the room?”

Toby sighed. It had been a foregone conclusion from the start that, short of revealing himself as a serial killer or jobless, David was getting the room. “You know the deal? No lease, no harm no foul for getting kicked out or leaving without notice. Rent amount non-negotiable, includes utilities and internet access, and you are expected to clean up after yourself. Parties are okay with a week’s notice to Steff and me. And your guitar better have headphones. I don’t want to hear it.”

“So no band practice in the garage?” David frowned, obviously hoping that he could negotiate it.

“The garage is my photography studio. No entry.”

David sighed and looked at the coffee table for a minute. “Frank’s got space for band practice. I was just hoping for something less of a drive. But okay. I need a place short-term, so yeah. Deal.”

“How short-term were you thinking?”

“Four months? Is that okay?”

Toby nodded. That might work out perfectly—David would be leaving right at the end of the summer, just when, in Toby’s experience, people were often looking for a place.

He stood up and held out his hand, and they shook on it. Toby figured he could put up with a musician for four months, especially if he had headphones.

DAVID liked to throw parties, which was the first unusual thing Toby noticed about him. Most of his tenants were social butterflies, going out to other people’s parties or to nightclubs and bars for their entertainment; Steff, his longest long-term tenant, spent a lot of time at her boyfriend’s place and St. Michael’s Pub when she was not at work. Toby was used to having people around, but not being very visible. David had other ideas.

He hosted a board game party about once a week, a low-key affair for close friends, which Toby thought was incredibly lame until he got sucked into a four hour test of wills in *Risk: Star Wars Original Trilogy Edition*. After that, David simply assumed Toby was on the short list for board game night, and unless Toby was under a tight deadline or out at a nighttime shoot, he was there.

Once a month, David held large Southern-style potluck affairs that brought in twenty to thirty people. The first one Toby only partially attended, going out for a movie earlier as he usually did when tenants held parties. He figured being

the landlord was not an automatic invite and tried to be respectful. When he showed up later that night, David fell on him in almost comical dismay, wondering why he had not come home earlier and forcing him to try his best friend's version of bacon-wrapped artichoke hearts by poking one in his mouth when he tried to answer him.

Toby stopped trying to pigeonhole David after that, figuring he was someone who was used to having lots of people around and enjoyed cleaning the resulting mess. He kept his guitar practice quiet, and when he was not at band practice, or his job, or hosting a party, often sat in the living room reading a book. Toby enjoyed David's company, which was more than could be said of some tenants, and if he always seemed to be underfoot, it was not as if it was much of a hardship.

TOBY came home from the shoot hot and sticky and miserable. His models looked elegant and sexy in latex while making out in the ferns, but they had also nearly passed out from heatstroke. It had been a five gallon sport drink kind of shoot, and Toby was very bitter that his fans and customers would all look at the pictures and think the sweat was sprayed on the models out of a bottle. Every drop was real, on them and on him, and Toby's own damp clothes were testament to his craft. At least, he thought so.

There was music in the den; he could hear it though the garage door as he dumped his gear and locked the place

down. When he walked in, it was to candle light and blues music and the smell of something meaty and saucy.

“What, you got a date and forget to warn us?” Toby nearly stumbled into the couch. David put down his guitar and jumped up, grabbing him.

“What the hell? You okay?”

“Winter can get here any damn time it likes. It is ten different kinds of hell out there.” Toby nodded absently, the cool air of the A/C making him giddy. He felt himself being pushed into the cushions, and part of him rebelled at sitting on anything without a shower first but exhaustion won out.

“Yes, hence I am in here.” David’s voice was distant. Toby realized why when David was in front of him again with a glass of water. “Drink.”

“Mmmmm.” Toby nodded and downed the glass, holding it out for a refill. David was in and out of the kitchen again quickly, handing him another full glass. This time he sipped at it.

“Seriously, you look beat. You going to be okay?”

“Yeah. I’ll be fine. Just a miserable day out there, three hours doing that shoot in the boonies and most of that time I was thinking I would have to call the paramedics for my models.”

David gave him a confused glance as he sat back down and picked up his glass, filled with amber liquid that Toby guessed was whisky.

