

A photograph of a couple lying in bed, covered by a white sheet. Their feet are prominently displayed in the foreground, with the toes of both feet touching. The background is a solid dark red color.

Mr. Right Now

A Dreamspinner Press Anthology

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Table of Contents

<i>Snowbound, Lovebound? by Sutherland & Labbe</i>	5
<i>Deacon Decides by Eric Arvin</i>	31
<i>A Screw and a Stud by Sonja Spencer</i>	39
<i>Odds Are by Chrissy Munder</i>	65
<i>A Thorough Workout by Alix Bekins</i>	113
<i>Know When to Spread 'em by Catt Ford</i>	121
<i>The Proposition by Aile & Urban</i>	137
<i>Wanna Ride? by Sonja Spencer</i>	193
<i>Power Struggle by Anais Morten</i>	199
<i>Special Offer by Clare London</i>	219

Snowbound, Lovebound?

*Fae Sutherland &
Marguerite Labbe*

“FUCK you, Tam. I ain’t listenin’ to goddamn ‘choppin’ anymore!” Jimmy reached down to fiddle with the radio, ignoring Bryan Tam’s huffing.

Tam snorted and smacked Jimmy’s hand away from the radio. “It’s pronounced ‘sho-pan’, hillbilly. And you’re going to listen to it, because I’m driving. Who knows, maybe it’ll rub some class off onto you, though I doubt it.”

Jimmy glared at his partner then slouched down in the seat. “Yeah, well, you have twenty more minutes until I take over driving and I don’t wanna hear a fuckin’ word about *my* music, got it?” Fucking overbearing, pain in the ass, condescending bastard. Jimmy swore the man must have a fear of drowning every time it rained; his nose was so far in the air.

Tam arched a slim brow imperiously. “Music? Is that what you call it? I brought earplugs for just that occasion, hotshot, not to worry.” His tone was smug, and Jimmy wanted to punch him right in his smirking mouth. Fucker.

Jimmy looked around for lack of anything entertaining to do since the batteries on his Game Boy had died two hours earlier and Mr. Prima Donna couldn’t be bothered to stop and let Jimmy buy some more. He scowled and sat up, gesturing to the road sign they’d just passed. “Tam, you wanna tell me why the fuck we’re 25 miles from Hartford when we’re supposed to be in fucking Albany? Connecticut, New York... kinda not the same fuckin’ state, ya know.”

Tam frowned and glanced around, then huffed and shook his head. “You must have read the sign wrong, Jimmy, although that doesn’t surprise me, reading and writing isn’t exactly high on the hill folk list of important things to do, is it? In fact, it’s right below ‘Marry someone I’m not related to’ if I recall correctly.”

Jimmy growled. Oh that was just it! He did what he’d wanted to do all day and planted his fist firmly on that elegant jaw. Of course, he didn’t take into account the fact that Tam was the one driving and knocking out the driver might not be a good idea. The car lurched to the side and skidded on the icy, slippery road as Tam swore, fighting with the steering wheel. He lost control of the car and they went careening in a spin off the blacktop, down a low incline. Jimmy grabbed the oh shit handle, his heart pounding until they settled firmly with a hiss of deflating tires and a crunch of a fender about twenty feet down from the road itself.

Tam glared at Jimmy and smacked the back of his head hard, though Jimmy figured he wanted to do way more than that. “Are you crazy?! Wait, don’t answer that, you clearly are because you just attacked me while I was driving, for God’s sake! Christ, you really are simple, Jimmy.”

Jimmy was tempted to hit him again just on general principle, but before he could, Tam jerked the driver’s door open and got out to check the damage to the car. Jimmy shivered as the icy cold air, along with some snow, came blowing in. He took the opportunity to reach down and shut the radio off with a little childish smirk before he climbed out to join Tam.

“Well?”

Tam’s expression was incredulous as he laid his hands on his lean hips. “Well? Well what, jackass? It’s dead, no thanks to you, and we’re now stuck in the middle of nowhere in the middle of a snowstorm and worse, I’m stuck here with *you*!”

Jimmy glared, chin tilting. “Well, you’re no picnic either, ya know.” He deflated and bit the corner of his lip, peering at the crumpled front end of the car. Guilt swept him, though he blustered to hide it. “Well, ya shoulda not said what ya did. It’s your fault.”

Tam's head snapped up, eyes wide. "Excuse me? My fault? You, Jimmy Murphy, are the most self-absorbed, self-important, egotistical, entitlement happy bastard I have ever met. And I could care less how good you are in the ring, out of it you make me fucking sick!" He stormed back to the car and slammed the door shut, leaving Jimmy staring.

He was annoyed to find that Tam's accusations actually hurt. He was not self-absorbed. Okay, maybe a little, but he was definitely not egotistical. Um...well, a smidge perhaps. But entitlement happy? He was pretty sure he wasn't that. Only because he wasn't sure what it meant.

Jimmy waded his way through the ankle-deep snow back to the passenger door and tugged it open. He shivered as he climbed in and shut it again. He didn't say a word, just glared and slumped in the seat.

After about ten minutes, Tam sighed. "Oh, stop pouting for God's sake. We need to figure out a plan."

"And you want *my* input? Oh, but Ah'm jus' a redneck hillbilly from the sticks, what would Ah know 'bout anythin' but screwin' mah cousins?" Jimmy exaggerated his accent with a narrow-eyed glare.

Tam rolled his eyes, which amused Jimmy because it seemed like something the proper Bryan Tam would never do. "Listen, Jimmy, we don't have time for your childish behavior. It's three below out there and still dropping, so unless you want to die with *me* in a little metal coffin buried in the snow, I suggest you help."

That was enough to jolt Jimmy out of his petulant pout and he sat up straighter. "Gotcha. But don't go thinkin' anything stupid like we're friends now or somethin' just cuz we gotta work together. I still hate yer guts."

Tam sighed and shook his head. "I'm well aware, Jimmy, believe me." So what if maybe Jimmy heard a bit of sadness in his tone; it was gone before he could really notice and the acerbic, prickly Tam he knew and hated was back full force.

God, of all the jackasses to get stuck with. They'd better get out of this and quick or somebody was gonna end up dead, and it damn sure wasn't gonna be Jimmy.

Tam bit the inside of his cheek and pursed his lips, studying the snow swirling down. It wasn't too bad yet, but it was only going to get worse. He took out his cell phone, ignoring the little sting his pride got from having to call for help. Jimmy snickered and he shot the brat a fierce glance. Of all the people to be stuck with, he was with the most spoiled rotten man he'd ever had the privilege to meet.

"Put a cork in it, hotshot," Tam snapped. Christ, Jimmy could provoke him like nobody else. He had perfected the habit of getting under his skin and knowing just how to irritate him. Jimmy probably sensed that Tam liked to keep his emotions on an even keel and went out of his way to turn them inside out.

The cell phone signal was gone and Tam cursed under his breath. There went that idea. It was either the storm or because they were a little off the track from where they were supposed to be. Though he fucking *refused* to acknowledge that Jimmy may be correct and they might be nowhere near Albany.

"We're just going to have to stay put," Tam announced, putting all the authority he could muster into his voice in the vain hope Jimmy would listen. "The storm will end eventually and someone will be by to clean the roads. We'll keep an eye out for them."

"That's your grand plan?" Jimmy shouted, turning to glare at him. "Just sit back and wait for them to find our bodies?"

Tam glared right back. "Cease your melodrama, Jimmy. This is not the Midwest. The storm can't last for more than a day or two, and we have snacks and water. I'll run the car every once in a while for a few minutes and we'll be fine if we keep our heads straight. Can you manage that?"

Jimmy's cheeks reddened even further and his icy blue eyes flashed pure outrage. Tam was surprised they didn't scorch him into a little pile of ash in his seat. Good God, that boy had a

temper. “Fuck you, Tam. I ain’t sittin’ in here with ya for two days and doing nothing.”

Tam watched, incredulous, as Jimmy opened the door and swung his legs out. “What do you think you’re doing?” He demanded, grabbing a hold of Jimmy’s arm through his jacket.

Jimmy scowled down at his hand and then met his eyes. “Get your hand off my Pats. That exit we passed wasn’t too far away. Ah’ll go and get help since you’re too much of a pansy ass to do anythin’ but sit and wait. Ah’ll let ya thank me later.”

Pats? What the hell was Jimmy talking about now? “Just stop it, hotshot. I’m not letting you walk out there and get yourself killed.” Tam had to say something to cover up the note of concern in his voice. “I don’t want to have to explain your mistake to the boss.”

“My mistake!” Jimmy growled, jerking his arm free from Tam’s grip. “Jesus, you do love to pin everything on me, don’t you? I guess the great Bryan fucking Tam isn’t capable of making mistakes unlike the rest of us?”

For half a second Tam thought Jimmy was going to deck him again and really wished he wouldn’t. His jaw was already aching and as much as a good fight would heat up his blood right now, it was counterproductive to their situation. He resisted the impulse to remind Jimmy that he had accosted him while Tam had been driving; there was no need to dig it in, especially when he’d been baiting Jimmy, knowing how his temper worked.

The sound of a slamming car door stunned Tam out of his thoughts. He stared at the empty seat next to him, his heart suddenly hammering. Oh Jesus fucking Christ, Jimmy wasn’t. Tam looked in the rearview mirror at Jimmy who was stalking away, his head down against the wind and his hands deep in his pockets. Oh fuck. He was going to get himself killed, leaving Tam stuck with the guilt for the rest of his life.

Tam grabbed the grocery bag of water and snacks and the first aid kit in the back seat before heading out in pursuit. “Jimmy!” he shouted, the wind taking the sound of his voice and carrying it away. Okay, yes, Jimmy drove him fucking nuts, but he

didn't want anything to happen to him. On days when Tam hadn't spent too much time in his company, he could even admit, privately to himself, that Jimmy wasn't all bad. He had a good heart even if he was arrogant and cocky and had a temper that would make an Irishman proud.

After several minutes of floundering in the snow, Tam caught up to Jimmy who was now walking along the road. Maybe an emergency vehicle would come along. He had to admit the exercise had warmed him up. Jimmy glanced at him sideways, still fuming, but didn't say a word.

Several things ran through Tam's mind, all of which he wanted to say, but he finally settled on the one he should. "I'm sorry, Jimmy." Jimmy looked over again, surprise replacing fury. "I shouldn't have called you a hillbilly," Tam continued, his face perfectly straight. "Or implied you couldn't read. The hill folk comment was definitely over the top."

Jimmy stopped dead in his tracks and turned towards him. The wind tugged his scarf and the snow settled on his eyelashes in a way that made Tam think things he shouldn't, which was what always irritated him about Jimmy. "However, the jackass and simple remarks were right on the money," Tam finished.

Jimmy couldn't help the snort of laughter. He fucking hated it when Tam would do that. Make him laugh when he wanted to be pissed. Fucker was really good at it, mostly because he'd look at you with that straight face, every inch the serious, proper guy, and Jimmy just knew underneath he was snickering like a junior high schooler.

He started walking again. "Yeah, well, just be glad I didn't say some of the stuff I was thinkin', otherwise I'd maybe be apologizing too. Maybe."

Tam scrambled to catch up to him and laid his hand on Jimmy's shoulder. "Jimmy, we really shouldn't leave the car. I know the exit isn't that far, but it's one of the rules of winter storms, never abandon the vehicle."

Jimmy smirked. "Rules were made ta be broken, Tam. Now you wanna stay and follow your little guide to being a goody

two shoes, go right ahead. I plan to be laid up in a nice comfy warm hotel room within the hour ordering delivery and watching some porn.”

Tam wrinkled his nose. “Thank you for the visual I didn’t need, Jimmy.” Tam huffed and glanced back at the car, then at Jimmy, who had started walking again, before seeming to come to a decision. He stomped after Jimmy. Jimmy arched his brows and got a snapped, “Shut the hell up. Not a word,” for his trouble.

Jimmy shrugged and buried his hands further into his jacket, shivering as the wind and cold cut right through his heavy New England Patriots jacket and the hoodie underneath. Fuck, it was colder than he’d thought when they were back at the car. He glanced over at Tam and his brow furrowed at how red his nose was and his fancy mid-length leather jacket didn’t look nearly as warm as Jimmy’s.

“Hey...you okay? Shouldn’t be too far.”

Tam gave him a pursed lip glance. “I’m fine, and you had better hope it’s not too far. It’s coming down harder in case you haven’t noticed.”

Jimmy tilted his head back, noticing Tam was right. The snow was falling harder and damn, the road was fucking deserted. Where was all the traffic when you needed it? He frowned. He could have sworn the exit was closer than this. How long had it been after he’d seen the sign to when they’d gone off the road? No more than five, ten minutes, right? The way Tam drove that had to mean they weren’t but five to ten miles away...ouch. Five to ten miles. In a snowstorm. Christ, maybe Tam was right and he was simple.

He stopped in his tracks and looked back towards the car almost lost in the haze of snow, then at Tam. He hated the knowing expression on the other man’s face, like he was just standing there going “I was right you were wrong,” except gloating would probably be deemed below Tam.

“Maybe...”

Tam cleared his throat and nodded. “Yeah, I’m going to have to put my foot down, Jimmy. We’re going back to the car and waiting for help, and don’t you dare argue with me.”

Jimmy laughed out loud, shoving Tam’s shoulder. “Save your salve to my ego, Tam, you were right. Come on, let’s get the fuck back there, I’m freezing my nuts off.”

They were both silent as they made their way back to the car, and Jimmy had to admit he was grateful to see it, even more grateful when they climbed in and Tam turned it on to get some heat going. The blast of hot air made his icy extremities prick and tingle, but damned if he minded. He held his palms up in front of one of the vents and was just about to moan in pleasure when the car shut off.

He scowled. “Dammit Tam, that wasn’t enough to warm up a gnat, turn it back on!”

Tam glared. “I didn’t shut it off, brat, it died. Hang on...” Jimmy watched intently as Tam tried again. The engine turned over sluggishly, struggling to catch before finally there was nothing but some clicking. Dammit!

Jimmy shoved his cold hands back in his pockets, refusing to admit that there was a little ball of fear starting to form in his stomach. “Now what do we do?” In all honesty he truly hoped Tam had an answer.

Tam looked over at Jimmy. The worry in the hotshot’s eyes was clear and he knew if he tried to reassure him he’d either get a snippy comment or a slap in the back of his head for his effort. He turned towards the backseat, an idea beginning to form in his mind, but in all honesty he’d almost rather freeze than voice it. He could only imagine Jimmy’s reaction. He sighed; it was time for the both of them to cease bickering like children and act like adults. “Come on, hotshot,” he said, clambering into the back seat. “We’ve got a blanket back here. If we stay close we’ll keep warm.”

Jimmy’s blue eyes were wide and incredulous, and then he started snickering. “Oh, now I’ve heard everything. You wanna

fucking cuddle? Ya could really use some work on your pick up lines, Tam.”

Tam shot him a baleful look, settling down in the back seat and stretching out his long legs. He could feel his ears redden and scowled harder. “Judas Priest, Jimmy, you’re an ass. I know you think you’re God’s gift to wrestling and everybody wants a piece of you, but honestly, I’m not impressed. The wrapping is pretty, but the inside leaves much to be desired.” He sighed, already regretting his rude comment, but Jimmy didn’t seem to notice it. He was too busy still snickering.

“Sure, whatever ya say, Tam.” The brat sounded almost gleeful. “I’d believe you more if you didn’t spend so much time pawing at me in the ring.”

Tam’s jaw tightened. He unhooked the back seat and laid it down, reaching into the trunk for the blanket. Then he settled back and draped it over his legs, tucking in the corners. He was not going to give Jimmy the satisfaction of continuing to argue with him. He dragged the blanket up to his chin and leaned his head back on the seat, closing his eyes. His hands were clenched in the folds of the blanket to keep himself from strangling Jimmy.

“What are you doing?” Jimmy demanded. “Is that the only blanket?”

Tam fought hard to keep the smug smile from his lips and was pretty sure he had succeeded. “I’m going to take a nap for the next hour or so, then you can take your turn.” He made his voice as condescending as possible, “Try not to freeze during that time since you’re too damned good to be back here with me.”

Jimmy swore viciously and Tam heard him climb over the seat. His breath came out in a whoosh of air as Jimmy landed on him. “Move over, damn it,” Jimmy snapped, elbowing him in the ribs. “Freaking Prima Donna drama queen,” the younger man muttered under his breath. “Can’t take a joke.”

Tam opened one eye. He fixed Jimmy with a steely look and moved his legs so Jimmy could sit down before promptly placing them right back in his lap, daring Jimmy to say one word. He might just be tempted to plant his heel between Jimmy’s thighs.

That would take Jimmy's mind off the cold for a little bit. They struggled with the blanket, pulling it back and forth before it was arranged to their satisfaction. Tam knew he was being horribly childish as well, but he put the blame solely on Jimmy. He'd provoke a saint, and Tam was no damned saint.

Their shared heat started warming Tam up, though the tip of his nose and ears still felt raw. He was grateful Jimmy had decided to come back, because if he had gotten frostbite he would've staked Jimmy naked out in the snow. Hmmm, that had definite possibilities and was preferable to think on instead of Jimmy's warmth and his scent. Tam started to drift off to sleep, humming lightly to himself when he felt Jimmy's shoe nudge him hard in the stomach. "What?" he snapped, refusing to open his eyes.

"You can't seriously be thinking about sleeping," Jimmy said, nudging him again. "It's getting dark out there and the snow is coming down worse."

Tam tried to calm his temper, realizing Jimmy was worried. "We don't know how long we're going to be out here, Jimmy. We'll conserve energy this way, and if we take turns we can make sure the other doesn't sleep too deeply or get too cold." He wasn't sure if you could get hypothermia from sleeping, but he wasn't going to risk it. Since there were two of them they could keep an eye on each other.

"Bryan," Jimmy said, with a slight whine in his voice. "Come on. You can sleep later."

Tam's eyes flew open and then narrowed on Jimmy. "What, you need me to hold your hand for you too, hotshot? Would you like me to tell you a bedtime story?" God fucking dammit, he just wanted some peace. Didn't Jimmy realize what his proximity was doing to Tam's self-control? Oh good God, where had that thought come from? It made him reckless and he couldn't stop goading Jimmy. "Why don't I sing you a *fucking lullaby* while I'm at it?"

When Jimmy's eyes flashed blue fire at him Tam knew he'd gone too far and braced himself for the fallout. Jimmy scrambled and grabbed a hold of him, and they wrestled on the

back seat, kicking the blanket off onto the floor, the car rocking as they each tried to get the better of the other. Tam's heart beat faster and he felt his blood start to heat up. Oh well, in for a penny, in for a pound. If he was going to get his ass kicked, he was going to damn well deserve it and give Jimmy what he'd had coming for a long damned time.

The hotshot let out a startled squeak as Tam dragged him over his lap, anticipation rising higher. Jimmy's thick jacket hampered his struggles as Tam jammed his elbow in the small of Jimmy's back long enough to yank Jimmy's jeans down around his thighs. Jimmy's bellow of outrage was probably heard in Albany. Tam admired the perfection of Jimmy's ass for a split second before bringing his hand down hard three times across both cheeks. They bounced slightly under his touch and damn, it felt so good, even if Tam knew he'd just signed his own damn death warrant. He raised his hand to strike again when Jimmy's roar of unadulterated fury whipped the air between them and the hotshot jerked himself out of his grasp.

Jimmy launched himself at Tam and tackled him back onto the seat, fist slamming into his stomach and snarling, so furious that he hadn't bothered to yank his jeans back up. "Fucking asshole!" He grunted when Tam agilely flipped them over in the cramped space and returned the blow, the two of them struggling for the upper hand. Jimmy's legs came around Tam's waist and tightened, using his powerful leg muscles to squeeze the breath right out of him as he glared up at Tam through the shadows. Tam's fist connected with his temple and Jimmy saw stars.

His grip relaxed and Tam took advantage, grabbing Jimmy's legs and flipping him back over onto his stomach, pinning him there. "Dammit hotshot, calm the fuck down. Then I'll let you go." His words panted in Jimmy's ear and Jimmy tried to ignore the shiver of awareness that ran down his spine, the combination of that and Tam's groin pressed tightly against his naked ass.

Jimmy snarled and swung an elbow back, catching Tam's shoulder. Between the surprise of the blow and his own strength, Jimmy slid out from underneath him and reversed their positions.

He pinned Tam to the seat, growling as he reached a hand down and jerked at Tam's finely tailored pants, feeling the shock go through the other man.

"Don't you fucking dare, Jimmy Murphy!" There was a clear threat in Tam's voice. Jimmy snorted with laughter, wrenching Tam's arm up behind his back even more with his other hand.

"Don't what, fucker? Humiliate you in return? I think I will." He heard fabric tear as Tam's pants gave way at the seam and shoved them down despite Tam's frantic wriggling. That turned out to be a mistake on both their parts, though, because when those pants fell away and Jimmy felt bare skin against his cock with Tam writhing like that – spanking that ass was the furthest thing from his mind. Fucking it, however...

"James... get off..." There was an edge of desperation in Tam's voice, like he had an idea what Jimmy was thinking. Jimmy bent his head and sank his teeth into the other man's shoulder, not hard enough to break the skin, growling.

"That was exactly what I was thinkin', Bryan..." He had no idea what'd come over him. Wasn't like he hadn't at first thought Tam was quite possibly the most fuckable man he'd ever met, but that'd been quelled quick when it had become clear they rubbed each other every way but the right one.

Tam went deathly still, then his struggles renewed with force. He managed to get partially out from under Jimmy and landed some choice blows to Jimmy's ribs and jaw in the process. Jimmy snarled and grabbed both of Tam's wrists, hauling them back to pin at the small of his back and then he dropped his weight onto his back to hold him down. Tam didn't give, though, squirming and cursing a blue streak you wouldn't imagine a man like him would know how to do.

Jimmy freed a hand and slid it down until one blunt finger probed Tam's entrance. The other man let out a ragged sound and bucked hard beneath him and Jimmy nipped his neck sharply in response. He unthinkingly loosened his grip, feeling a rush of desire so strong it left him dizzy, and Tam managed to tear his hands free. Jimmy cringed, expecting a fist, but instead Tam

turned his head and one hand reached back to fist hard in Jimmy's jacket. His eyes were fierce and his lips were curled in a tight snarl.

Tam didn't stop him, though. Jimmy took the unspoken invitation and drove his finger deep inside him roughly, rewarded with a sharp cry. Jimmy's cock twitched hard and he lifted off of Tam enough to flip him onto his back so they were face to face, their eyes locked in their own struggle. Jimmy had no idea what the fuck was going on, but there were hard hands gripping and lean hips bucking and dark eyes glaring up at him like he was the devil's spawn, but still Tam didn't push him away.