“Latex. It was for some new dresses LaTeXia has coming out, so we just doubled up and shot some soft-core sex scenes for the web site too. But jeezus, we were all ready to pass out *looong* before the come shot.”

David frowned. “Since moving in with you, my interest in porn has really dropped off. You kind of ruin the magic for me.”

Toby nodded as he leaned back and closed his eyes. “S’mmy job. You’re welcome.”

David snorted and laughed, but did not add anything else to the conversation. Toby heard him pick up his guitar again and start playing bits and pieces along with the music on the stereo. Toby drank his water and drifted for a bit, reveling in the A/C and the dark room and the soft couch.

Finally David put down the guitar again. “Got some stew on. Should be ready. Care for any?”

Toby nodded and held out his glass again, trying to look pathetic, which he feared was not much of a reach right then. David grinned at him and took the glass. He banged around in the kitchen for a bit and then came out carrying a tray with two bowls and a plate of bread on it. He set it down, and Toby noticed a second glass that David quickly filled with the Scotch whisky he was drinking and handed over. Toby took a sip and sighed—it was lush and honeyed and delicious. He reached for his bowl of stew.

“You are totally spoiling me.”

“Awesome.” David grinned and sat down, grabbing his own bowl and a few pieces of bread.

“Oh no, this in no way gets you a break on rent.” Toby shook a piece of bread at him as he chewed.

“Ahhhh, my master plan foiled!” David laughed and they toasted their glasses.

The time sped by as they ate, had second helpings, emptied half the bottle, and relaxed on the couch. By that time Toby’s brain came back online just enough to know he was a little buzzed, and that the room was lit by candles. He waved his hand around. “Seriously. Date?”

“No! Can’t a guy just want some romantic time for himself?”

Toby snapped his fingers. “After all this time, I had no idea you were gay!”

David groaned.

“It’s okay, I’m gay too, you know.”

“Oh well, good then!”

“The board games should have tipped me off...”

David rolled his eyes and plucked Toby’s glass from his hands. “You are drunk.”

“So totally not. Buzzed, a little; still confused by you, though.” He looked around. “This is nice, I have to admit.”

“And that was the whole goal. Nice. With food, and good whisky, and blues.” He leaned back on the couch, stretching out, and Toby was reminded of the first time they met, when he’d thought David was so good looking. Mostly, David had faded into the background noise of Toby’s life, but right then he was casual and relaxed and sexy. He looked like a masculine delicacy, firm and solid yet pretty in the candlelight. Toby almost wished he had his camera.

David looked over at him, and his expression cleared from the languid haze he had going on a moment earlier into something sharp and predatory. His body flexed instinctively, Toby could tell by the way he nearly grimaced. He visibly forced himself to settle down and look at the wall of bookshelves where the stereo was set up, his gaze locked and blank.

Toby was surprised to realize that David was forcing himself to hold back.

Sighing, Toby reached out and put David’s half-full glass back in his hands. He gave Toby a shy glance, as if to see if he was mad at him. Toby shrugged. He was not even sure he would turn David down if he pressed... it had been a very long time since he had gotten physical with anyone, and he knew he would be lying if he said he did not miss it.

Moreover, he actually liked David. Toby enjoyed his company and his strange dinner parties and his music, but that was the best kind of tenant, he thought. One who blended into his life, who he felt comfortable around. He was not sure he wanted to mess that up with sex, much less the possibility of a relationship. Or not. He stared at his glass,

realizing with a peculiar clarity that he was not really sure what he wanted anymore, and that he was possibly overthinking this. It felt wrong to let David believe this was not a big deal, in its own way, and Toby found himself talking before he finished that thought.

“I was with Alan for eight years.” He set his glass down without drinking any more. David was frowning at him, obviously not sure if he was supposed to reply. Toby shook his head. “I like my life. I’m not sure I want to change it again. But I’m not sure I’m entirely happy either.”

David pulled one knee up on the couch so he could turn to face him directly. “I think you would know if you’re happy.”

“Yeah, that’s what I thought too. But you know what? It’s not like I’m unhappy either. I’m... comfortable.”

David gave him a small, shy smirk. “Isn’t that when most people get divorced?”

Toby laughed. “Comfortable is good, for me. Alan was... difficult. Abusive. I’m lonely being single, sure, but don’t want to risk that again. I’m not out to rock the boat with casual sex either.”

David did not ask for details either way, which Toby appreciated. “Lonely’s no fun.” He gave Toby a shuttered look.

“No, but being hurt and in pain is much, much worse.”

David carefully set his drink on the table and leaned forward on the couch, still facing him, angling in closer. “Doesn’t have to hurt to be with someone.”

Toby looked at him, knowing what was coming and unwilling to stop it. David was right, and it had been so long since anyone wanted him enough to get past his defenses that ironically he did not want to put up much of a defense. Toby gazed steadily at David as he leaned in slowly, gauging his reaction, until their lips were touching.

That was enough, the brushing of skin against skin, to set Toby’s nerves tingling in anticipation. He brought his hands up to rest on David’s chest, not pushing him away, just trying to make a connection. David responded by leaning up on his knees and pushing against Toby’s hands, pressing him down in a slow slide onto the couch. Toby pulled one leg up and nestled it between David’s as he lowered himself down, barely breaking the soft and gentle kiss the whole time.

David pulled up and looked at him while he started undoing the buttons on his own shirt. “This okay? I’m not... I’m not intimidating you, am I? This too fast?” He sounded and looked so sincerely worried that Toby stopped to laugh.

“No. No! But thanks.”

“Just... you know...” David murmured and tipped his head, leaning in to kiss again. Toby parted his lips just a little, allowing David to poke his tongue in enough for them to taste each other. When David’s shirt was completely unbuttoned he did not even try to get it off, simply let it fall

open so Toby could move his hands to his bare back. David made a small needy noise as Toby's hands stroked his skin, and he pushed his tongue farther into Toby's mouth. As they both relaxed into each other, Toby felt David's erection starting to press against his thigh. It was still a little soft, but substantial enough for him to take notice of it. Toby's hips gave a shallow thrust and he pulled his knee up to press his thigh harder against David.

"Oh my god, yes, please..." David made humping motions against Toby's leg and starting giving him small, frantic kisses all over his chin and jaw.

"Hey, don't take off without me." Toby returned the kisses along his temple and forehead.

"No, just... feels so good. Been a while." David slowed his hips down to a languid grind, though, and worked at Toby's neck, kissing and gently sucking his skin. Toby felt hands scrabbling at his waist, then under his shirt, fingers gently skimming his skin. Toby moved his head up and kissed him again, harder, pushing his tongue into David's mouth. They both groaned and David's hands flexed, grabbing Toby's waist in a clutch. Toby shoved his hips up and they were rubbing and tongue-fucking in earnest, a more familiar and comfortable routine he knew what to do with.

Moving his hands, Toby started to undo David's pants, but David pulled up and back in response. Surprised, Toby stopped to stare, but David smiled and dropped his hands to rest lightly on Toby's hips.

“Hardly seems fair to move *that* fast,” he said, and pulled at Toby’s sweatpants, dragging them and his underwear off in a smooth move. Toby could tell from David’s body language, the way he was shuffling backward and licking his lips and staring at his cock, that he was planning to go down. Toby sat up to stop him.

“Like this.” He got up on his knees and faced the back of the couch, bracing himself, legs wide. It was a cheesy way to “present” but he was aiming for distraction. Sex was one thing but he was not too comfortable with how intimate things were getting.

David did not move for a few moments, then pressed up against his back. He helped Toby pull off his T-shirt, wrapping his hands around him to hold them close together. David’s lips were at his ear and he licked it quickly before whispering, “What do you want?”

“As long as you have protection, I think we’re good to go.”

“Damn—yeah, okay—yeah.” One hand snaked around Toby’s waist to slide down and gently stroke his cock. Toby shuddered at the light, exploratory touches. David’s other arm tightened around his waist, pressing them so closely together Toby could feel the erection through David’s pants against his ass. He moaned softly with every touch and gasped as David squeezed ever closer.

“David...” Toby wanted to sound demanding but it came out in a long, anguished groan, and David chuckled.

David pushed Toby forward as he leaned back, his hands retreating. “Stay here. Like this. Just like this.” David ran a hand down Toby’s naked back, slowly. Toby nodded and lowered his head to rest on his forearms which he crossed over the back of the couch. He felt like a moron, sitting on the couch like that completely exposed, but he supposed it was better than having to lie there with his dick bobbing in the air, watching David run around with his pants open. This way he could just wait and think about making it good for them.