It was like an episode of the "Twilight Zone." A very kinky episode.

Panic was the only way Tam could describe what came over him. Pure and utter panic that the game was up and Jimmy would realize how he really felt about him.

Tam would rather have the spanking. Tit for tat, measure for measure. Fine, he maybe deserved it too, maybe... though not as much as Jimmy did, but trust the fucking hotshot to have to push it to the next level. Now they were grappling on the seat, both of them with their pants around their knees in the fucking car where anybody happening by could see them. It provided him with no comfort that they were in the middle of snowstorm and unlikely to be discovered. It was the principle of the matter.

Suddenly he was furious, blindly, ragingly furious. Jimmy was driving him crazy, with his relentless finger and intense blue eyes watching him for every reaction. Tam wanted him with a passion that enraged him and now Jimmy knew it, because the hotshot wouldn't be able to ignore how hard Tam's cock was. He narrowed his eyes and punched Jimmy in the jaw. Not hard enough to knock him out, because that would've ended the fun, but hard enough to let Jimmy know... he didn't know what, maybe that he wasn't easy. There, that made sense to him, sort of.

Jimmy fell back on his heels with a startled oof, and Tam grabbed him, jerking and twisting until Jimmy was underneath him on the seat. Jimmy's punches against his ribs were nothing compared to the sensation of Jimmy's cock against his own. Judas

fucking Priest, Jimmy was hot. Desire quickly overran every other thought.

“Get off me,” Jimmy snarled, bucking against him.

“What’s wrong, hotshot, you can dish it out, but can’t take it?” Tam snapped back, suppressing a groan as his finger found Jimmy’s entrance. The hotshot froze, and for a moment, there was no sound but pants for air. Their eyes locked, furious and daring, then Tam smirked and thrust his finger into Jimmy, groaning at how tight he was. Jimmy growled, bucking against him, and Tam stopped breathing. Jimmy was fucking beautiful.

Jimmy succeeded in shoving Tam off. “I can take whatever ya got, Bryan.” Tam ducked as Jimmy took a swing at him and lost his balance, falling back against the seat as Jimmy pounced on him again. Jimmy grabbed his wrists, restraining them above his head with a wicked grin on his face. “But I can give a lot more.”

Tam’s knees went weak and he melted back as Jimmy gave him a rough nip on his throat. Those bites were driving him crazy. He fought against Jimmy’s grip, trying to gain enough leverage to torment the hotshot in return. Then Jimmy released one of his hands, and Tam almost jumped out of his skin when Jimmy’s hand curled around his cock, stroking roughly. His breath hissed through his teeth as he fought a moan of pleasure. He fisted his hand in Jimmy’s hair, jerking his head back and running his tongue over Jimmy’s straining throat. “Doesn’t seem to me like you’re giving too much now.”

“I’m just getting warmed up, Bryan,” Jimmy promised, stroking faster until Tam moaned despite himself. “The best is yet to come.”

Tam tilted his head, sinking his teeth into the curve of Jimmy’s neck, dragging a curse and a shudder from the other man. Then he proceeded to suck and nip until he was sure Jimmy was going to have a mark there, and there was a primal surge of satisfaction at the picture of Jimmy marked. He lifted his head and captured Jimmy’s lips, thrusting his tongue into his mouth even as his hips arched helplessly up into Jimmy’s fist.

Abruptly, Tam realized Jimmy had let go of his other wrist too. He brought up his hands to shove Jimmy away when the hotshot broke the heated kiss and snickered against his mouth. "I wouldn't do that, Bryan. I've got yer prick in my hand and I'm liable to take it with me."

Jimmy chuckled at the glare he got for that, which was hard to take seriously when Tam was still lifting his hips into Jimmy's stroking fist and desire gleamed so brightly in his dark eyes. "Ya don't want me to stop, Bryan." And he had no intention of doing so.

It was like a dam had been broken or a gate lifted or something, and all these caged emotions came rushing out and threatened to drown him. Jimmy was supposed to hate this man. He did hate him. Only not. Jimmy hated what Tam made him feel, but now, knowing without a doubt that he made Tam feel just as much, it made him burn and ache instead. Tam could deny it all he wanted, but Jimmy was suddenly like a man with 20/20 vision. Every look Tam had ever given him took on new meaning, every match that had ended with both of them heaving and sweaty with bloodlust raging. It all made sense now.

They wanted each other. With a fucking madness they did, and he grinned wickedly down at Tam. "How long ya been wantin' me to fuck you, Bryan? All ya gotta do is spread your legs. I'll fuck ya. Happily."

Tam gave him a shocked, horrified look that was quickly followed by fury. "I am not spreading my legs for you, jackass, get the fuck off me."

Jimmy couldn't help but notice that Tam didn't insist that he didn't want Jimmy. Of course, that'd be pretty moot at this point, what with Jimmy fondling his rock hard cock and everything else that had gone on in the last fifteen minutes or so. Still, though, Jimmy wanted him to, if not ask for it outright, at least have no option of pretending it'd been all Jimmy's doing afterward. It would be so like Tam, really. He blamed Jimmy for everything and anything, from famine to his cell phone battery dying.

He stroked Tam tighter, stomach lurching at the way Tam gritted his teeth and arched so hard against him. Oh, he was hot as hell for it; Jimmy could all but taste it on him. And Jimmy certainly intended to give it to him. But suddenly it'd gone from him not knowing why the hell he was doing any of this to it being crystal clear in his mind. And he was gonna have Tam's go ahead before he gave him what his eyes and body were begging for.

"If you don't want me, Bryan, why don't you kick my ass off of you? We both know you'd give me a hell of a fight." Jimmy's hand squeezed Tam's cock, eliciting a ragged whimper from him. "Instead you're layin' there breathless and whimpering and not doin' a damn thing to stop me."

His hand suddenly ceased its motion. "Do you want me to stop, Bryan? Go ahead and tell me to." His thumb circled the slick, warm head of Tam's cock, feeling him shudder in reaction.

Jimmy had no damn intention of stopping, no matter what Tam said. Because if he told Jimmy he wanted him to stop, the man would be a damned liar and they'd both know it. No, there wasn't any stopping now. It was just a matter of degrees. How much would Jimmy win, how much would he lose? He didn't know, but damn, he fucking thrived on the thrill and there was little else more thrilling than this moment right here, right now.

Jimmy bent and dragged his tongue across Tam's gasping mouth and sucked his perpetually pouting lower lip into his mouth, tugging lightly with his teeth before releasing it and meeting Tam's eyes with a boyish grin. "Tell me to stop." At the same time a single finger dipped back past Tam's balls to touch his entrance. "Come on. Tell me."

His voice got harder, louder in the small confines of the car, their eyes locked, and Jimmy swore he could hear Tam's heart pounding frantically inside his chest. "Dammit, tell me to stop, Bryan!" He snarled it, daring him with every line of his body, every breath he panted out as they glared at each other.

The tension rose and rose until finally Tam shook his head sharply.

“What was that, Bryan? I didn’t quite hear ya...that a stop?” There was another sharp shake of Tam’s head and then Tam was trying to pull him down for a kiss and Jimmy knew exactly why. Because Tam was hoping to distract Jimmy from his victory. Jimmy grinned wickedly and shook his head. “Oh no, Bryan, you say it. Want me to stop? Come on, want me to? I will, ya know, stop right now and never touch ya again except to kick your ass maybe, certainly not to fuck it, come on, tell me!”

“GOD FUCKING DAMMIT, HOTSHOT, NO I DO NOT WANT YOU TO STOP!” Tam roared, and Jimmy had the good grace to look utterly stunned at the fury in his voice. It only took him a second to recover and then he was grinning like the cat that ate the canary.

“Well, good. All ya had to do was say so.”

Tam ground his teeth together. When they were done here, he was going to strangle Jimmy. His hands trembled as he contemplated punching that gloating smirk off Jimmy’s face; at the same time he wanted to kiss the hotshot until Jimmy forgot all about his victory and was consumed with the same need that was burning Tam up.

At this moment, he really hated Jimmy. The brat held him in the palm of his hand with no care or thought for what it was doing to him. Tam scowled as Jimmy’s finger slid into him again, sparking more furious pleasure. Jimmy’s other hand resumed stroking his cock and Tam couldn’t help but move with the dual torment.

His hand snaked into Jimmy’s hair, gripping it hard at the roots. “Fuck me, hotshot,” he growled through clenched teeth. He could barely think past the lust that was blazing in him and the knowledge that Jimmy now knew Tam desired him. He had for a long time. Tam would get this out of his system and then go on to gather what shreds of dignity he had left.

Much to Tam’s surprise, his comment didn’t make Jimmy’s smirk widen as he expected it would have. No, Jimmy’s eyes widened, then pure heat flashed in them in a way that would’ve made Tam whimper if he wasn’t already. “Don’t worry, Bryan, I

plan ta,” Jimmy rasped before his mouth slammed down on top of Tam’s, and any coherent thought Tam had left instantly vanished.

Tam moaned, arching against Jimmy, his eyes rolling in the back of his head as he felt their cocks meet and grind against each other. He was surprised they weren’t steaming the windows with the amount of heat they were generating. His hands tore at Jimmy’s coat, unzipping it and sliding his hands underneath Jimmy’s shirt. His skin was hot, almost feverish against Tam’s fingertips as he eagerly sought to chart Jimmy’s body.

Jimmy’s kiss consumed him. Tam’s lips numbed under the hard assault, but the more the hotshot demanded, the more Tam found himself replying, opening up to him, encouraging him. He realized somehow in the midst of their embrace he’d ended up on his back, splayed out on the seat. His pants had gotten lost somewhere, though whether he’d removed them or Jimmy did, he didn’t know.

Tam’s hands slid higher up to twist Jimmy’s nipples just to hear him growl again, and when the hotshot did, he thought he was going to melt right through the seat. Jimmy pushed another finger into him and Tam’s little helpless sounds of pleasure were muffled against Jimmy’s mouth, urging him on. His hips rocked hard and he swore if Jimmy didn’t fuck him soon, he was going to come before the hotshot ever got a chance to penetrate him with his cock.

That idea had merits, but Tam was pretty damn sure that Jimmy with a set of blue balls would be even more annoying than he normally was. Tam tore his mouth away, taking a deep ragged breath, trying to gather together his scattered thoughts. He nipped Jimmy’s lower lip hard, groaning at the taste of blood on his lips.

“Come on, hotshot,” Tam grated. “What’s wrong? Forgot how to use your equipment?” He met Jimmy’s eyes and smirked, his hand coming down to squeeze Jimmy’s cock. “Maybe I need to fuck you instead. Show you how it’s done.”

Tam gasped as Jimmy sat up, his warmth departing him and sending goose bumps along his legs. He removed his fingers as well, leaving Tam strangely bereft and empty. “I don’t think that’s necessary,” Jimmy replied.

Tam gasped again as the hotshot flipped him over onto his stomach, hard hands clamping down on his hips, urging his ass up into the air. He groaned, biting down on his lip hard, his stomach fluttering madly, his heart thundering in his ears. The hot, blunt head of Jimmy's cock slid across his ass and Tam spread his legs as wide as he could without falling off the seat.

Jimmy leaned over him, pushing into him hard. Tam's nails scraped against the upholstery and he bit his lip harder, tasting his own blood this time against the sting, though fuck, despite the pain it felt so damned good to finally have Jimmy deep inside him. Tam moved restlessly back against him, the discomfort easing as he relaxed to take him in. Jimmy's teeth nipped his ear and his voice was husky with the ever present mocking back in his tone. "Besides, Bryan, we both know who the bitch here is."

Tam clenched around Jimmy hard enough that the hotshot took in a quick breath, hissing through his teeth. He twisted his head around to give him a dark glare and then reached up to wrap his hand hard around the nape of Jimmy's neck. "You call me a bitch again, James, and I'm throwing you through the fucking window," he snarled.

Jimmy grinned. Fuck, he did love to rile Bryan Tam. The man wore his control and calm like a coat, and Jimmy had from day one been bent on stripping that façade of proper from him just to see what was underneath.

It turned out what was underneath was an angel with wings of fire, scorching him, burning him alive, and Jimmy didn't care, just dove headlong into the flames with no thought for the danger. And oh, there was danger. Jimmy wasn't stupid enough to not recognize that. This moment would only last as long as the orgasm, and then they would be back at each other's throats. Jimmy felt a surge of sadness at that thought, though he didn't acknowledge it, focusing instead on the beautiful feeling of Tam beneath him, wild and whimpering, needy for him and just him.

Jimmy rocked his hips hard, nipping at Bryan's snarling lips. "Wasn't an insult, baby, you're about the hottest thing I ever saw on your knees like this." It was true, too. He hadn't ever in

his life seen or felt or tasted anything like Bryan Tam in the throes of passion. It was, quite frankly, stunning.

Tam glowered and rocked his hips back to meet Jimmy's thrusts. "Don't think I'm not going to have you on your knees before the night's over, hotshot. Now shut the hell up and fuck me."

Jimmy snickered and kissed him, unable to resist, even as his hips started up a steady and rhythmic thrusting, deep and hard, long and slow, in no rush despite the cold that he barely felt and the place which he barely remembered. All he could focus on was that he'd craved Tam in just this position for longer than he cared to think about, and he'd be damned if he let it go to waste with a quickie. Oh no, not this time around. Lord only knew if he'd ever get the chance again.

Jimmy shoved Tam's coat and shirt up, baring his back, tongue and teeth moving over the sleek warm flesh. He made a low sound of appreciation when Tam fumbled and shrugged out of the remaining clothes, Jimmy's own following suit until they were skin against skin and the car was so damn hot and steamed up with their movements and body heat that sweat actually formed, belying the snowstorm raging outside. The storm raging inside was far stronger.

Jimmy let his hands roam freely over Tam, trying his best to memorize his body, because he might never get another opportunity like this and he didn't want to forget. Ha, as if he could forget. The man was branding himself on Jimmy's psyche, and Jimmy thought he would never get him out.

Tam's skin was silky smooth, warm and alive under his fingers, the muscles moving fluidly. The bit of soft at his waistline had Jimmy so damn tempted to take a bite, but he was far more interested in nibbling on that soft, warm nape instead, tongue laving the sweet flesh. How someone as damned prickly as Tam could taste so fucking sweet was beyond Jimmy.

"Ya feel so good, Bryan." He didn't try and censor the shakiness of his voice, too far gone at this point to care about how vulnerable he was and how naked his emotions were. His arms wrapped around Tam's body, and Jimmy pressed him down into

the seat, hips moving deeper, harder, face buried in his shoulder blade.

“Hotshot...God, James.” Tam’s voice was shaky too, and Jimmy took some comfort in that, worming one hand underneath Tam to wrap it around his cock and let his thumb stroke the shaft, circling the head. If he wanted to really stroke him, Jimmy was gonna have to lift off of him some, and that wasn’t acceptable at the moment, so he settled for fondling him instead, driving into him over and over, withdrawing almost completely and savoring the whimpers and ragged cries when he thrust back inside.

Jimmy had never thought it’d be like this. Even he didn’t have that good of an imagination. He had the briefest of thoughts that Tam was ruining Jimmy for any other man, but it didn’t linger in his mind, torn away by the flare of pleasure when Tam clenched around him. He’d think about that other thing later.

“Don’t stop, Jimmy,” Tam moaned. “God, don’t ever stop.” He thought distantly that he might be revealing too much as he turned his head so their breaths were mingling, but it was lost when Jimmy’s eyes flashed.

“I ain’t ever lettin’ ya go, Bryan,” Jimmy said fiercely before kissing him, his tongue claiming Tam’s mouth possessively.

It had the strength of an unshakable vow and something within Tam broke free to be carried away by the storm of passion. He was stunned and humbled. All he could do was kiss Jimmy back and cling to what was left of the shreds of his composure. It seemed as if Jimmy was touching him everywhere, branding himself into his skin, his soul. The hotshot’s body and relentless thrusts laid a claim on him he couldn’t disregard.

Suddenly Jimmy lifted off of him and Tam keenly felt the loss, from the sudden sweep of cool air over his feverish skin to the deep unfulfilled ache in his body. He cried out, twisting his torso around to look at Jimmy, his breath catching as he saw him fully naked in the faint light. It should be illegal to be that fucking beautiful. “Dammit, Jimmy,” he snapped, craving their contact again. “Don’t stop.”

“Who’d a ever thought Bryan Tam would be so hot for me,” Jimmy teased, his hands coming down to Tam’s hips and rolling him over onto his back within the tight confines of the backseat. Tam wrapped his legs around Jimmy’s waist as he lay between his thighs. “I wanna see your face when ya come for me, Bryan,” Jimmy continued, surging deep into him again.

Tam cried out, arching against Jimmy and clenching around him. His hands, greedy for the opportunity, skimmed over Jimmy’s body, following the line of his hip, tracing the curve of his back, caressing the muscles of Jimmy’s ass that moved under his touch as the hotshot fucked him. Tam’s head fell back on the seat, the reality nigh overwhelming. He whimpered as Jimmy took the unwitting invitation and attacked his throat, nipping and sucking in a maddening fashion. Jimmy was marking him in return.

He squeezed a generous handful of Jimmy’s ass. Damn him. He probably had the most perfect ass of anybody south of Mason-Dixon line. Then Jimmy shifted, his cock driving straight against his prostate instead of just brushing by it, and Tam sucked in a deep, startled breath of air at the sudden shock of electricity along already over stimulated nerves. He let out a sharp cry that was almost a scream.

Tam raked his nails down Jimmy’s shoulders, and the hotshot bowed back, his breath hissing between his teeth. “Fuck, you’re killing me,” Jimmy growled. His hand wormed between their writhing bodies to grasp Tam’s cock again and started stroking it roughly.

Tam bit his lip hard trying to hold off the orgasm that was threatening to thunder through him. As he tasted blood against his lip, a strange expression crossed Jimmy’s face and he leaned closer licking Tam’s lower lip before drawing it into his mouth. The intimacy of that gesture tore through Tam’s defenses, and he cried out inarticulate words against Jimmy’s mouth, his legs flexing around Jimmy, his hands clinging as his orgasm hit him with stunning force.

Jimmy wasn’t prepared for the sudden clenching around his cock as Tam came. He gasped and watched with wide eyes as the

stoic, perfectly controlled man he'd known the last three years came apart in his arms. There was no help for it, his own orgasm had already been hovering dangerously close to the surface, and the sight of Tam shattering like that was more than enough to put Jimmy right over the edge.

"Fuuuck..." he groaned out as he slammed forward, burying himself to the hilt and holding himself there inside that spasming, clenching heat. He shook, letting out a hoarse shout as his own orgasm tore through him, flooding Tam deeply. Unable to hold himself up any longer, Jimmy collapsed down onto him in a tumble of sweaty limbs and panting breath and trembling muscles.

Tam didn't move, holding onto Jimmy for a long, long moment as they both attempted to regain their equilibrium. Eventually, Jimmy realized it just wasn't going to happen anytime soon and lifted his head, looking down at Tam.

Tam stared back up at him and they both held their breaths, waiting for the inevitable drop of the other shoe. For one or the other to snatch away, fists to fly maybe, the usual irritation and attitude to rise up between them and make this encounter nothing more than an insane fluke inspired by the crazy situation they were in.

Jimmy didn't move, didn't even blink, prepared for Tam to hit him or taunt him, call him a hillbilly again and be the Bryan Tam Jimmy knew and hated. Part of him wished for it, if only to ease his own uncertainty about what came next. At least then he would know. Part of him, however, waited with bated breath for Tam to say something that would make tonight make sense and perhaps tell Jimmy where he was supposed to go from here, where he stood.

Tam shifted then, and Jimmy took the hint and slowly eased out of him. He scooted back on the seat and leaned against the car door, watching Tam across on the other side of the vehicle. Waiting. Tam sat up slowly, a wince here and there that told Jimmy that he'd be feeling the effects of that fucking for the next few days. Some part of Jimmy preened at that knowledge.

Finally, Tam looked at him, dark eyes unfathomable and Jimmy sucked in a breath, bracing himself, steeling himself for the

blow, whether physical or verbal. He suddenly felt so young, every bit his twenty-seven years and some little boy part of him watched Tam with hope, the naïve part of him that wanted more than the sparring he would probably get.

“I suppose you think this changes things, don’t you, James?”

Jimmy’s face fell and he drew in a breath, all of a sudden so tired. He ignored the bands tightening around his chest and swallowed, sighing and shaking his head. “No, Bryan, Ah don’t. Ah ain’t stupid.”

He began to fumble for his clothes, not looking at Tam, not wanting to see the disdain on his face. Sanctimonious bastard, who did he think he was? He’d done just as much of the fucking as Jimmy had and he had the balls to sit there and judge? Bullshit, Jimmy grumbled in his head, such complete and utter...

“Well, it does. Change things, I mean.” Jimmy froze and Tam’s hand cupped his chin. “Look at me, James, please.”

Jimmy lifted his head and for the first time noticed the weariness in his dark eyes, the smile curving his lips. He looked like... like maybe he was as tired of the feuding as Jimmy was. Maybe he was?

Tam exhaled, tilting his head and arching his slim brows. “Now, don’t get it into your head that I’m excusing your deviant behavior, and you still listen to your music too loud, and frankly I don’t know what you see in football, but...” Tam met Jimmy’s eyes with a slightly peeved look. “Are you going to make me say it, brat?”

Jimmy grinned, figuring out where this was going and he nodded. “Oh hell yes, Bryan. I’m gonna make you say it. Go on, you won’t choke. Go ooonnn...” His voice dragged out in a taunting note and he smirked wider when Tam rolled his eyes.

“Fine. Maybe... maybe I like you. A little. Some. Not a lot, mind you, but maybe a bit.”

Jimmy let out a whoop of laughter, snickering. “Oh man, ya shoulda seen your face when ya said that, like ya sucked on a

lemon!” Jimmy slid both arms around Tam and tugged him forward to lay against his chest, his eyes now serious. “I like you too. Don’t go braggin’ about that, though, I’ll deny it.”

Tam laughed and nodded. “Our secret, hotshot. Our secret.”

They lay there like that, wrapped around each other, under the blanket, the snow falling heavy and silent outside. But inside... inside they were warmer than either had been in a long, long time.

Fae Sutherland

Fae Sutherland has always dreamed of being a published author, starting her writing career off at age 11 with a horrific "Monkees" fan fiction that will, luckily for all, never see the light of day. At age 33, she has since progressed to more serious writing, though always keeping that dash of irreverence and fun.