David crawled back on the couch after a second, but Toby did not move.

“I put the chain lock on the front door, just in case Steff comes home early. Here, let me....”

Toby felt slick fingers pushing at his butt cheeks, spreading them apart enough for David to rest a finger against his hole. As he did so, his other hand came back around to start teasing Toby’s cock again.

“Please, fuck, just... come on...” Toby groaned, thrusting his dick into David’s hand, then let out a long, heavy sigh as David’s finger breached him. “Oh my god, oh....”

“Been a while for you too, huh?”

“Yeah, yeah.” Toby gurgled out the words as David twisted his hand and shoved another finger in. “But I’m good, this is good. Fucking great.”

David laughed, pushing his fingers in and out and tightening his grip on Toby’s cock, pulling at it hard.

“I’m gonna come, you know that? Just, *oh fuck*, yeah, I’m...” Toby stuttered and gave it up, David chuckling behind him. His orgasm washed over him hard and dirty, with David’s fingers in his ass and his hand covered in Toby’s come. Toby gasped loudly, his thighs shaking. It was good, so good, maybe too fast but still fantastic.

He heard David fumbling with his pants. He thanked the gods for men who always packed for emergencies as he heard the crinkling sound of a condom wrapper being opened. Another second of silence, or close to silence as David mumbled and huffed to himself, and then he was pressed back up against him, holding Toby’s hips to pull him down.

“Got you,” David said and pushed in slowly.

Toby lowered his head and moaned at the breach. David stopped then, barely inside of him, and rested his forehead on Toby’s shoulder.

“Thank you, thank you, I’ve wanted this... you... oh Toby, goddammit....” He began pushing again, dragging Toby’s hips down to meet his as he lifted, and Toby shivered at the feeling of being filled. It had been a long time, and it was slightly uncomfortable, even with his own post-orgasmic haze going on—David’s cock was substantial enough to make a difference, he thought uncharitably as he shifted and squirmed, his hands clutching the back of the couch.

David’s hips snapped and he gasped, the reaction uncontrolled, and suddenly everything about David was *just right*. Toby laughed through a moan as David pulled out and

shoved back in, all the way in, then did it again, and again. David leaned forward and kissed the back of his neck, and Toby wondered how in the hell David could multitask like that while he could barely hold on to the damn couch.

“Say my name. Please, Toby, please....”

He nodded and opened his mouth, pleading David’s name off his lips in a chant. David’s thrusts picked up speed and soon they were jerking the couch with their movements, racing to keep up with each other as they lost themselves in the heat of sex. David finally lost the rhythm, his whole body stuttering and shaking, his hands letting go of Toby to reach out and grab the back of the couch for support. Toby’s own cock twitched hopefully at the sensation of David’s cock throbbing with release deep inside of him.

The moment of connection, tenuous as it was, lasted for a few minutes. David’s body kept shaking behind him, even as he made the effort to pet Toby’s body and rock through the aftershocks. Toby wondered how long it had been for him, but decided not to ask, resting his head on the back of the couch and catching his own breath instead. Eventually, David slid out of him, wet and messy with lube, and Toby did not even pay attention to what he did with the condom as David basically fell down onto his back on the couch, smiling up at him. Toby glanced away, the gaze too open and honest for comfort, and untangled their legs.

“Toby?” David ran his hand along his thigh as he got off the couch.

“Hmmm.” Toby waved a hand noncommittally at him, gathering his clothes and stumbling back to his suite with the barest minimum muscle control. Later, he hardly remembered taking a shower before face-planting into the bed in exhaustion, sated and comfortable and pleased, with only the nebulous feeling that something might be wrong bugging a very small part of his brain.

TOBY was no stranger to one-night stands, although admittedly he’d only had a few over the years since the fallout with Alan. Still, he knew that the morning after was always awkward enough that it was better to be long gone before morning hit the situation. He had never hooked up with someone at his own house before, though, much less one of his own tenants, so he figured he was in for some first class denial-avoidance behavior from David that day.

He was not prepared for the loud noise.

“What the fuck...” He stumbled into the hall where Steff was standing, looking shell shocked, her coffee mug sloshing in her hands.

“I’m not going back in there,” Steff said, pointing at the kitchen then disappearing like a ghost into her room, slamming the door behind her. Toby cringed at that, shuddering as another loud bang came from the kitchen along with nerve-wracking noises of dishes being... well, he was not sure, actually. Tortured, maybe.

Pulling his robe tight, he took a deep breath and went to face the music.

“You’re waking up the whole house.”

David did not even look at him as he practically tossed the stew pot into the cabinet. “Oh? I woke you? Sorry.”

Toby blinked and tried to process what was going on. David continued to clean the kitchen with extreme prejudice.

“Did I miss something?”

David stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. “Apparently not.”

“I’m getting coffee.” Toby shouldered past him to the coffee pot, ignoring David’s tantrum as he poured a cup and took a deep, painful swallow of the steaming hot liquid. “So this is about last night.”

“I’m surprised you even brought it up.” David started scouring the countertop.

“Well, you are kind of making it into an issue.”

“Sorry.” David gritted his teeth. Sighing, Toby walked out and went back to bed. It was his basic defense mechanism when things went to hell and he didn’t know why, but he also knew it was only a short-term reprieve.

It was not as if he regretted having sex, or even having sex with David. Toby liked him a lot, and he seemed to put a lot of effort into being a good tenant and a nice guy. He sat

on the edge of his bed considering this, when there was a knock on the door.

“Go ’way!”

“Toby, open.” Steff sighed. Toby mumbled at her to come in. It was rare that anyone tried to cross the sacred boundary of his bedroom door, and Toby respected Steff for putting forth the effort.

Steff closed the door behind her and sat down on the bed. She was still clutching her coffee cup, so they drank in silence for a bit as the kitchen noises started dying down.

“David’s a nice guy,” Steff said finally, giving Toby a studied look.

“Yes yes yes, we had sex. I was tired and we were drinking and he made dinner and we had sex.”

Steff nodded. “I figured. I’ve lived with you for three years. I knew something was up when the couch was a disaster and your boxers were on the rocking chair.”

Toby looked around frantically and realized that the pile of clothes he’d dragged back with him the night before was, indeed, missing his underwear. “Oh crap.”

“Anyway, he was awake when I got home, looking thoroughly debauched.”

“Who says that? Debauched?”

“Shut up. You know what I mean. Also, he looked thoroughly pissed too.”

“Hey, I’m not that bad.”

“What are you, blind?”

Toby frowned. “No, I know he’s cute. Pretty, even. I’m a photographer, Steff, I notice things like that.”

“But not that he’s been hitting on you for the last three months?”

“He... what?”

Steff rolled her eyes and took a slug from her mug before answering. “He grilled me not long after he moved in, asking if you were gay and about who you were seeing and what kind of guys you like and... really, really *not* subtle. And then he’s always making you dinner, and making sure you attend his parties, and... seriously, you didn’t know?”

Toby sat in stunned wonderment, remembering the candles and the music and the food, the very good whisky and David’s willingness to share.

“It was a date.” Toby groaned and lowered his head into his free hand.

“What?”

“I kept asking him if he had a date planned last night. It was all so... staged. I can’t believe I fell for that.”

Steff laughed, loudly, and the noises from upfront paused for a bit. Then the vacuum cleaner started up.

“Toby. Toby!” Steff, still laughing, poked him.

“What?”

“Do you like him?”

“Well yeah, hello, boxers on the rocking chair.”

“No, I mean...you know, *like him*.”

Toby paused. “I don’t know...” He turned to look at Steff. “It’s been a long time.”

“Long enough, maybe?” Steff gently put her hand on Toby’s knee, smiling at him. “You gotta try again sometime. David’s awesome, and he adores you. Everyone knows it. Well, except you, obviously.” Steff patted his knee and then stood up. “I’m just saying, think about it.” She left, closing the door behind her, and Toby sat on the bed drinking his cold coffee long after David gave up on the house cleaning and slammed the front door on his way out.

THE usual monthly fete was set for the following Friday, and Toby was torn between making an awkward appearance or acting like a dick by staying away the whole night. David had been MIA since the morning he stormed out, and Toby was not too sure what he was going to say to him anyway, so he took the reprieve in the spirit of a man getting a free day before execution.