Fae tells the stories that the muses give her, and though she is multi-published both solo and joint, she truly does prefer writing with her co-author Marguerite Labbe best. When she's not working hard on writing new stories to make her readers sweat or slaving over edits for completed work, she spends her time on website and graphic design, being with her closest friends and playing The Sims 2 until the wee hours of the morning.

She currently resides in Washington, D.C., where there is never a shortage of interesting characters to draw inspiration from.

Marguerite Labbe

Marguerite is a homoerotic author who is a shade neurotic, has a muse with OCD tendencies, and a husband, son, and gender-confused cat who are all doing an excellent job at keeping her toeing the line. Together with her co-author Fae Sutherland, Marguerite has found a shared passion for beautiful men with smart mouths, and stories that often ask hard questions or bring up taboo subjects.

When she's not working hard on writing new material and editing completed work, she spends her time reading novels of all genres, enjoying roleplaying games with her equally nutty friends, and trying to plot practical jokes against her son and husband.

Visit Fae & Marguerite's Website at <http://chasethedream.net/>

Deacon Decides

Eric Arvin

DEACON passed the rows of travelers in their identical blue seats with disinterest and something approaching disdain. The mothers and fathers, teenagers and grandparents, businessmen and vacationers of Qantas Air Flight 94 to Australia surrounded him. He had always hated flying, but not for any fear of disaster. No, Deacon simply hated being aloft with a herd of people he really didn't know, especially for hours at a time. His nature was rather reserved, and, for the most part, he was a loner. He had never been a big fan of crowds. But for Australia, for graduate school, he would do it. The adventure waiting for him at the end of the flight was well worth the torture of getting there.

He followed his traveling companion Carol to their seats. She was much more at ease. She loved people. Adored them, actually.

Luckily Deacon's was a window seat. He preferred to focus on the ephemeral qualities of clouds and traveling birds to the stolid presence of his fellow passengers.

It was as he was loading his carry-on into the overhead bin, other travelers pushing past him carelessly, that he caught the interested glance of a flight attendant a few rows down. Deacon noticed first that the broad-shouldered man was helping a little white-haired woman with her things while she was thanked him profusely in a thick, New England accent. Deacon quickly sized up the man's features: strong jaw, clipped hair, and a deep chest – very attractive. Deacon promptly collapsed into his window seat, fearing he might have stared too long though it had only been a

few seconds. There was the connection, of course, any gay man would have felt it. It was a kindred attraction, so to speak. The flight attendant's eyes clearly expressed interest; he might as well have winked. Deacon, though, had never acquired any flirtation skills and always doubted his own gaydar. He was somewhat –

“ – socially retarded,” Carol said as she sat beside him. “Just say something to him. You're both gay.” Carol was more attuned to such things. She could spot the one gay man in a crowd of ten as if he was wearing a scarlet letter. That was, in fact, how she had met Deacon.

“I don't know that. You don't know that.” He definitely knew it, deep down in his strong, gay core.

“You always do this. You find a guy you think is cute and drool over him, but then never go for it.” She started flipping through the in-flight magazine from the seat pouch in front of her. “It's so irritating, because then you bitch to me about being lonely. And there's no one to blame but yourself, Deacon.”

“Why would he be interested?” Deacon asked, already defeated. The plane was filling up, and Deacon massaged his ear lobe, a nervous habit.

“Because you're gorgeous, honey. Everybody in school thought so. You were always the only one who couldn't see it.”

Gorgeous? No, Deacon would have never applied that word to himself. He thought he could sometimes be nice-looking, but never gorgeous. Gorgeous was something reserved for underwear models and go-go boys in New York and Montreal. He had a nice body from years of exercise, a winning smile, and green eyes, but those were ordinary traits in a world that wanted the extraordinary. It was a world where everyone sought an Adonis, and every Adonis became a Narcissus.

He took off his thin, black-rimmed glasses and rubbed his eyes. It had been a long day. A strand of his dark hair fell into his face and he swept it back. The flight attendant walked by just as Deacon looked back up. Deacon watched him. Not only did he have a well-built upper body, his thighs also looked large and muscular hidden beneath the tight, black slacks. Deacon imagined

the man a rugby player (that being the only Australian sport he could think of). The man looked at Deacon and gave him a quick nod, making Deacon quickly look away. The acknowledgment terrified him.

“He looked at you. *Right at you!*” Carol said a little louder than he would have wished. “Why did you look away?”

“I don’t know! It’s what I do. My stomach goes into knots and I freak out.” He sighed. “I’m going to die alone.” He turned back to the window.

“Oh, the dramatics!” she said. “Besides, are you already planning a future with this guy? What do you have going on in that pretty head of yours? He probably just wants a fuck. You can find a boyfriend when we land.”

Deacon shook his head and smiled. But the idea of “just a fuck” with the flight attendant was hot. He did have those huge, strong thighs, after all. Deacon felt some fledgling desire begin to stir in him; some new restlessness.

The plane began to taxi down the runway.

In the air, all Deacon could think of were ways to atone for his lack of contact with the man. He chided himself mildly, making promises to do better. The same promises he had made on numerous other similar occasions at fraternity parties, bars, dinners. Nothing ever came of those situations, either. He did go to the restroom once, hoping to bump into the flight attendant along the way, but had no such luck. Every time the man passed by his seat, it was too quick to get a proper nod, though Deacon was caught looking plenty of times. The flight attendant eventually smiled at the attention. It wasn’t as overt as a proper smile, but it contained a hint of possibilities. Deacon forced himself to smile in return. It took energy. His heart pounded as the grin stretched across his face. There was a sense of victory with that smile.

After that, it was easier, as if they were friends or at least casually acquainted. The flight attendant came by more often, once with a couple of gift bags from business class, handing one to Deacon with inquiring eyes. “Here you go,” he said, though there was a wealth of innuendo beneath that harmless statement.

“Oh my God,” Carol kidded. “He loves you!” She jabbed him with her elbow.

It was about midway through the flight when Carol left her seat to use the restroom and stretch. There was a line, so it would be a while before she returned. They were gliding through night clouds, darkness the only thing visible from the window. Deacon was paging through one of the various airline magazines selling oddities he was certain he could never possibly need when the flight attendant sat down beside him in Carol’s seat.

“My name’s Joel,” he said in a deep, accented voice. Deacon almost shattered into a million pieces at the suddenness of the situation. He collected himself, though, and shook Joel’s outstretched hand. It was strong and firm.

“Deacon,” he introduced himself. His heart pounded fiercely and he swallowed hard.

“You headed to Australia for uni?” Joel asked.

“Uh, yeah,” Deacon stumbled out. “University of Sydney. Are you from Australia?”

“No. Auckland,” Joel replied. “You should hop over there some time. You’d love it. There’s a lot to see.”

“Do you play rugby?” Deacon asked. His conversation skills were usually much better, but they evaporated when faced with someone he found so attractive.

“A little bit,” Joel said. “What about you? You’re a big guy.” He made a flexing motion with his arm. “You work out?”

“Yeah. When I can.” In fact, that was a lie. Deacon made sure to work out six days a week, but he didn’t want to seem obsessive about it.

“Well,” Joel said as he rose. “You’re very cute.” And there it was. A phrase Deacon had never heard another man ever say to him, certainly not in the States, not in the small town in which he had spent his childhood.

“Th-thanks,” was all his stunned self could muster. He was already beating himself up before Joel walked away. He wanted to

shout “No! Wait! Come back!”, but that would have been desperate and silly. And yet maybe that was what he needed to be. Maybe sheer lunacy was his only hope. But the moment had passed. The awkward conversation, if it could be referred to as such, was over, and there was no getting it back.

He replayed it in his mind like a humiliating reality program, inserting what he *should* have said here or what might have been better there. And why, for Christ’s sake, when Joel complimented his looks, didn’t he return the compliment? *Anything!* Even “Hey man, I think you’re hot as balls, too!”

When Carol finally returned from the restroom, she could tell he was distracted. He couldn’t bring himself to tell her why. Her criticisms, even in jest, stung.

“It’s nothing,” he said wanting to scream under the self-rage that was growing stronger by the second.

He kept his eyes on Joel, hoping for *another* second chance. He couldn’t help hoping that the flight attendant would glance his way again. But it didn’t happen. Joel didn’t pass by as often as before.

“Where’s your lover?” Carol asked off-handedly.

“We’ve split,” Deacon joked, trying to keep the desperation from gushing out.

He kept quiet and still in his seat, dozing off occasionally, but he was awakened each time with a fresh sense of self-contempt for the way he handled the situation with Joel. He was all too aware of his true self and the desire and yearning of his bruised and battered conscience. He shifted in his seat as if some physical form was fighting its way out of him. Finally, Deacon could take the self-abuse no longer. He looked around nervously, standing up to get a better view of who surrounded him on the plane.

“What’s wrong?” Carol asked, waking from her own nap. “What are you doing?”

Deacon didn’t respond. His eyes were following a glimpse of tight black slacks and strong shoulders that was disappearing into the restroom.

This was his final chance. Without really thinking, Deacon decided to take it.

“I’ll be right back,” Deacon told Carol as he made his way to the restroom.

There was no one else in line. Fortunately, everyone was safely in their seats, asleep and still. If there had been others, Deacon might have given up the idea, scared off by a religious-fiend mother or a teddy-bear-hugging little girl.

Deacon’s heart felt as if it might explode as he heard the latch click and the lavatory door slide open. Joel stood looking at Deacon, an expression of slight surprise on his face.

“What are you doing?” he asked. His eyes moved over Deacon, making him feel dirty and sordid. It was more enjoyable than Deacon expected.

“Being desperate and silly,” he replied as he pushed Joel backward into the lavatory and shut the door behind them.

Eric Arvin

Eric Arvin resides in the same sleepy Indiana river town where he grew up. After graduating from Hanover College with a Bachelors in History, he has lived, for brief periods, in Italy and Australia. He's survived brain surgery and his own loud-mouthed personal demons. His other fiction includes *The Rest is Illusion* (Nominated for Lambda Literary Award: Best Gay Debut Fiction, 2006), *SubSurdity: Vignettes from Jasper Lane*, and *Slight Details & Random Events*, his first anthology of short stories.

Visit Eric's Website at <http://www.ericarvin.net/>

A Screw and a Stud

sonja spencer

WHISTLING as he walked down the aisle of the hardware store, Mark set down the box of product and pulled out a box cutter, deftly opening the cardboard and starting to hang up packages of screws and nails.

Tommy stepped into the air-cooled, brightly lit store, glancing around at the various items that hung on metal pegs in every direction. He walked slowly down each aisle, squinting as he looked around. Not paying attention to where he was going, he bumped into a slightly malleable surface and tripped headlong down the aisle.

Glancing up as he saw a customer trip over one of the rubber floor mats, Mark lumbered to his feet and hurried over to help him up. "Are you all right?" he asked, crouching down next to the other man.

Tommy glanced up, meeting kind, dirt brown eyes. "Pride's the only thing's hurt," he mumbled, rubbing at his knees as he prepared to rise. "Didn't let my eyes adjust well enough."

Smiling in sympathy, Mark offered his hand to help the other man up. "I know how that can be. I'm just glad you're not injured."

Blushing as he was helped to his feet, Tommy made a show of dusting off his clothes, more to hide his face than anything. "I should watch out for those mats. They're out to get me. Just last week, I almost tripped over one at the Circle Mart."

Mouth edging into a grin, Mark slowly let go of the man's arm. "Yeah, you've got to watch out for them, they can be vicious," he joked along.

Tommy missed the heat of the contact immediately, but he didn't let it show. "I'm searching for lube." He blushed, realizing how it sounded. "I mean, the hinges on the screen door are creaking... and I... yeah..."

"Sure, we've got some WD-40 over here, good for all sorts of hinges, stuff like that," Mark said, not even noticing the wordplay, looking quite earnest and helpful.

Tommy smiled, relieved that his blunder went unnoticed. "WD-40, you say? How do I use it?" He hated to sound so ignorant, but truth be told, he was.

"It's a spray can, real easy," Mark said, turning and leading the way around the corner and up the next aisle. He picked up a metal can. "This red straw goes in the slot here, then you just shake and spray."

A wide smile spread across Tommy's face. "Spray-on lube. Novel idea, that."

Mark blinked, tilting his head. "Oh, yeah. Not like you can get a squeeze tube of grease in some of those tight places," he said.

Tommy tried. Really, he did. But at the mention of squeeze tubes in tight places, he simply cracked up. Mark looked utterly lost as the man in front of him laughed so openly. He glanced again at the metal can and held it up. "Um, one can or two?" he asked cluelessly.

"I think one can will do it, Mr. ..." Tommy cast a quizzical gaze at the other man. "I didn't catch your name."

"Mark Baker," the clerk said as he held his hand out to shake.

Tommy took the large hand, barely able to wrap his fingers around it. "Tommy Griggs, Mr. Baker."

Mark shook his hand, smiling. “Nice to meet you, Mr. Griggs. And, sorry again about the mat. Is there anything else I can help you with today?”

Tommy looked around the store, searching for any excuse to stay in the coolness and Mr. Baker’s company a bit longer. “Um, I need a screw?” He blushed again. “To hang a painting I bought last week.”

“Sure. How big is the painting?” Mark asked, turning to walk back to where he left the box of stock.

Eyeing Mark’s behind as he walked away, Tommy said, “A big screw. I need a *big* screw...” he mumbled.

Already thinking of what he might have in stock, Mark stopped and perused the rows of boxes hanging on pegs. “Will you be hanging it on a stud?” he asked absently.

“A stud would be nice.” Tommy nearly drooled, but then snapped to attention. He laughed long and hard. “Listen at us... we might as well just proposition each other.”

Mark blinked, eyes widening as he looked at the customer, his cheeks flaming with color. “Ah...” he said, “I...” his jaw dropped. He was at a loss.

Tommy laid a hand on Mark’s forearm, giving it a light squeeze. “Don’t faint. I was just kidding.”

Relaxing a little, Mark smiled again, his face still a little flushed. “Um. I’m flattered, actually,” he murmured, shifting his feet a little, looking at his sneakers. It looked hilarious on a man topping six-foot-six and 250 pounds.

Deciding to chance it, Tommy asked, “Should I proposition you? Ask you to come to my place, and... hang my painting?”

Eyes widening again, Mark looked up at Tommy. “Um. I can hang your painting, yeah,” he said, voice hesitant. “I’m... I wouldn’t know what else to do... unless you helped me.” Then the other jokes made sense, and he glanced at the can in Tommy’s hand and blushed pink.

That blush was absolutely charming, Tommy thought. “How about just dinner and maybe a movie to start with?” Tommy asked, hiding the can behind his back.

Mark relaxed and smiled. “Yeah. I’d like that,” he said rather bashfully.

“Shall I pick you up here?” Tommy asked, picking at the wrapper on the WD-40 can.

Nodding, Mark glanced at his watch. “I get off at five.” Then he blushed again. “Um. I mean... I’m off the clock at five.” The taller man shuffled his feet again, and one hand lifted to scrub at the back of his neck.

Tommy bit his lip, trying to hide the grin. “I’ll make a note of that. Mark gets off at five. Okay. I hope you have a quick recovery time.” He grinned.

Mark winced and covered his eyes with that large hand for a moment before peeking at Tommy. “Yeah, well, I’m usually tired after work,” he muttered. “C’mom, I’ll check you out at the register,” he said, turning to walk down the aisle, obviously not catching what Tommy had said.

Tommy followed closely behind Mark. “Hope you don’t mind if I check you out right here.” Mark froze, stopping dead in place as he flushed even brighter red. Tommy forced an innocent smile onto his face. “Or would you rather I check you out in the nuts and bolts aisle?”

Stifling a chuckle, Mark shook his head, finally catching on. “You’re gonna be a wild ride, aren’t you?” he asked.

Tommy laughed and shrugged. “Possibly. I hope so, anyway.” He followed Mark on to the register before holding out his arms and turning around. “Okay, we’re here. Check me out, baby.”

Grinning madly, Mark just shook his head, reaching to swipe the can of WD-40 out of Tommy’s hand. “I, uh, had more hands-on of a check out in mind. More along the line of frisking,” Mark flirted weakly, cheeks still pink.

Pretending to growl, Tommy teased, “I like a frisky man. And I’m a definite subscriber to the old adage ‘learn by doing’. I want to learn all about you, Mark Baker.”

Sobering a little, Mark looked – really looked – at Tommy, and slowly nodded. “I agree, Tommy Griggs,” he said, a bit quieter.

Tommy offered him a genuine smile. “Guess I should go by the grocery, get some food that’s edible...” He felt reluctant to leave Mark’s presence.

Mark glanced at his watch. Four o’clock. “It’s only an hour,” he said, albeit hesitantly. Then he looked dismissive. “I’m not such a prize that you won’t be able to get along that long before seeing me again.”

“I don’t know about that,” Tommy murmured. “But I do need to get food, unless all you need is soda and popcorn.”

Holding his palm to his stomach, Mark looked doubtful.

Tommy pretended to be offended. “Well, since you won’t eat my popcorn and soda, how about wine and pasta?”

Mark grinned. “That’s a pretty good offer. Throw in some cheesecake, I might even... frisk you after,” he said. His face was still flushed, and he looked half-mortified at the words that came out of his mouth.

“In that case, I’ll buy two cheesecakes,” Tommy promised, leaning closer over the counter. Flirting like this was so much fun. He just hoped he didn’t blow it. At least not the date.

Pausing in ringing up Tommy’s purchases, Mark looked at him evenly. “You find turtle cheesecake, and *you* can frisk *me*,” he said slowly, dead serious although he thought it must sound really funny, coming from him, a naïve gay man people usually mistook for a football star. And out of the blue someone... Tommy Griggs... notices him.

Tommy’s eyes flashed at the thought. “I’d *make* turtle cheesecake for that opportunity, but I think we were discussing *edible* food.”

Humor sprang back into Mark's eyes, and he chuckled. "Yes, it must be edible," he agreed, sliding the can into a bag. "Your total is \$3.59."

Tommy held out a five, pressing it into Mark's accepting hand. A wash of arousal spread through his system, making his cheeks redden and his eyes darken. "Keep the change."

Swallowing hard as he felt sparks zing along his hand, Mark nodded slowly, indicating the nearby donation box for cancer research. "See you at five?" he asked quietly.

Tommy checked his watch again. "Fifty-five minutes from now." He stepped toward the door, turning back one last time. "I can't wait."

Mark watched him leave and even stood there the next ten minutes, just thinking about him, before the phone rang and scared him. Shaking his head, he answered the call and glanced at the clock. Forty-five minutes and counting...

NERVOUS, Mark pulled off his apron and tucked it under the counter, checking his pockets for his wallet. It was too late to run home and change clothes. He wished he had thought of that when he told Tommy what time to come back. Pressing a hand against his belly, he willed down the nervous butterflies while trying to not be negative about what might happen.

Tommy pushed back through the door to the hardware store a mere half-hour later, finding Mark closing things down. He grinned nervously at the other man, lifting his bag of groceries. "Dinner might take a while."

Blinking in happy surprise, Mark just smiled and shrugged. "I'm just glad you showed up," he said, grabbing a paper sack on the counter.

Tommy held the door open for Mark, waiting patiently but nervously as the other man locked the door. He nodded toward his Jeep. "Want a ride? Or do you want to follow me?"

One hand in his pocket, Mark looked over the Jeep. "I'll have to ride along, I don't drive. I just live a couple blocks down," he said, stepping to the passenger door.

Tommy grinned, escorting Mark to the vehicle. "Climb in and buckle up. I love driving this thing!"

Chuckling, Mark dropped the paper sack at his feet and sat down, pulling the door shut and putting on his seatbelt. "I'm glad you've got the top off," he said ruefully, eyeing how close his head would have been to the roof. Probably through the roof.

Tommy glanced up, laughing. "Yeah, the way I hit the bumps in my driveway, you'd have been unconscious by the time I got you back to my house."

"Driveway? I suppose I should have asked where you're taking me *before* I got in the Jeep, huh?" Mark asked, shaking his head.

"I live up on the ridge. My driveway is about a mile long and full of ruts and bumps and potholes," the shorter man shrugged. "Still sure you want to go?"

Mark looked at him evenly for a long moment, obviously considering, then nodded. "Yes, I still want to go," he said quietly.

Tommy gunned the engine, laughing. "Let's go!" He backed out of the parking spot and sped out of town, maneuvering the Jeep around the curvy roads before pulling off onto a graveled road.

Content to watch the scenery as they drove, Mark didn't speak, and when they arrived, he was surprised that he hadn't felt uncomfortable. Glancing over to the other man, Mark wondered where this evening would lead.

"So," Tommy spoke up as they stepped into his small home. "Tell me more about Mark Baker."

"Mark Baker. Nice guy. Works at a hardware store, lives in the brownstone he grew up in," Mark said offhand, as if he were talking about a stranger. "Never married, no kids, has lived his whole life here in Barstow."

Tommy nodded. “Tommy Griggs, grew up in Raleigh, moved here a year ago. Never married. No kids. No inclination.”

“Tall guy, Mark,” Mark said as he followed Tommy through the house to the kitchen. “Played basketball in high school and college. Thought about being an architect, but came home to take over the hardware store after his dad died. So here he is, well, him and Audrey.”

Tommy’s eyebrow lifted. “Audrey?” He pulled a saucepan from the cabinet as Mark talked, filling it with water and dumping the pasta into it. Sitting on a stool, he kicked another one from beneath the bar for Mark to sit on.

Taking the hint, Mark slid onto the stool. “Audrey,” he said with a silly, happy grin. “The love of my life. Such a gorgeous girl, takes really good care of me and just loves to snuggle at night...”

Running back over the facts Mark had fed him already, Tommy mused, “Is she a girlfriend?”

Chuckling, Mark’s eyes twinkled. “Oh yeah, she’s my girlfriend. I can tell her anything, and all she does is give me kisses and snuggle close. And she never tells a soul. I don’t know what I’d do without her.”

“Should I be jealous?” Tommy asked, rising to stir the pasta.

A small smile pulled at the corner of Mark’s mouth. “You don’t need to be jealous... but you can be, if you want,” he said, setting his chin in his palm, elbow on the bar.

Tommy stepped closer. “Tell me more about Audrey.” His fingers traced around Mark’s elbow where he leaned on the bar.

“Hmmm. She has short black hair and huge brown eyes. She doesn’t eat a lot, so she’s pretty light, although she still loves to go for walks. She really likes going to the park and sniffing flowers,” Mark murmured, watching Tommy’s every move, trying not to blush again.

Tommy’s free hand teased along the inside of Mark’s arm, sliding up to thread their fingers together. “Audrey is a dog, isn’t she?”

Lips curving up, Mark just nodded.

Tommy leaned forward, letting his lips brush against the curve of Mark's chin. "Maybe I can share you."

Jitters roared through Mark's stomach, but there was no way he was backing out now. "She's real protective, but if you don't mind her lying on your crotch, you'll win her over in no time," he murmured, eyes almost dilating in excitement.

Tommy grinned, huffing a laugh against Mark's chin. "A female... near my crotch... that'll be a first."

Mark snickered and then laughed, some of the nervousness easing. "So I don't need to be jealous, either?"

"Not of any females," Tommy grinned. He nodded toward the kitchen window where a huge tabby cat dozed lazily. "But Jack, he's another story..."

Peering at the cat, Mark looked awfully serious. "Jack looks pretty serious," he said, voice unsure.

Tommy leaned just a touch closer, nose gliding along Mark's jaw. "I'll give you a hint. Find a can of tuna in my cupboard, slip him some beneath the table, and he'll be putty in your hands."

Shivering slightly, Mark turned his chin and their lips almost collided. "So we've established that Audrey and Jack aren't problems?" he asked.

Tommy's blue eyes met Mark's brown ones, and he nodded slightly, breathing faster. "Apparently not."

Mark nodded, too. "So are you going to kiss me?"

Tommy closed his eyes, moving his lips the miniscule distance until he bumped against Mark. His lips caught the other man's, puckering slightly before releasing. He backed away slightly, opening his eyes to check Mark's reaction. Mark's eyes closed as soon as he felt Tommy's lips, but it was over all too soon and his mouth opened on a pleading sigh as Tommy pulled away.

Tommy's eyebrow quirked at the soft sigh, and he wrapped his hand around Mark's neck, pulling the other man closer for another kiss.

Melting against Tommy's mouth, Mark's lips were soft and warm and giving, and the taller man was thrilled to be the recipient of Tommy's attention. He slid his hands to Tommy's waist, his seat on the high stool putting them on pretty much even ground.

Tommy stepped between Mark's spread thighs, his free hand coming to rest on Mark's hand, sliding up the bare arm to tease under the short sleeve of his blue shirt. His lips caressed and teased at Mark's, inviting them to open to him. Feeling a rush of warmth as Tommy nipped at his lips, Mark slowly opened his mouth against the intoxicating kisses, his tongue darting out to lightly touch the full lower lip close to his.

Tommy's tongue darted out at the same moment, meeting Mark's. The warm, slippery touch turned him on, causing him to press closer against Mark. Just then, he heard a low hissing sound behind him. Coming out of the kiss slightly dazed, he turned and frowned at the range top, where the saucepan boiled over onto the heating element. "Fuck," he breathed.

Mark blinked and then grinned. "Not before cheesecake, sorry." Then he laughed, spinning on the chair.

Tommy laughed. "You set the table. I'll clean the mess up." He pointed Mark to the cabinet holding plates and wine goblets. He then drained the pasta, letting it sit while he used the saucepan to heat the sauce.

Drawing a settling breath, Mark stood and moved to the cabinet, pulling out a couple plates and glasses, moving them to the table. He returned to the counter to snag flatware off the hanging mounts, and he grabbed some paper towels as well.

When the sauce bubbled, Tommy moved both it and the pasta into serving bowls and put them on the table. He unwrapped the Italian bread from the bakery of the grocery store and pulled the wine from the fridge before gesturing to a seat. "Make yourself at home."

Standing in one place, Mark nodded and sat down, pulling a plate close and looking over the food. "Smells great," he complimented, picking up the tongs to first put pasta on Tommy's plate, then his own.

"It's not much, but it's about all I'm capable of doing," Tommy smiled. He thanked Mark for the pasta and then poured sauce over it before grabbing a chunk of bread. "I'm told that the grocery near your store has the best cheesecake around."

Mark slowly grinned. "Asked around, did you?" he said as he stirred up his pasta, mixing it with the sauce.

The graceful movements of Mark's strong hands mesmerized Tommy. "Couple of older ladies near the shop. Figured they knew what they were talking about."

Eyes narrowing, Mark paused in his eating. "The two ladies sitting outside the deli under the umbrellas?"

Tommy chewed his bite. "Yeah. You know them?"

Mark closed his eyes and sighed. "Yeah. I know them." He shook his head and pulled open an eye. "You didn't tell them why you wanted cheesecake, did you?" his voice was a little strained.

"Not really, just told them I had a date I wanted to impress. Why?"

Relaxing a little, Mark chuckled. "They're the terrors of the neighborhood. Matchmakers. They've been after me to find someone and settle down for some time. And they know I'm easy when it comes to cheesecake."

Tommy gulped a little. "They did mention Mark and his cheesecake."

Mark's eyes got big, and he stopped chewing. "What did they say?" he asked through a mouthful of pasta.

Tommy shrugged. "They just grinned and told me to get turtle cheesecake if I was stopping by the hardware store."

Mark closed his eyes and covered them with his hand. "You know, I think I liked it better when they were sending single

women my way. It's just weird to have grandmothers trolling for men for me," he muttered.

Tommy's heart jumped in his chest. "I have some friends, if you want me to send them your way. Lisa is nice. She's a looker, too, if you like that sort of thing."

Mark raised his eyes to meet Tommy's, staying quiet for a long moment. "I like more your sort of thing, really," he said almost offhand.

Tommy watched Mark's face for signs of teasing. After a long moment, he smiled. "I like you, Mark."

Face transforming with a pleased grin, Mark's hand froze with pasta halfway to his mouth. "Yeah?" he asked.

"Yeah. I feel comfortable with you," Tommy admitted. "Like I've known you forever, even though I just met you today."

"Yeah, I've felt..." Mark paused and set down his fork. "I've felt that since you tripped on that mat and started talking to me. I usually just blush and stutter. But with you, I was even able to, well, you know," he said, face flushing a little.

"Flirt?" Tommy teased. "You surprised me. I surprised myself. I normally don't do that with anyone, much less someone I've not even exchanged names with yet. But it felt right." He reached across the table, touching a fingertip to the smooth flesh on the back of Mark's hand. "I like feeling like this."

Feeling a flurry of sparks follow Tommy's fingertip, Mark nodded. "Me too," he murmured.

Tommy stood, taking Mark's hand in his as he stepped around the table. He leaned down, capturing Mark's lips again. His tongue teased Mark's, picking up where they'd been interrupted before. Mark sighed into Tommy's mouth, dragging his tongue against the other man's boldly since he couldn't say what he wanted to. His arms slid to Tommy's waist, his hands shaking slightly.

Tommy straddled Mark's legs, settling on his lap. His hands slid beneath Mark's arms, grasping his shoulder blades to pull him closer.

Whimpering very softly, Mark pulled Tommy closer, his mouth opening under the other man's kisses. He wanted to be closer to that warmth, wanted to be wanted.

Tommy's breath shortened into small gasps as he pushed forward, rocking his erection against Mark. His hands slid higher, threading into Mark's hair as his tongue pushed inside Mark's mouth. He teased the other man back into his own mouth, sucking at the slick organ that brought such lovely feelings out in him.

Mark gasped as Tommy pushed against him, and he was suddenly very aware of how aroused Tommy's kisses were making him. He clasped him closer, throwing caution out the window and kissing him with abandon.

Rocking wantonly against Mark, Tommy pushed closer and closer, gasping into the other man's mouth as their arousals met. He slid a hand down the center of Mark's chest, hooking beneath the waistband of his trousers. "I want you. Want to touch you. Right now," he whispered hoarsely.

"Oh, God..." Mark gasped, face again flushed, but for a different reason. He nodded quickly, giving Tommy permission.

Tommy fumbled blindly at the fastenings of Mark's trousers, pushing the placket aside as he reached inside. He moaned as he looked down, pulling boxers out of the way as Mark was revealed to him. "Perfect," he hissed, fingers closing tightly around the throbbing flesh.

Mark about choked on his inhaled breath. "Um, that's a new one," he breathed, trying not to laugh, trying not to lose control. He moaned as Tommy started stroking him slowly within tight fingers.

Tommy grinned happily as his fingers worked beneath the dark fabric of Mark's trousers, his mouth migrating to Mark's neck. Just then the phone rang. He had half a mind to ignore the insistent trilling, but having no answering machine and a father in poor health didn't allow him that luxury. Groaning loudly, he pushed off of Mark's lap. "I'm so sorry. My dad..."

"Go ahead, it's important," Mark said huskily, trying to get a hold of himself. He tucked and zipped himself back up, now a bit

embarrassed. He couldn't have done much more but strip down and throw himself at Tommy's feet. Sighing, he resisted the urge to bury his face in his hands as he listened to the sound of Tommy's voice, not really focusing on the words.

Tommy sighed in frustration as the insistent salesman on the other end of the line refused to take no for an answer. He finally hissed, "I was just about to get lucky, but thought you might be my poor mom calling about my father's condition. Fuck off, jerk." He slammed the phone back down into the cradle, blushing as he turned back to Mark. "Sorry," he apologized, waving a hand to indicate everything.

Mark glanced up, surprised at the last few words Tommy hissed. "Let me guess. Telephone poll? Amway salesman?"

Tommy shook his head as he rubbed at his temples. "Damned credit card representative." He looked up at Mark and a small chuckle escaped him. It turned into a full-blown laugh as he realized the ridiculousness of the situation.

Wincing a little, then laughing along as the silliness of the situation struck him, Mark relaxed and shook his head, looking at the other man over the table. "Well. I guess dinner was a moderate success. Ah..." he trailed off, at a loss for what to say next.

Tommy's laughter softened into a fond smile. "No, I wouldn't classify it as a failure by any means."

Mark's mouth quirked into a nervous smile, and he unconsciously licked his lower lip as he looked around the kitchen, eyes lighting on the bag he'd brought with him. "Oh, you said you had a painting to hang?"

Tommy's grin returned full force. "Ah. The *actual* screwing that was meant to take place this evening."

Eyebrows flying up, Mark's eyes grew huge before he flushed red. "Ah," he groped for something to say.

"Just kidding. Follow me." Tommy led the way into the back bedroom of the small house. "I need this hung above the headboard." He indicated the large landscape that sat propped against the foot of the bed.

Mark's face fell as Tommy turned to walk away. Just kidding? Although he supposed he could have been more upbeat about the not-actual screwing. He sighed as he followed along, then looked over the painting and dug into the paper sack he'd carried along from the kitchen, pulling out a drywall anchor, a large screw and a screwdriver. "Is it okay if I pull the bed out from the wall while I hang this?" he asked.

Tommy kept a perfectly straight face. "You don't want to romp about in my bed?"

Keeping his reaction to a blink, Mark slowly turned to look at Tommy over his shoulder, then down at the full-size bed, then back up at Tommy. "Something tells me this isn't your bed," Mark managed to drawl halfway convincingly.

Tilting his head, Tommy asked, "What do you mean?"

"I mean, if you have in mind some romping, we're gonna need more room than this," Mark said, looking up and down himself obviously before raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah, I can see your point," Tommy mused. "You are rather tall, and even though I'm small, I'm very active."

Mark's lips curved into a grin. "So? Can I move the bed? Sooner I get *this* particular screwing done..." he flushed again.

Tommy tugged at the bottom of the bed, barely budging it. "Oh, by all means, let the screwing commence."

Shaking his head, Mark lifted the foot of the bed fairly easily and walked it a couple steps away from the wall, setting it down carefully. Then he took up the screwdriver and started lightly tapping on the wall.

"What are you doing?" Tommy asked, fascinated at the play of muscles across Mark's broad shoulders under the thin cotton shirt.

The words were out of his mouth before he could stop them. "Looking for a stud," Mark replied.

Spreading his arms, Tommy crowed, "Look no further!"

Mark dissolved into laughter, leaning against the wall face first before turning around to grin at him. “Yeah, but you got better things to do than hold up a painting, right?”

Tommy snorted. “Not if this is all the screwing that’s going to happen in this house tonight.”

Leaning back against the wall, Mark looked him over. “I hope not,” he said a little more seriously.

Tommy propped himself against Mark’s arm. “So, the wall tapping, is that some sort of bizarre stud call that I should learn or something?”

Mark blinked and stood up. “Ah, well, it sounds different in the wall. Deeper, so you know you’re driving into something hard,” he explained, turning back to tap on the wall.

“I like it when you talk dirty to me, Mark,” Tommy grinned, tapping at the wall himself.

Glancing at Tommy again, Mark snorted. “Listen here, wise guy. *tap tap* Hollow. *tap tap* Hollow *thump thump* Solid. That’s the stud.”

Tommy gripped Mark’s hand and pulled it to his chest, making a small thumping sound. “Solid...”

Chuckling, Mark tapped his fingers against Tommy’s chest. “I don’t know. Got a little give there,” he said as he lined up the drywall anchor. “Now, the anchor goes through the drywall and spreads, pretty much easing the way for the screw and holding it tightly so it doesn’t slip.” Tommy squirmed a little under the gentle taps and the unintentionally erotic words. He stood quietly, holding Mark’s tools for him.

Mark screwed in the anchor and pulled on it carefully. “Make sure you pull on the anchor a little to make sure it’s seated solidly. Then you screw in the screw. Carefully, because it’s a really tight fit.” Now aware of the double meaning behind his words, Mark’s cheeks burned, but he kept with it.

Once again, Tommy found himself fascinated by the play of muscles, but this time in Mark’s tanned forearm. “You seem to be very skilled, Mr. Baker,” he mused.

“This kind of screwing I have no problem with,” he said before thinking, and then he flushed again and raised apologetic eyes to Tommy. “Not much chance to practice the other,” he said awkwardly.

An eyebrow lofted curiously. “But you do have the basic theory down, sounds like,” Tommy encouraged.

“Even for handymen, there’s book theory, then there’s hands-on experience,” Mark said, turning back to finish inserting the screw into the anchor.

When Mark turned the screwdriver a final time, Tommy pulled it from his hands and dropped it onto the bed as Mark hung the painting. Lifting Mark’s calloused, tanned fingers, he pressed kisses to the tip of each long digit. “These are capable hands.”

“Yeah,” Mark agreed, a little cautious. “Capable isn’t the issue,” he murmured, his other hand moving to hover at the back of Tommy’s head.

Tilting his head back, Tommy leaned into Mark’s touch. “You have the opportunity now,” he whispered.

Blinking, Mark’s lips parted as he got the message and all the blood in his body rushed to his cock. Slowly, he lowered his head, his fingers delving into Tommy’s soft hair. Tommy closed his eyes, waiting expectantly for the touch of lips that Mark’s actions promised him. He released a breath, sighing softly in anticipation.

The quiet sound Tommy made had Mark tied up in knots as he lightly pressed his lips to the other man’s, slowly moving his mouth over them to learn their texture. Tommy fought to remain still, dying to taste Mark again, but willing to let the other man explore at his own leisure. One hand clasped loosely around the hand he’d kissed earlier, and the other hovered somewhere near his midsection, trying to quell the butterflies in his stomach.

Shifting to drop his hand and curl it about Tommy’s waist, effectively pulling him closer, Mark inhaled and opened his lips, carefully licking along Tommy’s lower lip and kissing the corner of his mouth.

Tommy's lips parted on a sigh at the tentative touch of tongue. He dared to open his eyes, glancing shyly up at the man who dwarfed him, both in physical size and sensuality. "Mark," he whispered, idle hand meeting Mark's ribcage and drifting higher.

"Uh huh?" Mark answered quietly, slowly sliding his lips along Tommy's jaw as he held him close.

"If," Tommy cursed himself for saying what he was about to say. "If this isn't going to happen tonight, we need to stop now." He pulled a mere hair's breadth away. "I don't think I can stop later."

Mark looked down at him seriously. "I don't want to stop," he murmured. "If you want me, I want to be here."

Tommy smiled faintly, his lips curving as he pressed them to Mark's. "Wrong room," he whispered. He tugged Mark along behind him as they navigated out from behind the bed. He led him to another, larger room. Indicating the bed, he whispered, "King sized."

A smile pulled at Mark's lips. "That's more like it," he complimented, pulling Tommy close against him again. "What do you want?" he asked quietly.

"You," Tommy whispered hoarsely. "Any way I can get you." He pulled at his own shirt, tugging it over his head and dropping it over the knob on the footboard of the bed. "You're a sexy man," Tommy half-growled, stepping closer and pressing his body to Mark's. His hand slid from collar to hem of the shirt the tall man wore. "I feel alive right now. More alive than I've felt since I moved here." He unsnapped the button of Mark's trousers for the second time that night, sliding the zip down smoothly over the protruding bulge.

Eyes fluttering shut, Mark swallowed hard. "You make me feel sexy," he admitted, sliding both his hands around Tommy's back, fingers tracing the muscles.

Mark's gentle fingers on his back made him shiver with excitement. He pushed gently at the trousers surrounding Mark's hips, the fabric whispering to pool around the other man's long legs.

"I've never blushed harder than when flirting with you," Mark admitted. "I've never *been* harder than when flirting with you."

Fitting his hand around said hardness, Tommy moaned before answering, "I'm so flattered to know that I can cause this," he squeezed gently, "in a man like you." He slid his hands inside the boxers Mark wore, cupping firm cheeks.

Groaning, Mark chuckled. "A man like me? I'm just your average Joe, really," he said, eyes sparkling as he shifted his hips against Tommy's hand.

Testing the length and weight of Mark's cock in his curious hands, Tommy laughed. "Nothing average about you." He stroked once or twice, getting a feel for the other man's pleasure.

Mark snorted, then laughed, leaning to give Tommy a playful kiss. "You just remember that, now," he joked, then he purred in pleasure.

The sounds that rumbled from Mark's throat made Tommy's insides clench. He tipped his head up, meeting the playful kiss with an open mouth, teasing Mark into a deeper caress of tongues. His thumbs edged at the elastic waistband of the boxers, wanting to see Mark bare. Pressing closer, his chest encountered the cotton of Mark's shirt, and he grumbled at the obstacle, pulling his hands away from Mark's waist and groin long enough to dispose of the shirt.

Tommy's intensity and desire were catching and Mark wanted him closer. Once his clothes hit the floor, he swept Tommy up against his body, lifting the other man into his arms and urging his legs to curl about his waist as he went back to kissing him.

Tommy didn't require much urging, his legs fitting naturally around Mark's frame. He gasped into Mark's mouth as their engorged organs brushed together for the first time, the texture and contrast making him shiver violently in Mark's arms.

"You fit great in my arms," Mark murmured, dropping his mouth to Tommy's neck, sucking and nipping there, feeling his shyness drop away as he was instead driven by desire.

Tommy's neck arched at the intense pleasure Mark's lips and teeth evoked in him. He tightened his grip on Mark, hips hitching slightly. "Bed," he breathed.

Turning, Mark walked the couple of steps and sat on the bed, settling Tommy on his thighs. "Bed," he murmured, seeking Tommy's lips again, his hands splayed along the other man's hips.

Rising onto his knees, Tommy pushed Mark back onto the large, soft surface, pressing his body fully against the larger man's as they settled into the pliable mattress. "You make me feel good."

"God, I'm glad," Mark said fervently, sliding his hands to cup Tommy's rear and savoring the feel of his body against him.

Tommy chuckled at Mark's relief combined with the feel of strong hands on his bare bottom. His legs spread, letting him sink further down over Mark's body, his full weight pushing Mark deep into the mattress. He nipped at Mark's chin, tongue teasing in the slight cleft before his teeth scraped gently over the stubbled flesh.

Groaning, Mark craned his neck, trying to kiss along his neck and learn his flavor. He shifted his hips up without meaning to and gasped as sensation shot through his groin.

"Do it again," Tommy breathed, bracing himself above Mark's frame, "Push..."

Trying to remember what he'd done, Mark shifted his hips slowly from side to side, then up, then up again and pressing close and... "Oh, *God!*" he cried as their cocks rubbed together, sending sparks flying.

Tommy pushed down, trying to simulate the same feeling again and again. He frowned as it wasn't quite the same. "I want to feel your weight on me," he pleaded, hoping Mark would understand what he wanted.

Brow furrowing, Mark sat halfway up, propping himself on his elbows. "Okay," he said, tilting his head. "Whatever you want." Looking up and down Tommy's lean, muscled frame, Mark smiled appreciatively. "You're gorgeous," he complimented as he

moved his knees to lie between Tommy's legs, lowering himself slowly until his weight rested upon the other man.

A full-body shudder rippled across Tommy's body. "Yesss...." he hissed through clenched teeth.

Mark groaned as he felt Tommy shake under him. He shifted slightly, raising up and lining up their hips before settling down again, pushing against him slightly, moaning when he felt those sparks again. It was pure perfection. Tommy spread his legs wider, encouraging Mark to simply move against him.

Feeling his hips press down against Tommy's, Mark sighed and used his arms to shift his body up and down on Tommy's, just a couple of inches, creating some friction and pressure between them. Tommy slid his hand between their bodies, grasping both of their cocks. He fisted them loosely, groaning openly at the friction and heat that grew exponentially with each movement Mark made.

"Oh, whatever you're doing, don't stop," Mark groaned, leaning his weight on his elbows as he started to grind down more against the other man.

Tommy's other hand made its way between them, grasping at Mark's balls as the other man moved above him. Just as Tommy's hand closed around Mark and he groaned, their weight shifted and the headboard hit the wall. Then there was a clunk, a slide, and a heavy crash.

Tommy sat up, nearly knocking Mark to the floor. "*Holy hell!* What was that?"

The larger man gasped and groaned as Tommy sat up, ooofing as he caught Tommy's elbow in his gut. "The picture," he wheezed, holding his middle. "Sounds like it fell."

Tommy turned back, hands going to Mark's shoulders. "Oh, God, I'm sorry!" Seeing Mark's face twist in a grimace of pain tickled him, and he started giggling.

Grimacing, Mark looked up and then chuckled as well. Shaking his head, he shifted his feet off the bed so he could breathe a little better. Standing, he stepped into his trousers, tucking

himself in and zipping up. The moment was past, after all. “I think I’ll make it,” he answered.

Leaning against Mark’s shoulder, Tommy laughed until he cried. “I am so sorry. This has to be the funniest, funnest date I’ve ever been on. Please don’t be offended.”

Enchanted by Tommy’s openness and smile, Mark couldn’t help but laugh along. “Don’t be sorry, it’s been great,” he said honestly, sliding an arm around Tommy’s shoulders.

“Maybe we can go out again soon?” Tommy asked hopefully. “And maybe now that our... ahem... heads are on straight, we won’t be so rushed.”

Looking at Tommy with a smile, Mark nodded. “I’d like that. I like *you*, Mr. Tommy Griggs.”

“Good thing. I’m rather fond of you as well, Mr. Mark Baker.”