What ended up happening was that Steff locked him in the garage Friday afternoon before he could decide to escape or not.

“Open!”

“No!”

The door opened into the garage, so Toby wondered how the hell she had jammed it from the other side. “Steff, come on.”

“You are staying for dinner.”

“This really isn’t any of your business.”

“Yes or no.”

“Yes! Dammit! Open the door!”

“Hold on.”

There was some scuffling on the other side before the door was pushed open. Toby stepped back, ready to flay Steff alive, but instead David tumbled through.

“Don’t make me move out because your gay-boy emo moping drives me insane. Fix this.” Steff pointed at both of them and shut the door again with a loud slam. Toby stared at it, wondering if she had somehow jammed it locked again and a little scared to find out.

“I told her to stay out of it.” David stood with his hands spread out to his sides, frustrated and looking at the wall past Toby’s shoulder.

“So did I.”

“Well, we’re both pretty ineffectual.”

Toby laughed despite himself. After a second, they both awkwardly maneuvered around to arm's length, facing each other.

"Look, I didn't mean...."

David stopped him. "Don't care. Really, really don't. I made a mistake, I made an assumption, and it's my own damn fault. Lesson learned."

Toby squinted at him. "Okay?"

"Good. Next time I'll stick with the band's groupies." David crossed his arms defensively, still staring at the wall.

Toby did not have anything to add to that, and kept quiet. He had a hunch that David was not quite done yet.

"I just...I thought we clicked. I haven't been involved with anyone seriously for a while; maybe I just misread the signs. I don't want you to think I was cruising you in your own living room."

Toby nodded. "I know that."

"Because I like the arrangement. I mean, the tenant part." David flushed red, but Toby could not find it in himself to laugh. It was his fault that David thought they'd just had an awkward one-night stand.

Which was when he realized that was exactly what they had done, despite what he had said to David that night. "Well, shit."

David went from red to pale in a heartbeat. “Okay, well, fine, I can be out by Monday.”

“No!” Toby stepped forward and grabbed David’s arm, dropping his hand quickly when David flinched. “Sorry... I....”

“The only thing keeping me from grabbing you and shaking some sense into you is knowing about your past, okay? So hands off.” David stepped backward.

Toby stared at him. “Thank you.”

“No problem. We done?”

“No. No, we aren’t. I owe you an apology.”

“I accept. Now are we done?”

“Would you slow down for a damn second?”

David uncrossed his arms, his shoulders slumping. Toby grabbed the reprieve and ran with it.

“I mean it: I’m sorry. I haven’t had anyone really interested in me for a while, and I tend to... avoid that kind of thing.”

“I noticed.” David rolled his eyes.

“David, *please*.” Toby pleaded, moving closer to the other man. David looked directly at him for the first time since being shoved in by Steff.

“I really don’t know what you want, here, Toby.”

“Am I going out on a limb thinking you were interested in a relationship with me?”

David paused, then nodded. “Yeah, I was.”

Toby’s heart clinched, and that told him what he needed to know about himself. Now he just had to figure out how to let David know. “But not anymore?”

David gave him a cursory, curious once-over. “Maybe.”

“Maybe yes?” Toby shuffled a few inches closer.

“You shut the door on me. That was a pretty clear message, man. This isn’t about apologies, or fixing things.”

Toby stopped at the comment, then nodded back. “I think it’s more about starting over.”

He saw David fighting a smile, and knew he had at least reopened the door between them. Toby reached up and gently ran his hand down David’s chest, pulling it away when he got to his waist. David sucked in a gasp and closed his eyes for a second. He opened them, and Toby nearly drowned in the intensity of his stare, David’s eyes crystal blue and honest.

“Toby, don’t... I mean, I really like you. If you aren’t ready to be a part of this, just don’t.”

“That’s a risk I’m willing to take if you are,” Toby said, because he simply could not promise anything. David studied him for a second, then nodded as if making up his mind. He stepped forward, cupped the back of Toby’s neck

gently and leaned in to kiss him. Toby moved into the kiss, placing his hands on David's waist, pulling him closer.