MARK stood at the register, literally watching the clock on the wall. Everything was done and put away except for cashing out the register, and he’d already counted the money once. He just had to wait three minutes and twenty-six seconds longer.

Stopping just outside the plate glass window in the front of the shop, Tommy pressed his face to the glass, knocking to get Mark’s attention. When the other man turned, he made a face, puffing his cheeks out against the glass.

Breaking into a laugh, Mark grinned and motioned for Tommy to come inside. Shaking his head, he started cashing out the register. It was close enough to closing time.

Tommy entered the air-cooled building, leaning on the counter as he watched Mark count money. “Planning on taking me somewhere really expensive tonight?” he joked as Mark handled the money expertly.

Raising an eyebrow as he bagged the money, Mark made notes on the register tape. “Did you have something particular in mind?” he asked absently, tucking the pencil behind his ear.

“There’s this lovely little bistro, out on the lake. I hear they serve the best steak this side of the continent.” Tommy reached up, smoothing a lock of hair that was displaced by the pencil behind Mark’s ear. “Or we could just sit on my porch swing and rock the night away.”

Zippering the bag shut, Mark smiled. “We could see if they do take out,” he suggested. “’Cause I think the porch swing sounds great.” He made eye contact with Tommy. “The rocking, too.”

Tommy took his hand. “Have you missed me as much as I’ve missed you?”

Looking at their entwined fingers, Mark nodded before meeting Tommy’s eyes. “Haven’t been able to think about much else, really,” he admitted. “And stocking the screws was really...” he cleared his throat.

“Giggle inducing?” Tommy snickered, remembering the experience. “Did any of the customers wonder why you blushed and then started giggling while holding your midsection in remembrance?”

Mark chuckled. “It was nothing compared to the old Jewish lady who came in asking for WD-40.”

Tommy started laughing, fingers tightening around Mark’s. “I can imagine.” He leaned up, pressing a soft kiss to Mark’s lips. “The second hanging of the painting worked. It hasn’t fallen again. Thank you.”

The taller man flushed a little. “Although I guess there’s not been a headboard thumping against that wall?”

“I rearranged the room,” Tommy admitted. “The bed is on the opposite side now.”

Mark relaxed a little. “So... no thumping?” he asked hesitantly.

Realizing suddenly what Mark was asking, he kissed the taller man again. “No thumping. Yet. Just thoughts of thumping. Thoughts of you and lots of thumping.”

Cheeks pinkening, Mark smiled some after Tommy's kiss. "Good. That there's no thumping yet, I mean. Real thumping, not thoughts of thumping. Well, unless they're of me. I mean, yeah. No thumping." Mark's face got progressively redder as he babbled.

"We can remedy that," Tommy said with a smirk.

Mark looked confused. "But there's already no thumping."

"But maybe I *want* there to be thumping." Tommy said in blatant invitation.

Eyes widening, Mark's jaw dropped a bit, then snapped shut. "Oh." Then he blinked in realization. "*Oh*. Well. I think I could probably help you with that," he stuttered out.

Tommy grinned and tugged at Mark's hand. "Feed me, Baker. I need sustenance to last me through the thumping to come."

Grinning like mad, Mark fished his keys out of his pocket, ditched his apron as Tommy pulled him past the cash wrap, and stopped long enough to lock the door. Tommy waited impatiently. Mark was a very attractive man. Tall, dark, handsome in the classic way, but his eyes and mouth were creased with laugh lines. His wide mouth smiled easily. His eyes sparkled constantly. His tall frame lounged easily, whether standing or sitting. Tommy grinned as he realized exactly how lucky he was to have a chance with such a sexy man. And *tonight*. Oh, yes, there would *indeed* be much thumping.

Tucking his keys away, Mark turned to find Tommy looking at him speculatively. He glanced down at his dark slacks and button-up shirt, nicely tucked in. "What?" he asked.

Tommy grinned and pressed close to steal a kiss before rasping, "Thumpety thump thump, thumpety thump thump, look at Tommy go..."

Sonja Spencer

Sonja Spencer has always enjoyed writing as an escape from her professional life. She spends what spare time she has with her family and friends; and she loves long walks on the beach, jumping in puddles and cuddling puppies. She aspires to be an entertaining writer and a gourmet chef.

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Odds Are Chrissy Munder

“I don’t want to go.” Rick Page stood at the open door of his closet and shook his head. “I really, really don’t want to go.” Somehow he really didn’t think the garments hanging there so silently in their neat little rows cared.

“You have to go. You’re on the program.” The female voice came from the direction of his bed, but as it was currently piled high with clothes he’d tried on and then discarded, he really couldn’t see anything but bare feet with their blue painted toenails wagging in his direction. They obviously didn’t care, either.

“Maybe I can get someone to sub for me.” Rick declared morosely even though he knew that wasn’t really possible.

“Right. There’s oh-so-many people on the top of their game when it comes to the intracellular messenger molecule known as C/EBP-alpha as it applies to bronchial smooth muscle cells,” Carol pointed out as she tried to fight her way through the mess of clothing covering her and the bed. “Wow, you know, it sounds really dirty when I say that out loud.”

“Almost everything you say out loud sounds dirty, and I still don’t want to go,” Rick replied dejectedly. Maybe if he said it often enough...

“Oh, stop whining and finish packing.” Carol’s head finally managed to lift from the pillows where she reclined and she glared at Rick. “Look, you made me spill my drink.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be helping me instead of reclining on my bed and drinking... what *are* you drinking, anyway?” Rick

turned and looked at his oldest friend and the head nurse at the respiratory rehab facility where they both worked.

“Mimosas. Champagne and OJ. The only damn alcohol I could find in the house. This is a bachelor pad, and my Great Aunt Tina has more booze in her cupboard than you do, and she’s in her sixties.” Carol waved an indignant hand at Rick as he stood in front of his closet dressed only in a disreputable pair of scrub pants that were in danger of falling off his narrow hips.

“I don’t drink much, you know that.” Rick shrugged and scratched his chest, unmindful of Carol’s critical gaze on his muscular torso. They’d been friends for far too long for that to bother him.

“You don’t do much of anything else, either. If I know you, this is the most action your bed has seen in ages.” Carol leered at him, the effect only slightly lessened by the T-shirt draped over her head where it must have fallen during his earlier fashion panic. “And watching you strut around half-naked I can only say that’s a damn shame.”

“I’m not strutting.” Rick ignored the rest of her words, mainly because they were true and he didn’t want to give her the satisfaction of being right. It had been six months since Brian had left him. Six long, lonely, empty months, and that’s why he didn’t want to go the conference that normally was a high point in his professional year. How could he enjoy himself when everything there would remind him of Brian and the fun they had had there the year before?

“I always forget how damn macho you can look, too.” Carol pulled the T-shirt off her head and tossed it to the foot of the bed as she continued her attempts at confidence boosting. “Especially half-naked. It’s those damn muscles. Sexy.” She mock-growled at him. “If I was a guy and looked like you, do you know how often I could get laid?”

Carol tilted her head to one side. “Or at least blown?”

Rick snorted as he knelt down to fumble for a pair of shoes shoved toward the back of the closet ignoring Carol’s whistle at his

upended rear. “Does your husband realize just what a potty mouth you get when you drink?”

“I’m serious.” She smirked knowingly. “And for the record, my husband loves it when I get drunk and talk dirty to him.”

Rick knelt back up, triumphantly waving a pair of dress shoes before he took a closer look and then threw them back into the closet. “Remember our discussion on too much information?”

“I thought that was just for my trying to spark your libido with tales of my marital bliss?” Carol gestured imperiously. “Get those shoes back out here. If you don’t want them, do you think they’d fit Eddie?”

“No,” Rick replied. “Honestly, that discussion covered pretty much anything you do that I don’t want to hear about.”

“I’m telling you, here’s your chance to go and do something wild. Something crazy,” Carol enthused. “Something I can vicariously enjoy through you.”

“I’m going to an educational conference with a bunch of pulmonary specialists, Carol. We’re not exactly known for being wild and crazy.” Rick signed mournfully.

“So, like I said, here’s your chance. Go to the conference, give a kick-ass speech, and then celebrate by picking up someone totally unsuitable for any type of long-term commitment and have a hot kinky one night stand which you can tell me about later. Even better, you could call me and leave the phone on the nightstand so Eddie and I can listen.” Carol took a big swallow from her glass.

“Meaningless sex always makes me feel better about myself. You should try it.” Carol winked at Rick before flopping back down on the pillow.

“Other than the fact you married your one and only one night stand and the only meaningless sex you have now is married sex, you’re forgetting that one: I’m over thirty-five, and two: I happen to like long-term commitments. Brian and I were together for ten years, you know.” Rick sat on the edge of the bed and

picked up Carol's bare foot, idly rubbing at the sole as he spoke. "I'm just not the one night stand type."

"You thought you were in a long-term commitment. He thought he was just covering all his bases." Carol wiggled on the pillows with a grateful sigh. "God, I love your hands."

"Wait a minute, what does being over thirty-five have to do with anything?" The wiggling stopped and she glared up at Rick.

"Well, I was happy." Rick's hands paused as he ignored her glare. "At least, I thought I was happy when I thought we were happy."

"And I thought I was the one drinking?" Carol looked at her almost empty glass. "You realize that what you said makes no sense, don't you?" Carol kicked her foot into his thigh to remind him what he was doing. "Time to get out there and experience life. Get back on the horse, or cock as your case may be."

"It's been way too long for me." Rick tickled her foot in punishment for her coarseness. "I don't even know how to pick anyone up anymore. What would I say – Hi, I'm in town for the conference, want to fuck me?"

"A trifle tacky, but the bold and upfront approach has been known to work." Carol opened one eye and studied Rick carefully, admiring the contrast between his dark, tousled hair and his paler skin. "You'd be amazed where that may lead a looker like you."

"I shudder to think where you came by all your knowledge." Rick grinned, unable to stay somber for long around Carol, one of the reasons they'd been friends for so long despite their difference in personalities. "Let's face it. I was a nerd when I met Brian, I was a nerd while I was with Brian, and I'm still a nerd now that he's left me."

"Don't give me any of that. I saw that movie in the '80s. What was it, *Revenge of the Nerds*? One of the world's greatest truths about nerdhood was exposed there. Since nerds hardly ever get laid, they spend all their time thinking nasty, kinky thoughts and planning what they'll do when they finally *do* get laid." It was Carol's turn to shrug. "Something kept Brian coming back for all those years, and I don't just think it was your cooking skills."

Rick couldn't help the flood of red that covered his face. "Is nerdhood even a word?" He threw himself back on the bed next to Carol to hide his embarrassment.

"There's a whole wildly kinky side to you that you just need to learn to express." Carol nudged him with her elbow. "Want me to mix you a drink?"

"No." Rick just smiled forlornly. "Apart from the fact I have no desire to express my inner kink around you, I don't want any of that champagne. I bought it last year to be sure I had some on hand for our anniversary."

"Oh, honey." Carol patted his arm sympathetically. "If it helps, I never really liked Brian."

"I know." Rick exhaled deeply. "But I did."

RICK straightened his tie and studied his appearance in the mirror, blind to the appeal of his deceptively lean frame and dark hair. The suit fit well enough, and Carol had been right, the subtle striping of the grey shirt added a classy touch. Not that she would know classy if it bit her on her pert and kick-boxed ass, but she did have an eye for style that put Rick's to shame. So much for stereotypes.

Rick had to smile as he thought of Carol. It was too bad she couldn't come with him. Maybe then he wouldn't be so nervous or spend his time thinking about Brian. It wasn't giving the speech; he'd done that plenty of times now and he'd either met or knew most of those attending the conference. No, his lack of confidence was on a deeper level.

His blue eyes darkened as Rick couldn't help but wonder again just what or who Brian had found to occupy himself at last year's conference or even the year before. At the time, he'd thought it was so sweet the way Brian would just give him a kiss and tell Rick not to worry about him being bored.

Sure.

Rick straightened his shoulders and tugged his cuffs of his suit coat down over his shirtsleeves one more time. Past was past

and this was the present. His present. While Rick had always enjoyed being in a relationship, he never thought he was the type to need a man around to complete himself, so enough of this!

He had a successful career, good friends, and an apartment which, if not as extravagant as the townhouse he and Brian had shared, was much more suited to his tastes. So, Carol was right. Time to move forward and put Brian and his hurtful behavior behind him.

After making sure the door to his hotel room was locked, Rick headed down the hallway to the elevator, admiring the hotel's décor on his way. The conference was in a Midwest casino/resort, and it really was an amazing place, all gleaming wood and tile with Native American accents. There was even a museum full of artifacts discovered during the construction and cultural exhibits regarding the area tribes. Maybe this year he'd get a chance to explore more of it.

Brian had never cared for gambling and had sniffed disdainfully at the crowds playing slots, but Rick found the whole scene energizing and exciting. Tonight's meet and greet was in one of the banquet rooms, but that didn't mean he couldn't slip away later and toss a few nickels away, maybe manage to strike up a conversation and have a few drinks.

Carol was right once again. (*God, don't ever let him tell her that.*) He wasn't a gargoyle, and there had to be some prestige in having his name and picture prominently displayed on the placards as one of the speakers for the conference. He could at least test the waters with some tentative flirting to psych himself up for the real thing when he got back home. Rick felt his long-lost confidence stir within him.

The chime had him moving forward reluctantly into the elevator and past the other occupants. Rick was surprised at the number of people jammed together – what was the weight limit again? The lobby button was already pressed so Rick settled with his back against the far wall, unable to disguise the small shudder than ran through him as the doors shut.

He did *not* have a phobia, Rick told himself firmly. He just didn't care for small spaces and he refused to give in and take the

stairs all the time. He just had to consider this a test of will and self-control.

“Are you alright?”

The voice was soft, pitched low enough that it didn’t reach anyone’s ears but Rick’s. His eyes flew open as he straightened away from the wall, embarrassed at having his reaction noticed.

“What? Um..yeah, just tired, I guess.” Rick cursed the flush that he knew was creeping up over his cheeks; he’d never been able to stop that autonomic reflex.

“But the night’s still young.” Was that a hint of *suggestion* in the slightly rough voice?

Rick’s stunned gaze traveled slowly over the broad, flannel-covered shoulders of the man who stood directly in front of him. Contrary to conventional elevator etiquette, he wasn’t staring straight ahead at the closed doors pretending not to notice anyone; he was staring straight at Rick.

Jonah smiled when the well-dressed man finally looked back at him, really seeing him, surprise evident in those big blue eyes. Jonah had spotted him as soon as he’d gotten on the elevator, long and lean, just the way Jonah liked a man. It was obvious he had no clue how attractive he really was.

This guy was definitely not dressed for the conference, Rick thought as his eyes passed over the firm chest wearing a navy T-shirt, down the long, jean-clad legs to the dusty boots and back up again to meet dark and amused eyes. A strong face accented by gleaming hair pulled sleekly back and clasped at the neck completed the picture.

Wow.

Hot.

Damn Smoking Hot.

Rick had been wrong. He didn’t only want a long-term commitment, and he didn’t want to say “*Hi, I’m in town for the conference, want to fuck me?*” No, at that moment, Rick was

struggling not to fall to his knees and blurt out “*Please, I’ll give you anything you want if you just let me suck you.*”

“Late night, rough flight, you know. Traveling.” Rick tried not to stammer as he stared at the living wet dream in front of him and all thoughts of Brian faded from his mind like the other man had never existed. This man had to be straight; all the really hot ones always were in Rick’s limited experience.

Rick felt his little bit of regained confidence drain away. He *had* to have imagined that bit of interest he thought he’d heard. Even if he was gay, no way would a guy this fine be anything more than polite to an average guy like Rick.

Still, that didn’t mean he couldn’t look, and he could certainly fantasize. Rick was suddenly lightheaded as the blood pounding in his ears rushed to where his cock was telling him in no uncertain terms that *oh yes, not only could he, he definitely would!*

Even as Rick struggled to pull his scattered thoughts back from the gutter where they had fallen with alarming speed, the elevator gave a small lurch, causing the occupants to gasp and giggle in reaction. Rick paled and reached out a hand to steady himself on the nearest surface, not realizing until he felt the heat and hard muscle beneath his grip that he’d grabbed the arm of the man in front of him.

“Sorry about that!” Rick exclaimed, dropping his hand from the other man, who no matter how hot he looked, could still kick his ass into next week with minimal effort.

“I’m not.” The self-assured voice was calm and almost lazy compared to Rick’s agitation. Jonah had to control his impulse to reach out and touch back. He was going to have to go slow here.

Okay. Straight men do *not* respond that way to a touch from a stranger. Rick straightened to his full height and looked up into those dark eyes once again just as the elevator chimed and the doors opened.

“Good thing you’re just tired and don’t have a problem with elevators.” To Rick’s surprise, Mr. Flannel Shirt continued to hang back as the other passengers began shuffling out. “The gal at

the front desk told me they've been having intermittent problems with the elevators on and off all week."

Rick didn't know what made him want to whimper more; the sight of that fine, jean clad ass walking out of the elevator into the lobby or the fact that his room was on the twenty-seventh floor.

THE problem with pulmonary specialists was that they were basically pulmonary specialists and not flannel-wearing, long-haired gifts from the gods, Rick thought as he stood, drink in hand, with a small group of his peers in the banquet room, trying to forget about his brief encounter in the elevator.

The drinks were flowing which was always a good thing; it helped scientists who spent most of their time alone in their labs with their research interact with other humans without more than the usual nervousness. But it also caused some of them to attempt to catch up on all the conversation they'd missed in the past eleven months in one weekend.

And that was apparently a *lot* of conversation.

Not that the subject matter wasn't near and dear to Rick's heart. It's just that it was hard to focus on the use of the immune transcriptome to direct the development of monoclonal antibody-based strategies for the depletion of mast cells when all he could think about was the worn, white patches on a pair of blue jeans.

That and just what exactly might have rubbed the fabric so repeatedly over time to make those intriguing worn patches.

"So, uh, where's your friend?" Rick brought his attention back to the man closest to him. That was Darrell. A nice enough guy, Rick thought, even if he couldn't remember his last name. What Rick could remember was that he did solid research and published often. Darrell was blond, good-looking in an absent-minded, glasses sliding down his nose kind of way, when Rick took a closer look at him.

Rick met him four or five conferences ago, and they'd spent plenty of time together at meetings like these in the following years as casual acquaintances. Not only had Rick not

given any thought to Darrell's relative attractiveness during that time, but Rick hadn't thought that Darrell paid enough attention to anything other than his work on asthmatic airway remodeling to realize he and Brian were together.

Surprise.

"I'm by myself this trip," Rick answered, not really wanting to get into the whole yes-he-was-my-partner-and-yes-we've-broken-up thing.

"Really?"

There was almost a look of disappointment in Darrell's eyes before it gave way to a surprised interest that gave Rick a momentary pause. Who would have thought? What else had Rick been missing over the last several years?

"In that case... do... do... you think... you'd like to have dinner with me... once this breaks up, of course." Darrell stammered a bit, but Rick was actually proud of the way the other man forced the words out. Rick definitely had to give him credit for effort. Granted, Darrell wasn't up to Mr. Flannel Shirt standards, but in Rick's mind, he wasn't, either.

"You know... to talk about your speech for tomorrow." Darrell flushed and his knuckles were white where he gripped the glass in his hand.

"Yeah," Rick answered, smiling at Darrell sympathetically. He knew just how the other man felt. Not more than a few minutes ago in the elevator, actually. "Sure, I'd like that."

There, Rick thought smugly. He'd be able to report to Carol that he'd been open and amiable. Maybe then she'd get off his ass about getting back on the... horse. And the more time he spent interacting with real humans, well, okay, pulmonary specialists, this weekend, the less likely he was to moon over tall, dark, muscular strangers met in elevators.

Elevators that were having intermittent problems this weekend, his inner coward reminded him.

Shit.

Rick drained the rest of his drink and touched Darrell's arm lightly, ignoring the fact he didn't feel the same heat or hardness under his hand that he had earlier with Mr. Flannel Shirt. "I'm going to get another drink. I'll meet up with you later."

Darrell nodded, his expression pleased at Rick's touch. Rick walked towards the bar, stopping and greeting several familiar faces on the way. He was really surprised at how many people asked him about Brian's whereabouts. He didn't think he'd introduced Brian to so many of his colleagues, but then they'd been to a lot of these conferences together.

DINNER had been good, if filling, and Rick was now having a hard time keeping his eyes open. The casino had a variety of restaurants, but Rick wasn't comfortable with the expensive one Darrell had first chosen, so they'd gone to the prime rib buffet room instead. That might have been a mistake, Rick acknowledged as he ran a discreet finger around the waistband of his pants, seeking just a smidge of extra room.

They had finished eating quite a while ago, and Rick had gracefully given in when Darrell insisted on putting the meal on his room tab. He was a little uncomfortable with Darrell's apparent interest in him, but the conversation had flowed easily between them as colleagues with little other pressure, and Rick managed to relax a bit more.

Darrell was nice enough and his attention was somewhat flattering, and if Rick had spent time noticing just how far and how often Darrell's glasses slid down his nose before he pushed them back up, well, that was just being observant, right?

Rick's yawns had proceeded from discreet to overt as the day, the drinks, and the good food began to catch up with him. He really wanted to call it a night, but Darrell had been excited about the new direction his work had been going and continued talking, quite happy with his semi-captive and drowsy audience.

"So, if we can validate the genes as asthma therapeutic targets, we can start with the discovery and testing of small molecule inhibitors." Darrell waved his hands as he talked,

knocking over his water glass in his enthusiasm and sending it cascading into Rick's lap without a pause in his flow of words. "Target identification is only the first stage, but the long-term process will definitely lead to the development of new drugs."

Rick smiled when Darrell didn't even notice the mishap, talk about being in a world of his own! He grabbed at his napkin and blotted at the mess the water made of his pants. He tried not to wriggle when the cool water got a little too close to his personal bits. Ugh, soggy, and for all the wrong reasons.

"Did I do that?" Darrell stopped talking for a minute and looked dismayed when he realized Rick was doing something other than listening attentively. "I'm really sorry."

Darrell picked up his own napkin and came around the table to help Rick try and wipe up the water, his hands clumsy and higher up Rick's thigh than Rick was comfortable with.

"Oh man, I can't believe I did that." Darrell was profuse with his apologies.

"Really, Darrell, it's okay." Rick tried not to back away from the other man, but honestly, four hands in his lap were two hands too many. He looked up for a moment – and straight into the amused, dark eyes of Mr. Flannel Shirt sitting a few tables over in the restaurant.

How had he not noticed him?

Rick flushed with embarrassment – again – at the knowing amusement in those amazing eyes. He abruptly pushed his chair back to remove himself from Darrell's groping hands.