It was not one of the lust-heavy kisses they'd shared before, instead soft and exploratory with small adjustments made to accommodate noses, teeth, and tongue. David's hand moved up to drag his fingers through Toby's hair, and Toby moaned softly.

"Hey! Do I turn the crockpot to 'Low' now?" Steff shouted through the door and David nearly fell down jumping backward. They caught each other as they stumbled and started laughing, Toby dragging David into a hug. It felt good, even as awkward as they still were, and he wondered how much more awkward things might get, despite wanting what they were headed for.

"Yes! I'll be right out! ...wait, can I get out?" David shouted back. Steff tentatively opened the door and peeked in.

"Oh good, fondling. But save the sex for after I leave the house, okay? You'll scar my delicate sensibilities."

Toby laughed as David pushed off him to head toward the kitchen.

THE party was busy and enjoyable, much to Toby's surprise. He was expecting more awkwardness, but David orbited around him casually, not making a production about the comfortable touches he bestowed upon him. Unused to any form of PDA, Toby was not certain how to respond so instead

just worked on letting himself be receptive, which he figured was his big hang up anyway. No one seemed to notice anything different, or at least they did not comment on it, and the evening finally ended with a two hour marathon of old *Twilight Zone* episodes. Toby noticed that David had stuck with nursing one beer for hours, and he followed suit, assuming that a sober head for after-party discussion might be called for.

The last thing he wanted was to let David think everything was just another alcohol-fueled mistake.

Steff left with her boyfriend James a little after midnight, and after that the place emptied out fairly quickly. David made noises about cleaning up, but Toby decided that for once it could wait until morning.

“Come on.” He pulled at David, who was giving the pile of dishes a conflicted look. “David....”

Something must have tipped David off, or Toby just sounded as needy as he felt, because David let himself be pulled down the hall without any arguments or questions. Toby opened the door to his room, but David stopped there.

“Seriously, Toby. Only if you’re sure.”

Toby knew that promises were more than useless in these kinds of situations—he had gotten too many empty promises from Alan—so instead he walked the few steps back to David and pulled him into a kiss. It was like picking up where they left off in the garage, gentle and sweet, and David melted into it.

They swayed over to the bed, Toby providing the energy to keep going when David seemed more interested in getting his hands up the back of his shirt. He tried for a graceful “drop and roll” maneuver, but David startled and they ended up in a slightly painful tangle of elbows on the bed.

“Ow.” David extracted his arm.

“Sorry. I was going for ‘manly and forceful’,” Toby admitted sheepishly, and David laughed.

“Maybe next time....” David grinned and crawled on top, nuzzling at Toby’s neck.

“Yeah, sure, *okayyy*... oh....”

David snickered and began sucking at the delicate skin below Toby’s ear, hard enough to leave a mark but not so hard that it was painful. Toby felt the endorphin high starting as his body surged in reaction, and he gasped in pleasure. After a few seconds, David pulled back to look at Toby.

“I spent a week setting up that date.”

Toby cringed a little. “Sorry?”

“I worked on the playlist for *hours*.”

Toby blinked. “You’re such a girl.”

David smacked his arm. “I’m trying to be sensitive and honest here.”

“Well, maybe you could just skip to the point?” Toby smiled hopefully, pushing his hips up. David rolled his eyes.

“The point is: this is important to me.”

Toby stilled at that. They looked at each other for a few moments, and then Toby wrapped his arms around David’s back and pulled him down into a hug. “I know. I *know*. And we wouldn’t be in my room if I didn’t feel the same. I swear, I haven’t had sex with anyone but myself on this bed since Alan left.” He moved one hand to caress David’s face. “I’m not going to promise anything other than I’ll try my best, because I do want this. I want this to be about us, together, even if it scares the shit out of me.”

David’s face lit up, his grin broad and electric. He dropped onto Toby completely, pressing their bodies and mouths together in a bruising, full-contact kiss before slowing down and moving to kiss down Toby’s neck. There was a familiar edge to their explorations, which calmed Toby down enough to relax into the experience. They pushed and ground against each other in slow, languid waves of motion, David returning most of his efforts to kissing.

Finally Toby curled up a little, demanding more from David’s mouth and body. David groaned, grinding his cock slow and hard down against Toby’s before pulling back. “Since I’m the injured party here, I think it’s only fair for you to do all the work.”