"Do you want to go change?" Darrell stood there deflated, his glasses sliding down his nose, the wet napkin clutched in his hands.

"Why don't we just call it a night, Darrell, okay?" Rick tried to speak gently, despite his sudden nervousness. "I've had a really long day and I need to prepare for my speech tomorrow."

"You sure? You're not mad?" Darrell blushed and Rick felt a surge of sympathy for the other man.

“Really, it’s fine.” Rick pointed to another table close by where two other researchers he recognized were engrossed in conversation. “There’s Sam Lin and Donny Walker, aren’t they working on developing unique models of defined aspects of asthma and COPD pathogenesis?”

“Yeah.” Darrell’s face brightened. “I wanted to talk to Sam about working on a joint paper...”

Rick waved as Darrell wandered over to the two other men and gratefully headed for his room. Except to get there, he either had to walk up all twenty-seven flights of stairs wearing a pair of uncomfortably wet pants or risk the elevator again. With a sigh, Rick headed for the bank of elevators in the lobby.

THERE was the familiar chime of doom, and Rick was once again forcing himself to step inside the elevator. Normally, he didn’t have this many problems with the hydraulic monsters, but the little lurch from earlier had him wishing that a room on the lower floors had been available when he’d made his reservation.

At least the elevators were fast. Fast for small, enclosed, no way out little metal boxes that resembled nothing more than wide coffins. Rick found his usual spot against the back wall, closed his eyes against his mirrored reflection and resigned himself to fate and bad music when a large hand blocked the closing doors and a familiar form stepped in to the elevator to stand beside him.

“Hey.” The greeting was casual, the smile bright and in his tired haze, Rick found himself smiling back at Mr. Flannel Shirt, even managing to return the greeting without stammering.

“Hey, yourself.” Pretty good, if Rick did say so himself. He’d managed to sound casual and relaxed.

“Where’s your dinner companion?” The rough voice slid effortlessly across Rick’s nerve endings, making the peach-fuzz hairs on the back of his neck stand at attention. Well, he could toss casual and relaxed right out the window, couldn’t he?

Timing truly was everything and now that his had paid off, Jonah was playing it casual. Just making idle conversation to

distract the Doc from the elevator ride. He'd recognized Rick's face on the signs for the conference as the man he'd been attracted to earlier in the day and had to admit he was intrigued enough by the contrast between the man's obvious professional acumen and his personal uncertainty to seek him out again.

"He's talking with some friends." Rick wasn't sure why he didn't just blurt out he and Darrell weren't together, maybe it was something about the constant amusement in those exotic eyes that stiffened his spine and wanted him to appear less than available. *Yeah, like this was playing hard to get.*

Oh, the doc would never make a poker player. Jonah tried not to smile. It wasn't often in his busy life he got a chance to spend time with someone interesting. Good companionship was hard to find, especially as he preferred to stay away from those on the prowl, and he didn't have the time for a deeper commitment.

Rick was startled to notice the heat that radiated off Mr. Flannel Shirt when the man shifted, leaning against the back wall next to him. "You're still looking kind of tired, Doc, you need someone to take care of you and trust me, Blondie's not the man for the job."

"Pardon?" Rick was stunned. *Did he really just say that?* Ignoring the last part of the sentence he just couldn't process, Rick's mind focused on a tinier detail. "How did you know I'm a doctor?"

A quick grin widened full lips over those white teeth, and Rick's brain stuttered. Was that really a smile or was it something more predatory? Kind of an "I'm on to you" look? Rick shivered and he thought he felt the elevator lurch under his feet.

"I've seen your picture on those placards all around the hotel." A strand of the dark hair had come loose from the clasp and fell against one angular cheek. "They really don't do you justice."

"Me...?" Rick's voice stuttered along with his brain as he fought against the sudden desire to reach out and push that stand of hair behind the other man's ear. Would it be soft beneath his

fingers? There was that strange jolt again. *These elevators were going to be the death of him.*

Jonah decided to up the stakes a little when he noticed Rick's distraction. Besides, that blush was just too damn cute in his opinion. He wanted to see more of it.

"That's one hell of a wet spot you've got there, Doc. But then you've just spent the last several hours with what's-his-name, and you just don't have the look to go along with it. I can't say I'm surprised."

Rick flushed again and tried not to notice how damp his pants felt against his legs as he struggled to follow the conversational shift. "The look?" What the hell had happened to his vocabulary?

"You know." The voice lowered even deeper and other parts of Rick began to stand at attention as well, much to his dismay. What was it about this guy?

"That can't-wait-to-be-fucked look." The dark eyes stared at Rick intently, and this time Rick wasn't surprised to feel the small jerk in his equilibrium as well as his cock.

Rick would have given anything at that point to keep the tide of color from sweeping over the rest of his face. He was thirty-six years old, for Christ's sake. You'd think he could manage to stop blushing. Wouldn't you?

"And you're an expert when it comes to that look?" Rick tried to match the other man's insouciance as he wiped his clammy hands against his pant legs. It's not like he was a rank virgin anymore.

Jonah wanted to grin. This hand went to the doc. However, Jonah was the more experienced card player.

"I am when it comes to you." The words were almost a purr.

Rick swallowed.

Hard.

This guy was so far out of his league he might as well have been nineteen and clueless all over again. Shit, okay, twenty-two if he was really being honest with himself about when he'd experienced anything other than a few fumbling attempts at intimacy.

"I knew the first time I saw you just how sexy you'd look, and what I wanted to do to you to get you there." Jonah deliberately let his voice lower until it was like velvet, rich and dark and oh, so sinfully soft. Just like he'd bet the doc's skin would be.

"Rea...lly?" Did his voice just crack? Rick was embarrassed all over again, but the other man didn't appear to notice.

"Really." There was that knowing smile. "I'd start with that tie, first thing. It's a nice color, but it has to go." It was finally time, Jonah decided. Time to stop bluffing and lay his cards out on the table, showing the sweet l'il doc just what was in store for him if he kept playing.

Rick watched in hypnotized fascination as those strong hands reached out for his collar. A part of his brain that was still managing to function noticed the pale skin of the other man's palms, the other part just stood there, frozen and wondering what would happen next.

He didn't have long to wait. The hands were gentle on his shirt collar, easily working the knot in his tie loose until it slid down around his neck to be held captive by those long fingers.

"Then maybe I'd loosen a couple of buttons on your shirt."

Rick could only stare as a moist tongue peeked out between the white teeth and the lips so close to his and yet so very far away. A warm finger traced the small V of skin exposed by his now open shirt, and Rick sucked in his breath at the unexpected touch and his body's helpless reaction to it. He'd gotten hard more often today than he had in months. Carol would be ecstatic.

Was he really just standing there, trembling?

“A little more time spent on the finer details, and oh yeah, Doc, your cheeks would be flushed, your eyes would be half-closed with passion and your lips would be all swollen and pouty from our kisses.” Jonah’s voice was almost a whisper now. “And you know what?”

He moved even closer into Rick’s personal space, just enough so that their chests were almost brushing but not quite. Rick should have found it intimidating; instead, he found it undeniably arousing. Any closer and the man would have felt Rick’s undeniable physical reaction to him. A tan finger raised and traced the outline of Rick’s lips, barely touching, just close enough for Rick to sense the movement.

“You’d want more.”

The words were spoken in an impossibly low voice, almost a breath, and then the only sound was the instinctive whimper Rick gave as the Jonah moved back and leaned casually against the far wall of the elevator, twining Rick’s tie sensuously through his strong hands.

Rick could only stare at those hands, watching the play of tendon and sinew, wondering how they would feel on his skin. Instinctively Rick knew the contrast between the pale color of his skin and the dark tan of the hands would be an erotic thrill all its own.

“But instead, after all that time with Blondie, all you did was look like my grandmother when she’s forced to play pinochle instead of the slots. That’s a damn shame in my book.”

“What...?” Rick was stunned at how easily he’d been seduced with barely a touch. He struggled to find a coherent sentence but before he could find more than “please” and “now” in his vocabulary the elevator chime shattered the silence between them.

“This is your floor.”

Gentle hands took Rick by the shoulders and urged him out of the elevator.

“My tie...” Rick turned back to the elevator.

“A small souvenir.”

There was time only for that wicked grin, a pat on his ass and a quick wink before the elevator doors slid shut, separating Rick from his tie and the man that had just, impossibly, improbably, and unbelievably stolen it from him.

“SO what are you going to do about it?” Carol’s voice was eager. “Hold on for a minute.” There was a brief pause and then Rick had to pull the phone away from his ear as Carol yelled to someone in the room with her. “Honey, Rick just almost got some in an elevator.”

“I did not!” Rick exclaimed. “Hey, wait a minute. Who are you...”

“I thought he didn’t like elevators.” The reply was faint over the phone lines, but Rick heard it all the same. “Tell him about what we did in the elevator in Vegas. Maybe it will inspire him.”

“What?” Rick sat up from the hotel bed. “Tell me you did not just tell that to Eddie!”

“Relax,” Carol cackled. “Eddie’s rooting for you to get laid as much as I am.” Rick could hear some low murmuring in the background, a smack and then a squeal from Carol right before another voice came on the line.

“Please, Rick.” The voice was deeper and masculine. “Please get laid on this trip so Carol will shut up about your pitiful sex life and I can go back to enjoying mine.”

“Oh my God.” Rick covered his face with his other hand. He knew this conference wasn’t a good idea. He’d told Carol it wasn’t a good idea, but did anyone ever listen to him? He was apparently destined to spend this trip either mortified beyond belief or incredibly turned on. Although the thought of whatever Carol and Eddie did in an elevator in Vegas was enough to kill all but the most extreme lust.

“So.” Carol’s voice came back on the line after a few minutes. “I’m so proud of you and Eddie’s proud too. Now, what next?”

“Sleep,” Rick declared. “I’ve got to get some sleep.” Maybe then he could pull himself together and leave all this nonsense behind.

“You are such a coward,” Carol groaned over the phone. “The man’s kidnapped your tie, he obviously wants you to come get it. Besides that, he did everything but feel you up in the elevator. It’s a perfect opportunity. Don’t be such a weenie.”

“He did not even come close to feeling me up! And I’m not being a weenie, I’m being sensible.” Rick ran his free hand through his thick hair. “I’ve got a speech to give tomorrow, and I’ve had about as much embarrassment as I can handle for the evening, thank you very much. Besides, I don’t even know what room he’s in or if he’s here alone. He could just be playing hot games that someone else is getting the benefit of.”

Rick knew he was sounding whiny and depressed, but what did she expect him to do? Go knocking on every hotel room door to find what room Mr. Flannel Shirt was in? Bribe the maids? Ask at the front desk if the hot guy lurking around the elevators checked in alone? He’d already thought of all that and decided he wasn’t going to stoop that low.

“I knew I should have let Eddie kick Brian’s ass,” Carol sighed. “That bastard really did a number on you, sweetie.”

Rick had to smile at the image of Eddie’s five foot, four inch, 285-pound frame going up against Brian’s six foot, three inches of hard muscle. Now if it were Carol and her kickboxing skills, well, that would have been something to see.

“I appreciate the thought, really I do. You can tell Eddie I think he’s a sweetheart. But this has less to do with Brian and more to do with me just being wiped out. You got it?” Rick wondered why he even called her in the first place. He certainly regretted it now. He was carefully forgetting the way he’d been bouncing off the walls in his hotel room, unable to calm down after the *incident*.

“Yeah, I got it. I just want *you* to get it.” Carol started giggling, and Rick could hear a low murmuring in the background. About the only words he could make out were... *c'mere, baby?*

“That’s it, I refuse to listen to you and Eddie make out over the phone. It’s bad enough in real life. Hanging up! I’m hanging up now.”

Without waiting for her goodbye, Rick disconnected and tossed his cell back onto the nightstand. He loved Carol and Eddie like family but it was difficult sometimes to hear just how happy they were together. Especially when Rick was aware of how alone he really was. And it wasn’t just the Brian thing. He’d always been too smart, too geeky, too focused on his studies to really connect with anyone.

Too scared, really.

Rick stood in front of the hotel room mirror and took a good hard look. His damp pants were already hanging over the back of the desk chair to dry and he’d stripped down to his boxers before giving in to his inner teenager and calling Carol to gush.

He wasn’t the same insecure, skinny kid he’d been when he’d first discovered that a good-looking school boy lit up his world more than a good-looking school girl. Honestly, Rick was pleased with the way he’d matured and the man he’d become.

Physically, he’d improved. His natural leanness had come in handy as others his age were having to work hard at not running to fat, and Rick just seemed to develop a more defined musculature. Mentally he’d definitely met his potential as well, achieving his doctorate sooner than expected.

So why, when it came down to it, did he always go back to feeling like that gawky boy he’d been in his youth? It was time to get past that. Time to work on his social confidence. After all, if Darrell could do it, he could too, right?

Rick looked at the clock radio beside the bed. He groaned when he saw how late it was. He really needed to get some sleep. But it was time to look at his notes and go over his speech one more time. Now was the time to be sensible and forget all about dark and exciting strangers met by chance.

Now was definitely not the time to lay back down on the bed with a sigh and close his eyes, remembering once again the swirl of excitement that had filled him when he'd been alone in the elevator with Mr. Flannel Shirt and captivated by that deep voice.

Nor was it the time to let his hand slip under the waistband of his boxers, slip them down and slide one hand up and down his hardening flesh while he thought about those dark eyes and the wicked glint within them. Rick enjoyed the friction of his slow, gentle strokes before he pictured the strong hands twisting his tie between them once again and imagined those hands touching him instead.

Those hands would grip harder; the skin would feel more calloused than his own. They would be hotter, the touch more sure and impatient. Rick's fist increased its speed and he tightened his grip, pulling harder on his cock as he groaned with pleasure, feeling the oozing slickness ease the glide.

He could imagine that dark hair falling forward over his face as they kissed, shielding him, sheltering him. He would wrap his own hands around those biceps, stroke that broad chest and feel the ripple of the muscles beneath the skin. God, it would be so intense, so...

Rick shuddered, so damn... good. He could only moan as his orgasm rushed over him, leaving him trembling and gasping alone on his hotel bed.

Damn.

Now was the time to clean off the damn notes for his speech that he'd left on the bed.

Double damn.

And figure out what tie he was going to wear tomorrow.

THERE was a certain skill to giving a good speech. The ability to read the crowd and keep their attention, no matter how dry and erudite the subject matter, was mainly instinctive and difficult to learn. Rick was a good public speaker and he knew it.

It was something he'd always taken pride in, especially as he'd sat through some absolutely horrible speeches in his time.

Rick looked out over the crowd, pleased to see that he'd only lost a few to the obligatory restroom breaks and that other than those with obvious hangovers from the unusual amount of partying the night before everyone appeared to be awake. Not too bad for as late in the afternoon as it was. He always hated being one of the last speeches of the day, preferring to get it over with bright and early.

But things had a way of working out. It had taken double Rick's usual amount of caffeine to jumpstart himself this morning, so he had a certain sympathy for anyone he'd seen nodding out. Especially after Dr. Bartholomew had gone an entire half hour over the time allotted for his speech. Dr. Bart, as they affectionately called him, wasn't known for his speaking skills and tended to mumble throughout. Rick always got transcripts of the speech afterward to make sure he hadn't missed anything.

"So we've shown that secretion of extracellular matrix proteins and the enzymes which break down this matrix are compromised in test cells from asthmatic volunteers for our study, and this leads to an increased deposition of extracellular matrix. We've also shown that the release of anti-inflammatory factors is reduced and the automatic release of pro-inflammatory factors is increased in smooth muscle cells from these same volunteers."

Rick looked down at the notes for his speech and paused for a second, the hesitation unnoticeable to the crowd (he hoped). But as soon as he'd seen the smudges and stains on the note cards he'd tried to clean off he'd been taken back to last night and the overwhelming rush of sensation that had swept over him. He'd not come that hard in ages, certainly not by his own hand. Rick sternly told himself to finish the presentation.

"As our study continues, we will examine the intracellular mechanisms which control airway remodeling and inflammation in asthma patients and clarify the role of the smooth muscle cell in these processes. As part of our study, we will look for the presence of factors that control angiogenesis."

He looked up in time to see Darrell wave his hand. He should have known, as soon as he brought up airway remodeling. Although, it was funny, as long as he'd known Darrell, Rick couldn't remember seeing the man in the audience for one of his speeches before. Maybe he just never noticed?

"Yes, you have a question?"

Darrell stood up, his blond hair falling over his forehead, glasses sliding down his nose and looked intently at Rick standing up at the podium. "Dr. Page, what about the remodeling characteristics in which there is the formation of new blood vessels or angiogenesis?"

"Our preliminary studies have identified that one of the extracellular matrix proteins which acts as an anti-angiogenic factor is missing from the lungs of our volunteers with asthma. We hope to study both why this factor is missing and the potential effects that this absence may cause."

Rick looked around the hall. "Are there any more questions on anything that I've discussed today?" There were a few hands raised, and Rick spent the next 20 minutes carefully answering questions from his peers.

A solid feeling of satisfaction filled Rick as he finished up the questions and smiled out at the crowd. It had been a good speech. He could always tell. Besides, Rick knew his team was doing good work and making a difference in people's lives every day. What more did he need out of life?

He could feel himself flush as he gathered his notes to the applause of his peers and couldn't help himself from smiling as he took just one more look into the crowd to enjoy their approval. As much as he enjoyed the research, it was still nice to feel the work was appreciated. Rick let his gaze wander to the back of the hall and then flushed even darker as he recognized the dark-haired figure at the rear exit.

It may have been a different colored shirt covering that broad chest, but that was definitely Rick's Mr. Flannel Shirt standing there applauding him with the rest of the crowd. Wow, he

couldn't believe the man had made an effort come to hear his speech.

Well, he probably hadn't been there the whole time, but still. Rick couldn't help but remember that Brian had *never* come to listen to one of his speeches, complaining that the subject matter was always too boring. Rick was distracted by a colleague asking another question, and when he looked up again the man by the exit doors was gone, but the warm feelings his presence had brought remained.

THE rest of the evening passed in a blur of food, drink, and laughter. Rick couldn't remember the last time he'd had so much fun. With their speeches over and their personal Swords of Damocles no longer hanging over their heads, the researchers were more than ready to kick back and try to raise trouble in a casual, nerdy and totally innocuous sort of way.

The group had wandered into the casino proper and Rick was amazed at the controlled chaos. It was loud. Really loud. There were over 4,300 slot machines spread out over two floors (the pulmonary specialist within him was grateful one of the floors was totally nonsmoking), and the resulting volume stunned him.

Everywhere he looked, there were people laughing, lights flashing, and the sound of the silver arms belonging to the "one-arm bandits" being pulled. Of course, this being the electronic age, there were push-buttons on the slot machines that spun the wheels for you, but Rick preferred the old-fashioned thrill of grabbing the gleaming metal arm and pulling it downward as he watched the fruit on the wheels spin.

It was also heaven for a people watcher like Rick. There were folks of all shapes, sizes, and ages here trying their luck of one sort or another. Rick wasn't sure what was funnier, watching some of the guys from the conference fumble about, trying to figure out how the machines worked, or watching them fumble about trying to hit on some of the attractive women that seemed to be there in droves

He'd lost Darrell in the crowd, and Rick wasn't unhappy about it. There was something troubling about in the way Darrell seemed to hang around him. Rick liked him, but his goal was to keep his options open, not jump at the first warm body that came along. *Unless it was wearing a flannel shirt*, his treacherous mind reminded him.

Rick had used all his tokens without winning anything and he debated whether to stop one of the casino employees wheeling their change and token carts through the aisles and getting more. Actually, none of the guys were winning, but that didn't matter. The fun was just being a part of the group and sharing in the electric thrill of possibility.

"Unlucky in cards, lucky in love?"

Rick didn't need to turn around to discover who that voice belonged to. The instant salute his cock gave the man behind him told him all he needed to know. "Does this count as cards?"

"Close enough." Mr. Flannel Shirt moved into Rick's line of vision, and Rick let his gaze travel longingly over the man's large frame. Tonight's shirt was a dark navy, the T-shirt a soft gray, but the jeans were the same. As was the hard body they covered.

"I've not won a cent. How about you? Are you winning?" Rick asked. Maybe it was the alcohol, but Rick wasn't as nervous now. He was still glowing from the thought that this man had taken the time to stop by and listen to his speech today. That meant something. Surely it did.

"I don't play unless the odds are in my favor." The dark hair was pulled back again, and Rick wanted to release it from the clasp and see it fall down and soften the stark planes of the face before him.

"What are the odds of me getting my tie back?" Rick changed the subject abruptly before the desire to reach out and touch overruled his common sense.

"Odds are definitely in your favor." There was that smile again, and Rick could only smile back as he felt the glow low down in his belly burn hotter.

Rick opened his mouth to be bold, to be braver than he'd ever been, when he was suddenly surrounded by a few guys from the conference. He recognized their faces, but didn't know their names. "Yo, Rick." They were panting and rushed, and Rick cursed the interruption. "We need you to come over here, man."

"No, really... I'm... What's going on?" Rick looked up at Mr. Flannel Shirt, who just cocked an eyebrow at him and nodded slightly before disappearing back into the crowd. *Damn.*

"It's Darrell."

IGNORING his protests, the other guys had dragged him off to one of the sitting areas off the casino floor. Like the rest of the resort, it was tastefully decorated in a warm, welcoming style that urged you to sit down and settle for a bit.

The fun of the evening swirled away with Rick's alcohol buzz and the fading view of that jeans-clad ass once again, leaving him with a faintly nauseated feeling. He didn't know what was going on but he had an instinctive sense that it wasn't good

Sure enough, there was Darrell, all sprawled out in an overstuffed chair and looking pretty much worse for wear. He must have been hitting the booze hard and fast if the stench coming from the waste bin beside him was any indication, and he hadn't even given a speech today. Well, Rick thought philosophically, that's what happened if you were a quiet researcher not used to partying.

It had been a long time since his college days, and Rick hadn't been anything but a studious kind of guy. Even so, Rick could look at Darrell and say he'd been there and done that. He didn't envy how Darrell would feel in the morning but it still wasn't anything that unusual, hadn't they all been trashed at one time another?

"Why me?" Rick looked at the men by Darrell. He recognized Sam and Donny, but still couldn't put any names to the other guys. This was kind of weird and he really just wanted to head back into the casino and find Mr. Flannel Shirt once again.

"I'm not unsympathetic, but he's just drunk. What do you want me to do?"

"We don't know, man." Donny shrugged. "But he's puking and carrying on and he was saying your name and talking some shit. So Paul and John went and found you, then Sam showed up."

"I guess we should take him up to his room?" Rick looked around helplessly. "I mean, unless you think it's alcohol poisoning?" He still wasn't sure what any of this had to do with him.

"Rick... s'that you, Rick?" Darrell's words though slurred were loud and his glasses were sliding down his nose once again, but this time Darrell didn't push them back up. Oh yeah, Rick thought, he's toasted.

"Yeah, Darrell, what's up?" Rick moved a bit closer to Darrell despite the smell of puke. God, that was gross. Maybe they should just get him up to his room and let him sleep it off before Darrell did something further to embarrass himself.

"Sorry, Rick... jus... sorry." Darrell's head hung forward down onto his chest and he groaned and burped.

"No problem, Darrell. It's cool." Rick couldn't figure out what Darrell was apologizing for. Getting fucked up? Hitting on him? Spilling the water on him last night? Burping in his face like that?

"Didn't know... he... didn't... sorry, Rick."

"Hey, maybe Rick's right. Let's just get him up to his room." Sam looked suddenly uncomfortable. "Donny, you, Paul, and John grab his arms and try to get him up there."

"But why did he want us to find Rick?" Donny and the guys pushed past Rick who stepped back out of the way, wondering the same thing. They took hold of Darrell and pulled him swaying to his feet. Rick grabbed at Darrell's glasses when then fell off his face and handed them to Donny.

"Doesn't matter," Sam said firmly. "Just get him to bed."

“Should I go with them?” Rick asked helplessly. This was one of the moments in life where he always felt so awkward. It was like a game where everyone knew the rules but him. Where was Carol to explain all this when he needed her?

“Nah, it’s probably nothing but the booze talking. They’ll get Darrell up to his room, and he won’t even remember any of this tomorrow.” Sam’s words were logical.

Darrell suddenly lunged forward, breaking free of the guys holding him up and falling onto Rick’s chest. “Brian... I didn’t... the first... not ’til after...” None of it made any sense to Rick, who stood there frozen, not even the stench of Darrell’s breath making him flinch this time. “I’m s... sorry...”

Everything seemed to stop for that moment. Rick saw the look on Sam’s face, the realization in the face of the other guys and suddenly he was the one whose head was spinning and who wanted to puke.

Sam gestured urgently and Darrell was hauled off, stumbling and muttering protests the whole way. Rick was led to the same chair Darrell had been sprawled out in and Sam just kind of pushed at him until Rick sat down.

“What... why would Darrell say that?” Rick turned to face Sam. “You know him better than I do. What was he saying?”

“He’s just drunk, Rick. Never mind him.” Sam was obviously trying for some damage control and part of Rick appreciated it. But there was another part of Rick, the part that knew better.

“Brian? Was he talking about my Brian?” Rick felt like he was stumbling in the dark. There was a door in front of him and light behind the door. But he didn’t think he really wanted to open it.

Sam was looking real uncomfortable now. “Uh... you guys still together?”

“No, we split up about six months ago. Darrell and I kind of talked about it yesterday.”

Darrell's look of disappointment when he heard Brian wasn't going to be there was back in Rick's mind. Darrell not ever being at one of his speeches before this one. Rick let his eyes wander around the small sitting area. There were some nice wooden carvings along the ceiling, details of wildlife and leaves, that kind of thing. Rick concentrated on the owl in the corner.

"Uhm... yeah. Well, Darrell never could hold his liquor. Hey, you want to go have a drink, play some more slots?"

Nice try, Sam. "I'm a big boy, Sam." Rick looked away from the owl and back up at Sam. "I'm sorry you're in this position, but whatever it is, just spill it."

"You're better off without him," Sam blurted out. "I mean..."

"Wow." Rick sat there, stunned. Suddenly it was all so obvious. Rick looked back up at the owl again. Wood, did wooden owls feel anything? Was Rick suddenly a wooden owl?

"Darrell? And my Brian?"

"It's not really Darrell's fault, I mean... you know what? Let's just not do this, okay?" Sam stood up, his agitation evident as he took a few steps away and then back.

"C'mon, Sam." Rick held out his hand. "Who all knows about this?"

"Shit, Rick." Sam sighed and looked away, his struggle obvious. "Look, Darrell wasn't the only one. It was obvious you guys were together, but he said it didn't matter. That you were okay with it. That it was the only perk to coming to these conferences."

The words took awhile to sink in. Rick sat there. Then the only thought to float to the surface of his mind was how grateful he was for Carol. After the breakup, she'd insisted he get tested. She never really said why in so many words. But she had pushed until he'd given in and made the appointment. Hell, she'd even gone with him.

She'd known, or she'd guessed.

How could she have known Brian better than he had? How had he not had a clue? *How many other men had his ex-partner fucked during their time together?*

“Rick, you okay?” Sam was staring at him, obviously worried.

“Yeah.” Rick felt a strange sense of calmness. Maybe it wasn’t such a surprise, maybe deep down he knew all along. He thought he should be upset, but he was just calm. Wooden. Like the owl. “I’m fine. I’m just really tired all of a sudden.”

“You sure you’re okay?” Sam was looking relieved, but kind of nervous as well.

“Yeah,” Rick repeated, amazed at how normal his voice sounded. “I’m probably going to just head to my room. Do me a favor, will you? Be sure to check on Darrell tomorrow? Make sure he’s okay? I may get an early start home.”

“Sure, man,” Sam nodded. “I can do that.”

THE elevator was empty, a fact that Rick was pathetically grateful for. He was holding himself together. He was cool. He was... Rick looked at his reflection in the mirrored walls and didn’t even recognize the man that looked back at him.

He was a fucking mess right now.

Rick watched the digital numbers change as the elevator rose higher and higher. He just wanted to get to his room and hide. He didn’t want to see anyone else from the conference, he didn’t want to wonder just who else was here that Brian had fucked or sucked or spent any time with over the last several years or the last several conferences.

At the eighteenth floor the elevator chimed and the doors opened. Rick looked down at his feet to avoid seeing who entered the elevator. The doors shut and there was silence. Rick took a deep, trembling breath, composing himself before he looked up. His face was set, frozen into a polite mask. Only nine more floors he told himself.

Only eight and then he could let himself shatter into pieces.

Only...

"Everything alright, Doc?" There was concern in the deep voice. "You're not looking so good."

Oh God, Rick thought. Not now. There really was no end to his humiliation. For some strange reason Rick just wanted to fall into those muscular arms and burst into tears. Now that would totally kill any chance he'd ever had with this man!

"Just tired." Rick tried for a smile, but he could feel his face was still frozen, the muscles unable to move. He would be okay as long as he didn't look into those eyes. "Having an early night."

"I see that." Mr. Flannel Shirt shifted his stance, relaxing back against the wall as if trying to show Rick he wasn't a threat. "You know..."

Rick didn't ever get to find out what it was he was supposed to know. All Rick heard was a thud, then a clunk, then a bang.

And the elevator stopped.

Dead.

The lights on the panel flickered and went dark, hell; even the crappy music stopped playing.

"Goddamn it!" Rick didn't even realize he'd punched the wall until the pain spread through his hand and it was suddenly captured in a much larger, callused hand.

"Hey, now." The voice was lower, softer as it instinctively tried to soothe him. "That's not like you, Doc."

Frustrated, Rick used his other hand to push at the buttons, trying to buzz the alarm and get any of the lights to light up until it was captured as well and he was drawn close against a warm torso.

"Shhhh. C'mon, Doc. Just settle down." Realizing that Rick wasn't really with him, Jonah settled for the simple comfort of touch.

Rick struggled against the arms that held him. He was suddenly filled with anger and frustration and needed to lash out, to release everything that was boiling up inside him. He was cursing as he tried to slam his fists into anything he could reach, twisting and jerking against the other man.

Jonah tried to keep his hold gentle, his voice soothing, but he was angry inside in a way that surprised him. Somebody had messed with the Doc, hurt him, even. And that wasn't sitting too well with Jonah. He barely knew the man he held in his arms, but something about him had gotten under his skin.

Even in their teasing encounters Jonah had sensed the deep vulnerability of the other man. It had brought out all kinds of protective instincts Jonah didn't expect. He'd stepped back this evening when the Doc's friends had come up and pulled him away, but he wasn't stepping back now.

If might have been minutes, it might have been hours. Rick didn't know how long he struggled until his senses returned and he was left embarrassed at his outburst and still panicked at the elevator's stopping. The man who held him so gently just let him agitate, one hand patting his back softly until Rick stopped and let himself be held closer. Rick was amazed this man, so caring and gentle, was the same confident aggressor he had flirted with earlier.

"Just take a deep breath. Everything'll be okay." The voice was almost crooning in Rick's ear, and all he could think about was that movie about a guy that could calm down horses with simply a whisper. Rick finally gave up and gave in, burying his face in the broad shoulder of Mr. Flannel Shirt.

Exactly where he wanted to be.

"You breathing?" Jonah was surprised at how much he enjoyed it when the Doc settled down and nestled closer against him.

Rick could hear amusement now in that voice, but he didn't want to look up and acknowledge the real world. Nope, he just wanted to stay right where he was. There was something awfully

comforting about being held closely against a muscular chest and a bristly cheek rubbing against his hair.

It had been so damn long, and right now Rick needed all the comfort he could get.

“We might be here for a while. Let’s take it easy.”

It took a little adjusting since Rick was never released from the protective circle of those arms, but soon they were both sitting on the floor of the elevator. Those long, jean clad legs were stretched out, boots crossed at the ankle, and Rick was cuddled close, almost sitting on the other man’s lap.

Rick managed a deep breath, catching a hint of fragrance, a mix of sage and wind that he knew didn’t come out of any bottle. Slowly he began to relax, the tension leaving his shoulders and his grip growing less desperate once he realized the other man wasn’t letting go.

“I told you, Doc. You just need someone to take care of you.” Jonah kept his voice soft, but he was eager to be the one to do just that.

“The elevator’s stopped,” Rick mumbled against the broad shoulder.

“Yeah, it sure has.” There was that damn amusement again. “Just got to have a little faith they’re working on it.”

“I really don’t like elevators.” There was really something nice about a large hand resting firmly on the back of his neck, Rick mused. “It’s not like I have a phobia or anything.”

“I’m sure.”

“This hasn’t been my best night.”

“I get that impression.” Jonah tightened his arms around the doc for a minute.

“I’m really embarrassed.” Rick tried to draw back from the shoulder that pillowed him, but was simply held tighter. Deciding to enjoy the moment, Rick let himself relax again.

“That’s better, Doc.” There was that hand again, rubbing soothing circles into his back.

“You came to my speech,” Rick said quietly, soothed by the magic those hands were making. “Why?”

“I was interested, and it was a good speech.” A soft kiss was pressed against Rick’s neck.

“What’s your name?” Rick gave up on trying to understand what was happening and decided to give into his curiosity and find out just whose arms he was enjoying being in without questioning the reasons why.

Rick was released, and he sat back slowly. He wiped his hand across his face and pushed his hair back with one shaking hand before letting his hesitant blue eyes meet the darker ones in front of him.

“Jonah Lavierge.” A large hand took his in a quick shake. “Pleased to meet you, Doc.”

“Rick.” Rick looked down shyly. “Rick Page.”

Reality crept back in, and Rick looked around the small space they were sitting in. The frozen feeling was gone and even his embarrassment seemed to have disappeared. There was something about Jonah that simply refused to leave any room for those emotions.

“Sorry about that.” Rick took another deep breath as he turned and settled against Jonah’s side, his head against the wall. “I’m not usually so... so...” He gave up on words and just shrugged.

“S’alright. As my grandmother always says, every creek will run a banker when the storm’s bad enough.” Jonah smiled gently and continued, “From the looks of things, it’s been a doozy. You want to talk about it?”

Rick was amazed at how everything associated with such a large man was so soft, so gentle. He shook his head. “No, actually. I’d like to forget it for now.” Rick took another breath of sage and wind. *Elevators weren’t really so bad.*

“You know why I’m here. What are you here for?”

Jonah smiled and gracefully accepted Rick’s change of subject. If the doc wanted to forget whatever had upset him, Jonah was willing to help. Hell, if he were honest, Jonah wanted to drive everything out the doc’s head except how it felt to have Jonah inside him. “I’m here with family. My sisters and I brought my grandmother up for the weekend. She loves to gamble. We come with her to make sure she doesn’t end up spending everything she has.”

Rick tried to prevent the laugh that bubbled up. This man was here with his *grandmother*? “You’re kidding, right?” He looked up at Jonah again. “Oh, man, you’re not. God, I’m sorry.”

Jonah just laughed at him. “It’s fine. She’s ninety-seven. She raised me and my sisters, never had the easiest life. If she wants to spend her last years gambling, I’m not going to interfere.”

“I guess I understand.” Rick could only smile at the thought of a ninety-seven-year-old woman playing the slots for all she was worth. “I hope I’m that determined at her age.”

“Don’t we all,” Jonah agreed. “You sure you’re okay?”

Before Rick could reply, the elevator gave a jerk and they were moving upward again.

“See, Doc.” Jonah winked at him. “Everything’s fine.”

Jonah helped Rick stand up, brushed off his suit coat, and straightened its hang off his shoulders. “You’re as good as new.”

With those dark eyes on his, it was suddenly easy for Rick to be brave. “I’m even better. Let me say thank you. Come to my room and have a drink with me.”

It was surprisingly effortless. The “it” in question being the deliberate act of bringing a man back to his hotel room with every conscious intention of being intimate with him. There was none of the awkwardness Rick would have expected to feel, none of the tension or the nervousness.

Without hesitation, Rick took out a couple of beers from the room's minibar and he and Jonah settled down on the bed to make comfortable and quiet conversation. At first, Rick thought they would jump into a furious coupling as a way to purge Brian from his flesh and memories forever. It would be the ultimate way to release the anger and humiliation he felt after the final proof of Brian's infidelity.

It would have been payback to a man who wasn't even around other than in Rick's head. But that wasn't the case anymore. The past's hold on him had broken in the elevator where Jonah had simply held him close. Now Rick was filled with peace in the calm aftermath, filled with quiet anticipation as he let his gaze linger hungrily on the lean form reclined on the bed beside him.

Jonah didn't seem to be in any rush to fuck and run, and Rick had found his desire for Jonah had less to do with getting back at Brian and everything now to do with the exciting man beside him.

"So what do you do when you aren't rescuing distraught doctors in disabled elevators?" Rick couldn't help but smile at the alliteration that escaped him. He snuggled a bit closer to Jonah, enjoying the warm that poured off that hard body.

Jonah shrugged and took a large drink from the bottle, his head tilting back and letting Rick watch the movement of his throat as he swallowed. "Nothing much. Same as anyone else. Work a job. Help support my family. It's not like I'm saving lives or anything," he grinned at Rick.

"What kind of job?" Rick grinned back and pressed a little harder, interested in learning all he could about the man beside him, letting the tangible desire between them simmer and build.

"I help my sisters and their husbands run the farm my grandparents started years ago. We grow a variety of grains for use as livestock feed. I also own a feed store that specializes in custom mixes at the buyer's request."

“You’re not talking about the corner pet food store, are you?” Rick couldn’t imagine Jonah doing anything on a small scale.

“Not hardly!” Jonah laughed. “We don’t usually do a custom mix for orders under a couple of tons. There’s a whole science behind the blend of protein and other nutrients depending on what goal the buyer is working toward with their stock.”

“So really you’re a chemist.” Rick nodded and took another swallow off his beer. Jonah might try to play down his accomplishments, but Rick could see the sharp intelligence behind the dark eyes.

“No, Doc, I’m just a farm boy come to town.” Jonah put his beer down on the nightstand. “And I probably should get my boots off the bed.” He shifted, moving toward the end of the bed and sitting upright with a groan as his back cracked with the movement.

“Just take them off.” Rick enjoyed watching the movement of those muscles beneath Jonah’s clothing. Then suddenly, the watching wasn’t enough. Rick scooted down behind Jonah, kneeling behind him and looking at their reflection in the mirror over the room’s desk as his thighs closed around Jonah’s hips, trapping and holding Jonah tight against him.

They stared at each other for a silent moment, and then Rick undid the clasp at the back of Jonah’s neck and let the cloud of dark hair fall freely to Jonah’s shoulders, burying his face in the long strands just as he’d dreamed of doing.

“Why?” Rick spoke quietly, inhaling the tantalizing scent of sage and knowing he would always associate it with this compelling man.

Jonah didn’t pretend to not understand. “I have responsibilities at home. There’s no time for commitments. Weekends like this are all I have to give.”

“So I could have been anyone?” Rick let his fingers comb through the dark hair, watching as his gentle touch brought goose bumps to Jonah’s neck and then closing his eyes to better enjoy the feel of the coarse satin under his hands.

“Oh no, Doc. Definitely not anyone.” Jonah leaned further back between Rick’s legs, letting Rick support his weight. “You’re special. The first time I saw you, I thought you were beautiful and intelligent, and you looked as lonely as I felt. I just wanted to see you smile.”

“Your skin looks like dark honey,” Rick whispered, touched by Jonah’s words. “Is it okay if I taste it?” Rick didn’t know where this sudden aggression came from, this need he had to consume the other man. But he didn’t fight it, either. Instead he leaned down, letting his lips touch the soft skin under Jonah’s ear and enjoying the groaning reaction to his boldness.

Rick trembled, feeling released from his normally restrained behavior, and moved his hands slowly over Jonah’s shoulders. He took the dark shirt by the collar, spreading it open over the broad chest and then lowering it down, pulling it off Jonah’s wrists and tossing it onto the bed behind them.

Rick opened his eyes, his gaze meeting the dark eyes in the mirror. They drifted over his reflection slowly, lazily with open, carnal delight. Rick felt an unexpected warmth flood his body at the undisguised desire. He found it a welcome balm against his injured feelings of self worth.

He pulled Jonah back even tighter against him, grinding his erection into Jonah’s back as he stared at the picture they made, the two of them together in the mirror. Rick’s hair was tousled, his breathing ragged, his eyes wide and dark with desire.

He lifted one hand to Jonah’s throat, gently but firmly holding the other man still and feeling his pulse under his fingers. The other hand he splayed out against Jonah’s belly, feeling the hard muscle and the slow inhalations from deep within.

Rick knew the physical mechanics involved in the process of breathing. The way oxygen from the air, once inhaled, would diffuse into the red blood cells to oxygenate the tissues and organs of the body. The way carbon dioxide and other toxins were expelled from the lungs and body when a breath was released. He’d spent his life studying it, quantifying it.

Now he felt it.

Now he became one with it.

They each looked at their mirror image in silence, unmoving. Feeling the sync as their inhalations and exhalations met and matched, becoming one breath shared between the two of them. Finally, Rick moved his hands to the bottom of Jonah's T-shirt and lifted it over his head, exposing the warm skin beneath.

Jonah had been passive to this point, letting Rick's confidence grow as he explored. But now he swiftly turned, easily pushing Rick off balance and down onto the bed while Jonah straddled him. Jonah rubbed against Rick, letting Rick feel how hard the simple touches had left him.

"Everyone has a dream, a desire so deep that sometimes they can't even share it with themselves. Let me be yours tonight. Please?"

It was the final word that was Rick's undoing, uttered so softly he almost didn't hear it. Whatever else drove this man, Rick couldn't doubt his sincerity, his desire for him. Not with it pressed up against him so tightly, throbbing between them.

Jonah could see Rick's unspoken acceptance in his blue eyes, the pupils huge and dark with lust, and he let his fingers tighten on Rick's shoulders as he leaned close. He paused, his lips a breath's distance away from Rick.

Rick wasn't sure if Jonah was giving him time to protest or just time to drown in the sensual wave that the other man had become. He looked up into Jonah's eyes, unable to do anything else other than plead with him soundlessly, his lips parted. Rick groaned his need.

Finally, Jonah covered Rick's mouth with his own. His lips were firm and gentle, seeking and receiving permission to continue. It was Jonah's turn to moan, the sound vibrating in the back of his throat as he pressed down even harder against Rick's willing body.

Rick gasped as the kiss changed. No longer the seeker, Jonah became the conqueror. He delved deeply into Rick's mouth, tasting the sweetness that was Rick as it mixed with the sourness of the beer.

Rick let his tongue wrap gently around Jonah's, sucking and teasing as he tried to move against the bulk of Jonah's weight. Jonah responded by pressing him even harder against the bed, using his tongue to simulate the sex act until the kiss itself became an act of penetration.

Fucking perfect.

JONAH was breathing heavily as he pulled back up, supporting himself with one arm by Rick's head while he traced the outline of Rick's lips. "I knew they'd look like this," he whispered, slowly inserting his finger into Rick's mouth and pulling it out.

The implied innuendo was obvious, and Rick groaned again as he sucked on Jonah's finger before biting down. He knew he was being needy and greedy and it felt good.

"You have way too many clothes on," Jonah breathed again, and Rick smiled up at him.

"Let me up," Rick panted as he eagerly sat up and fumbled with the buttons of his shirt. Jonah reached over to help, tracing a path down the muscles of Rick's arms before letting his fingers travel over Rick's stomach to the waistband of his pants and pressing the heel of his hand against the hard bulge between Rick's thighs.

"You're one hell of a man, Doc." Jonah gave Rick another one of the drugging, soul-stealing kisses and Rick dropped back against the bed like a stone.

"Oh, man."

Jonah just winked before his head moved downward, breath hot on Rick's flesh as he licked Rick's navel with a pointed tongue. When he pulled the zipper of Rick's pants down, the sound was unbearably loud in the quiet room. Rick lay there waiting.

Hoping.

He wasn't disappointed. Jonah wasted no time pulling Rick's pants and boxers off and then gave Rick's cock a lick from base to tip that had Rick stuttering even before Jonah wrapped his lips around the hard length and swallowed him whole.

"Please..." Rick vibrated beneath Jonah, his breath hitching as his hips thrust helplessly upward. Rick reached down and grabbed hold of Jonah's hair, using it as leverage as he tried not to mindlessly force himself into Jonah's mouth.

Jonah opened his throat, letting Rick set the pace and loving the way Rick responded so effortlessly to every swirl of his tongue or suction of his mouth. There wasn't any hesitation, no holding back. Nothing except the intensity that threatened to overwhelm them both just like Jonah had imagined. It was easy to use his shoulders to push Rick's legs wider apart, one hand rolling the delicate skin of Rick's balls, loving the moans Rick gave in response.

He looked up into Rick's face, silently waiting until Rick's eyes opened and dazedly watched while Jonah raised his hand to Rick's mouth once again. Rick moaned again and then wrapped his lips around Jonah's extended fingers making sure to get them good and wet. Rick knew what was next and *God*, did he want it.