Toby frowned in confusion for a moment before the suggestion hit him. “Fuck yeah!” He pushed up and rolled them until he was on top, kicking David’s legs apart with his feet. “Like this; I want to watch you.”

David closed his eyes and groaned loudly at Toby's words, and Toby was doubly glad Steff had taken off for the night. He sat back on his heels, placing his hand on David's stomach when he whined in protest. Reaching over to his nightstand, he pulled out his faithful bottle of lube and a condom, then slicked his fingers up. Spread out before him, David watched his movements with wide eyes, his pupils blown open with lust, his hair mussed and ruined.

"She's right, you look debauched." Toby smirked. David took a second to process that, then shook his head. "Never mind, I'll explain it later." Toby ran his lubed hand over David's cock, which was full and demanding attention. David bowed up to the touch, closing his eyes in pleasure. Toby took that as permission and ran his fingers down, gently pressing one finger inside David's hole, humming in pleasure as he felt the tight heat.

David reached up, lightly grabbing Toby's arms as if looking for anchor. They gazed at each other for a moment before Toby continued pressing his finger in and began stretching David. It didn't take too long, a reminder that David had been more active recently than Toby had been for the last few years, but Toby decided he was fine with that. He did not know where this was going, but was comfortable with their pasts.

"Alan almost never let me top," he whispered, and David's eyes snapped open, watching him warily as Toby pulled his fingers out and shifted over him. "He said I was clumsy and bad at it... I just want to be good for you, okay?"

“Dammit, you’re gorgeous. Just keep doing what you’re doing, and stop worrying,” David whispered, ghosting fingers over Toby’s lips. Toby opened his mouth and sucked in two fingers as he started pushing his cock into David, both of them groaning low and deep in their chests. David opened up slowly but comfortably for Toby, and they settled easily down together as Toby sank inside all the way. He could not believe how hot David looked, how well they fit together, how much David wanted him. This was all he needed, he realized: to be wanted like this, desired and claimed. They had moved far beyond casual sex while Toby had been just warming up to the idea, and now he was hooked.

He really did not mind, he discovered. Starting a steady, deep thrusting, he worked them up to a hard pounding that actually made the bed springs squeak. David was crying out nonsensical strings of sounds, his hands clutching at the mattress edges for traction as Toby plowed into him.

David came first, which caught Toby by surprise so much that he immediately went off right afterward, his vision exploding along with the rest of his body in a riot of colors and sensations. He finally slowed himself down and curled over David through the aftershocks. They held one another in a glorious clutch of sweat and semen until Toby decided he could pull out without passing out.

Clean-up was quick and simple, shirts used as mops and tossed indiscriminately across the room. David stretched and turned on his side, grabbing at Toby to pull him close behind him. They shifted comfortably and familiarly as they settled, and David laughed.

“You know, I could get used to this.”

Toby smiled. “I hope so.”

COOPER WEST lives in Florida and wishes the weather was more like the Pacific coast, or maybe Hawaii, but is in graduate school to become a sexy librarian so is unable to make that real just yet. West has a cat and a lot of books and spends too much time reading slash fan fic when not riding a bicycle or doing yoga or napping.

Visit Cooper at <http://www.cooper-west.com>. You can contact Cooper at cooperwest.wtr@gmail.com.



Dreamspinner
Press

For more of the
best M/M romance,
visit

Dreamspinner Press

www.dreamspinnerpress.com

Room for One ©Copyright Cooper West, 2011

Published by
Dreamspinner Press
4760 Preston Road
Suite 244-149
Frisco, TX 75034
<http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/>

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover Art by Anne Cain annecain.art@gmail.com
Cover Design by Mara McKennen

This book is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution via any means is illegal and a violation of International Copyright Law, subject to criminal prosecution and upon conviction, fines and/or imprisonment. This eBook cannot be legally loaned or given to others. No part of this eBook can be shared or reproduced without the express permission of the publisher. To request permission and all other inquiries, contact Dreamspinner Press at: 4760 Preston Road, Suite 244-149, Frisco, TX 75034 <http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/>

Released in the United States of America
April 2011

eBook Edition
eBook ISBN: 978-1-61581-917-1