Jonah continued to work his mouth over Rick's cock, imitating Rick's actions before he removed his fingers and reached down between Rick's legs. The doc's hips were jerking, but it was easy to find the small whorl of puckered skin. Jonah tapped at it briefly, teasing and taunting until Rick whimpered and pushed back at his hand.

Rick knew he was whimpering, but right then he didn't give a good goddamn. Jonah's mouth was hot and wet and so willing to let Rick abuse it anyway he could. There was a calloused finger at his body's entrance and as Rick thrust back against the pressure, Jonah inserted it almost roughly inside him.

"Fuck... God..." Rick's hips moved upward now in an attempt to evade the touch, thrusting himself deeper down Jonah's throat in the process. His skin felt hot and swollen, the thickness of the finger inside him almost a shock.

As Rick gasped, Jonah inserted another large finger deep within him, insistently pushing past the tight ring. They both trembled. Jonah let Rick's cock slip from his mouth and covered Rick's belly with urgent kisses. He muttered, deep guttural sounds Rick couldn't make out, but ones that vibrated within him just the same. Jonah's teeth nipped at Rick's hip as he moved his long fingers carefully inside him.

"Good... oh man... that's good! Lube's in the nightstand." Rick groaned again as his head tossed from side to side. Jonah raised his head to watch, greedily soaking up his responses, learning what pleased him. Ignoring Rick's pulsing and leaking cock, Jonah leaned forward to capture Rick's mouth once again before he grabbed at the drawer one-handed and fumbled for the lube.

Jonah flipped the top and it poured messily out over his hand still shoved between Rick's legs. Hell, some of it had to make it where he wanted it to go. He found Rick's mouth again, so damn sweet, so damn addictive and began to move his tongue in unison with his fingers, thrusting in and out of Rick's body. He trembled, the tension visible in the corded muscle of his arms and in his own lower body.

"Please," Rick begged again, twisting his body up against Jonah. "At least, take off your pants before I come, I want to see you." His voice was hoarse, unrecognizable to his own ears. With an abrupt nod, Jonah stood, slowly removing his fingers from Rick's body before his hands made quick work of the removal of his pants.

"I've got to fuck you, right now," Jonah said in a low, rough voice, unable to play this out any longer. He knew he should spend more time with Rick, lavish more attention on him and all the parts of that gorgeous body he hadn't touched yet, but *God*, that would have to be later, not now. He fumbled briefly as he took the condom from his jean pocket and rolled it on quickly.

Rick watched with wide eyes, wanting.

Waiting.

“So fucking good,” Jonah growled as he pulled Rick’s yielding body down to the end of the bed. With one hand under Rick’s ass, one firm, rounded cheek held firmly in his grasp, Jonah lined up and positioned himself at the hidden entrance to Rick’s body. With a groan, Jonah shoved his hips forward and thrust the thick tip past the initial tightness.

Rick gasped at the sensations that filled him. *Damn* but Jonah was so hot, felt so large. Rick’s body resisted the intrusion and his thighs attempted to close and refuse him passage. Jonah grunted and released Rick’s ass, grabbing hold of his legs and draping them over his arms. His grip was tight and forceful and Rick knew the strength of his fingers would leave marks. Jonah spread Rick’s thighs wide, leaving him open and exposed to his rough demands.

It was madness, sheer utter and sweet madness that Jonah felt overtake him at the first hot and tight touch of that inner flesh. With a guttural sound, he flexed his hips and thrust further into Rick’s body. “All of me,” he demanded hoarsely. “Take all of me.”

He pushed further into Rick, slowly, inexorably. He could feel the intimate clasp of Rick’s body as the doc struggled to relax and accept him. In this position, Rick couldn’t even begin to control the depth or force of Jonah’s thrusts. He could only lie there and accept him, as Jonah wanted, as Rick needed.

Jonah was so large, so hot. Rick writhed helplessly up against him, looking for friction, for pressure. It felt like he was being branded. With a gasp, Rick’s hips undulated slightly upward. Jonah slid deeper within him, and Rick could feel his excitement rising at his lack of control. His inner muscles relaxed and with a swift stroke, Jonah pressed inside of him.

Jonah stopped, feeling himself pulsing inside Rick. He took a deep breath and waited another moment, letting Rick’s body adjust to him even more before he loosed the need inside him. Gripping both of Rick’s thighs, Jonah spread his legs even wider. He moved them up by his shoulders and thrust into him again and again. Grunting, groaning, needing. He could hear Rick’s broken,

husky moaning beneath him and it made him thrust even harder into the yielding flesh.

“Right there... damn!”

Jonah opened his eyes and looked down at Rick. His swollen mouth moved as he moaned yet again. His eyes were shut and his head tossed from side to side. Releasing one thigh, Jonah reached up and fisted his hand in Rick’s thick, dark hair.

“Open your eyes.” Jonah wasn’t sure if he was demanding or pleading. “Look at me. I want to see you.”

Helplessly, without his control, Rick’s blue eyes opened and he watched Jonah’s face, unable to tear his eyes away. Rick could feel him, and with each thrust, Jonah seemed to grow larger and harder. Rick could hear himself now, hear each whispering plea for more as the thrusts increased in speed and depth.

Jonah twisted down and took Rick’s right nipple in his mouth. He could feel his teeth almost meet as he bit down slowly, tasting and testing Rick’s limits. He rubbed his cheek over the distended nipple and suckled some more.

“Fuck... fuck...” Rick’s pleas became incoherent, he could feel the wave of tension start to break over him as Jonah continued to pound his body, but still, Rick couldn’t look away. Jonah twisted slightly, pushing into Rick from a different angle, and Rick cried out with a wordless scream, his hips straining upward as he shot waves of pulsing heat between them.

Jonah threw his head back, feeling Rick’s ass as it clenched down on him. It all became too much, too good, too everything and Jonah came as well, grunting with each final jerking thrust into Rick before he carefully pulled out and collapsed beside him.

“DAMNATION.” Jonah groaned when he was finally able to talk. To breathe. He lay there panting, the condom slipping off as he softened, and he couldn’t make an single effort to do anything but look over at Rick sprawled out senseless on the bed beside him and push back a sweat-soaked tendril of hair that clung to Rick’s red, swollen lips.

Just like he thought they'd look.

Fucking beautiful.

Rick's eyes were closed, but those swollen lips moved in a slow, seductive smile that made Jonas groan as he felt his cock twitch with wishful interest. "No," Rick whispered, still able to feel Jonah inside him. "Salvation."

"I'm sorry." Jonah tried to apologize for his lack of finesse even as he remembered the feel and taste of Rick's body. "Foreplay is usually a concept I can understand. But you were so damn hot I just couldn't help myself."

Jonah watched as Rick's arm covered his eyes and his chest quivered. *Oh shit.* He thought glumly. *I was too rough.* Sometimes when he lost control, that happened, but that was the last thing he'd wanted to do with Rick. He'd wanted to make this something Rick would remember with pleasure not something...

It was the snort that finally gave Rick away. The suppressed laughter that he couldn't hold back any longer. Jonah watched in disbelief as Rick lay there, laughing out loud until tears practically ran from his eyes.

"You asshole." Somehow Jonah found the strength to lean up on one elbow. He poked Rick in the ribs with a steely finger. "You total and utter asshole!"

"You think foreplay is a concept?" Rick laughed even harder at the look on Jonah's face, rolling onto his side away from Jonah and letting his body curl up with his simple pleasure in the moment before Jonah dug those fingers into his side and began to tickle him in earnest.

"God, no!" Rick gasped, wriggling in his efforts to get away from Jonah. "No fair!"

Jonah released him for a second and pulled the condom off his now-limp cock, tossing it into the waste bin beside the bed, hiding his own laughter from Rick. He didn't know what had upset Rick so badly earlier in the evening, but Jonah was happy he could help the doc enjoy himself like this. He'd finally gotten to

see that smile he wanted. “And here I thought you were a nice guy, worthy of my best behavior.”

Rick couldn’t make himself stop laughing. “Best fuck of my life and you’re apologizing,” he managed to gasp out as he laughed even harder.

“Asshole,” Jonah muttered again even as he pulled Rick close and couldn’t help himself from kissing those red, chafed lips one more time. Something about the doc just made him ache inside. Rick’s mouth opened in instant and passionate response, letting Jonah silence the laughter, but he was unable to keep his stomach muscles from convulsing.

Jonah slid his tongue back into his mouth, letting his teeth bite gently down on Rick’s lower lip and hearing the catch in Rick’s breathing as he finally refocused his attention on Jonah. “Best, huh?” Jonah murmured as he moved his nibbling teeth over to Rick’s ear.

“Absolute fucking best,” Rick agreed, arching up as Jonah found that sensitive spot on the side of his neck. “Does this mean I’ll get my tie back?”

“I told you, Doc. That’s my souvenir.” Jonah’s lips had found the jut of Rick’s collarbone and he sucked deeply, watching the pale skin bloom with color.

“I see.” Rick’s voice was becoming labored with each graze of Jonah’s teeth. “What are the odds then that you’ll show me this concept of yours in greater detail?”

Jonah ran his tongue over Rick’s hardening nipple and grinned. “Odds are looking pretty damn good, Doc.”

Chrissy Munder

The joke in Chrissy Munder's family is that she was born with a book in her hand. Even now, you'll never find her without a book or seven scattered about. Forced to become a practicing realist in an effort to combat her tendency to dream, her many years of travel and a diverse assortment of careers have taken her across most of the U.S. and shown her that there are two things you can never have enough of: love and laughter.

Visit Chrissy's Blog at <http://chrissymunder.livejournal.com/>

A Thorough Workout

Alix Bekins

MARC wanted to fuck him.

Which was great, because he wanted Marc to fuck him. The problem was that Marc seemed interested, but wasn't doing anything about it and Ryan was getting annoyed.

"Fuck. Me. Fuck. Me. Fuck. Me," he chanted under his breath, in rhythm to his pushups. "What are you waiting for?"

Whatever was causing Marc's hesitation, tonight was it; this was the last night Ryan was hanging around the gym until after everyone had left but Marc. It was now or never. Tonight he was pulling out all the stops, was saying goodbye to subtle flirting, and was just going to hit on Marc, plain and straightforward.

And if that didn't work, he was going out to a club to pick up a random bloke, go home, and make the guy fuck the stuffing out of him until he forgot all about Marc. No use fretting over what you can't have, even if it is almost two meters of solid muscle, barely restrained energy, and the most wickedly sexy eyes on the planet. And that mouth...

"Don't even get started on the mouth," Ryan told himself sternly, "because then you'll move on to other body parts like that ass and those *thighs*..." He took a moment to swallow the drool gathering in his mouth. "Focus. Doing pushups is no place to get an erection. Bad form when your cock hits the mat before your chest."

So anyway. Tonight was the night. Ryan was going to get laid or die trying.

Marc was on the treadmill, jogging with headphones on, which was good because he hadn't heard Ryan mumbling to himself. Since verbal seduction wasn't a possibility, Ryan had decided to stay within Marc's line of sight and tempt him into action that way.

So far it seemed to be working; the occasional flickers of Marc's eyes had been promising and the hungry look he'd given Ryan when he'd slowly pulled off his tank top prior to hitting the mat for pushups had been very rewarding. Marc had even let out a bit of a groan, barely audible over the sound of the treadmill, as his eyes lingered on Ryan's lean, damp skin.

Oh yeah; Marc wanted him for sure. Ryan just had to get him to make a move. Maybe it was time for something more interactive, since Marc was finishing up his run. He usually moved to the bench press next, but tonight Ryan was going to beat him to it.

By the time Marc had towed off a bit, Ryan was sitting on the weight bench, drinking from his bottle of water.

Marc gave him an inquiring look.

Ryan smiled charmingly. "Thought I'd risk getting a bit bulky and actually use some heavy weights for a change. Mind spotting me?" It was all he could do not to flutter his eyes and giggle like a girl.

Marc nodded. "Sure. You're going to lift all that?" he asked, gesturing at the loaded barbell.

"I can handle it," Ryan said.

"All right then. Ready?"

"Always," he winked. Ryan stretched out on his back along the bench, feeling the vinyl stick to the sweat on his back and Marc's eyes on the rivulets trailing down his chest. He wrapped his hands around the bar and Marc took a hold of the center as Ryan straightened his arms, lifting the weight from the rack. Marc moved closer, both hands guiding, just in case.

As Ryan bent and straightened his arms, Marc counted, sounding a bit more breathless than was usual after his run. At

“Five... Six...” he shuffled even closer, and Ryan glanced up at him. His arms weakened for a moment as what he saw registered in his brain; Marc was practically about to straddle the bench right above Ryan’s head. His glance had taken in tense thighs, dark blue shorts, and a totally obvious bulge. More than was typical. Deliciously more.

Ryan’s mouth watered.

“Ten... Eleven... Aren’t you going to rest between sets?”

Marc’s voice made Ryan blink and refocus his eyes higher up, on the face above. Marc had a vaguely strained look about him, very flushed but trying to smile as he chided Ryan for overdoing it.

Perfect, Ryan thought. “One more,” he grunted, and at twelve they put the weight back on the rack. Ryan sat up, watching Marc, who looked flustered. Ryan picked up his water bottle and shirt and took a drink. He patted off his face and chest. Marc clearly had no idea how he was staring: like a parched man in a desert, looking at a mirage, unable to believe.

Ryan stifled a grin. If Marc could resist this, he was calling it quits and heading to a club Craig had recommended. He went for the kill.

The hand holding his sweat-damp shirt drifted down Ryan’s throat and chest, to rest in his lap, drawing Marc’s gaze down. Slowly, Ryan lifted the water bottle, letting his eyes drift almost shut. Holding the bottle away from his mouth, he squeezed, squirting some water into his open mouth and letting the rest wash down his throat and chest. “Hot,” he moaned, drawing his tongue over his lips in a slow, lascivious motion. “So hot.” He lifted the water bottle higher and poured most of the contents onto his head, letting it drip down his sizzling skin.

Marc was frozen in place, watching. His hands were clenched, face pink, and tongue licking his own mouth as if the air itself tasted of Ryan. He whimpered.

But he still wasn’t moving.

Damn it, Ryan thought. I give up. Almost.

“Marc,” he said out loud.

Marc blinked and refocused his eyes on Ryan’s face, looking like a trapped rabbit. He cleared his throat. “Um. Yeah?”

“Are you going to fuck me?” Ryan asked.

There was a long pause as he watched the words slowly sink in. And then without answering, without even seeing Marc move, Ryan was pinned flat on his back on top of the bench as Marc’s tongue lapped up the water from his jaw, throat, and collarbones.

“Fucking finally,” Ryan groaned, hands tangling into Marc’s hair to redirect him upwards. Their mouths crashed together as Marc pushed his body more on top of Ryan’s. One hand wormed its way under Ryan’s shoulder blades while the other slid from his knee, which had wrapped around Marc’s hip, down to Ryan’s thigh, and then cupped his ass to pull their groins closer. Their bodies strained together, shoving against each other and the bench, eager for more contact.

Finally Ryan wrenched his mouth free to gasp, “Clothes. Off. Now.”

Panting, Marc nodded and stepped back, pulling off his shirt, while Ryan shrugged off his shorts, not bothering with his trainers. He turned over and spread himself across the weight bench, moaning as he ground his erection into the padded surface. Marc made a noise between a whimper and a groan as he lunged forward.

“Wait,” Ryan stopped him, pointing across the gym. “Get my bag.”

Marc raised an eyebrow.

Ryan smiled sweetly. “I’ve got condoms and lube in it. I wasn’t letting you get away this time.”

Marc grinned and Ryan could see some of the nervousness drain from him. He fetched the bag, handing it to Ryan, who quickly fished the necessities out, gave them to Marc, and rolled back over.

Fuck, he could just imagine how he must look; naked, on the bench, ass spread open, with his white socks and shoes still on. He arched his back and ground into the vinyl. “Touch me,” he said, half begging, half commanding.

Marc obediently slicked up his hand and grabbed Ryan’s ass, tracing the crease with his thumb, gently stroking across the opening. After a moment, he eased one thumb inside and wiggled it around. Ryan groaned, pushing back eagerly. Marc responded by sliding both thumbs in and stretching.

The weight bench creaked under Ryan’s death grip. “Now Marc. Stick it in *now*.”

Still silent, Marc pulled his hands away and Ryan tensed for a moment until he heard the familiar crinkle of plastic wrapper and then felt the most delicious pressure as Marc slid inside.

Marc’s cock was thick and filling and full and “Fuck, yes” spilled out of Ryan’s mouth with a groan. “Finally!”

Marc started at a relatively fast pace, his strong hands alternating between stroking Ryan’s back and drifting down to hold onto his hips. Pretty soon he was bent over Ryan with his hands clenching the weight bench and thrusting for all he was worth.

Ryan was in heaven. This was the fucking he’d wanted – *craved* – from Marc for as long as he could remember. It was hot and sticky and raw and needy and urgent and just this side of out of control and it was absolutely fucking *perfect*.

He managed to let go of his grip on the bench, push himself up enough to get his hand around his cock, and start stroking himself hard and fast. He could tell Marc was close as the thrusts got harder and lost rhythm, going for the home stretch. His climax built for an endless moment, and then Ryan’s whole body jerked convulsively. Every muscle clenched taut for a long moment. He yelled impossible obscenities and came all over his hand, his chest, and the blue vinyl bench, as the fiercest orgasm he could recall tore through his body.

Bones turned into pudding, Ryan collapsed onto the now very sticky bench as Marc gave a few last hard thrusts and came

with an animalistic howl. His hips gradually slowed and stopped, the last shivers of sensation ebbing as he slumped down.

Ryan made a vaguely pained noise, feeling squashed.

After a moment, Marc took a deep breath and slowly pulled out. He moved away, then carefully turned Ryan over and pulled him down onto the mat on the floor. They held eye contact for a moment, both with the same satiated smiles, before Marc ducked his head and licked Ryan's stomach clean.

"Mmm... That was brilliant," he murmured as Marc finished, tugging him back up to lie next to him.

Marc nodded.

"Knew it would be... What were you waiting for?" he asked.

Marc was silent for so long that Ryan wondered if he'd dozed off. Quietly, Marc answered, "My only other time with a guy was a pretty bad experience, when I was just a kid. Never thought I'd want to give it another go..." He sighed, and then chuckled. "But fuck, Ryan, who could resist you? Once you've set your mind on someone, that's the end of it; I've never been so thoroughly seduced before."

"Well, it's good thing I did, right? You seemed pretty clueless," Ryan laughed. "But are you always so silent when you fuck? I like your sexy voice," he said, wiggling and pressing his reawakening erection into Marc's firm thigh to make it clear that he wasn't even close to finished for the evening.

Marc rolled over and kissed him quickly, before pulling back with a grin, "I think you just rendered me speechless, sweetheart. Let's go back to my place and see if I can do the same to you."

Alix Bekins

Alix lives in the coastal mountains of Northern California with her partner and their dog. She's been writing for as long as she can remember in a variety of genres, including fiction, erotica, poetry, and nonfiction and has even managed to get some of it published from time to time.

Sexuality is the cornerstone of her life and work and always has been, through two degrees and several life plans. Her work and writing focus on the themes of self-discovery and coming out, with a healthy dose of kink on the side.

Alix is pretty sure she's the only person in the world who wears a plastic Viking helmet as a thinking cap when she battles Writer's Block. She always wins.

Visit Alix's blog at http://alix_bekins.livejournal.com/

Know When to Spread 'em

catt Ford

“HEY, Jay, how’s it hanging?” Bill asked, smiling mockingly at me as if he knew just how low they *were* hanging.

How the fuck did HR tap into the central casting department of my horniest dreams to hire men for this fucking company? It wasn’t fair. Where were the paunchy, balding guys I saw on the subway every day, wearing their pants and ties too short and their belts too tight? I wouldn’t have had a bit of trouble concentrating around coworkers like that.

Instead, the three guys I worked most closely with could all get a job starring in fuck films if the advertising business went bust. In fact, they didn’t know it, but they already worked overtime starring in the private porn of my busy fantasy life.

Bill stood there in my doorway, grinning at me, his shoulders straining at the seams of his shirt. “What’re you doing for lunch?”

“Busy,” I said tersely, scowling at my monitor, resolutely keeping my gaze off his crotch.

“How about a drink after work?” he suggested, although not in the way I would have liked him to mean it.

“Got a date, sorry.”

“Okay then, see you in the meeting later.”

He left. Finally. I got up and shut the door. I didn’t exactly advertise that I was gay at work, but you would think he would

have caught on by now, seeing as I never brought a date to company functions.

I sat down and contemplated my schedule. I had just gotten out of one intensely boring meeting, had a few hours open for lunch, and then was doomed to another intensely boring meeting that would eat up most of the afternoon.

My boss liked to hear himself talk. Not that he ever said anything worth hearing, but he paid me to listen, so the least I could do was show up ready and willing.

The problem was that I was so fucking horny I knew I'd never be able to focus. I really did have a date tonight, with a guy that I'd already fucked once. He had proven to be fun enough that when he called, I agreed to meet him again for 'drinks'.

But I was horny *now*. I could go to the men's room and jack off. Or I could hop online, scan Manhunt, and see if I could score a lunchtime fuck date.

Okay, Manhunt wins, hands down. Or maybe Craigslist. I wasn't in the mood to put up my own ad, which meant I had to sort through a million others (maybe I'm overstating it just a bit) with blurry snapshots of pimply asses and anonymous dicks. Hungry bottoms, total tops, cocksuckers, bi-guys, daddies looking for sons, sons looking for generous daddies, boring as fuck all.

Where was the no strings attached lunch hookup of my dreams?

I could say I'm 'versatile' but I don't spread my cheeks for just anyone. I'm pretty much a top even though I've traveled to the bottom on occasion. And I like to think I can find something sexy about just about any man, although why this one guy put a shot of his flabby, hairy butt online for the world to see, I'll never know.

I back-clicked off his ad immediately.

I'm a cockslut, I admit it, but I'm also a pretty nice guy. I eat right, don't smoke and work out every day except Sunday because I usually need to sleep in after a wild weekend. And I try to make all of them wild. So I guess you could say I'm a little jaded. For some reason, I was looking for something different; I

knew what I was getting tonight on my date, so I wanted a thrill, something... different for lunch.

Being in advertising, I've learned to appreciate good photography. Being gay and in constant need of dick, I've also learned not to expect good photography on internet hookup sites.

So when I clicked on his ad, I was intrigued and pleasantly surprised. The keywords were: DL hook up, 38, muscles.

I'm a pretty slim guy, in good shape (see my workout schedule above), 'trim' you might say with no love handles and my ass is round and high. But what I love most is fucking a muscle man. And a muscle man on the down low, well, I couldn't believe my luck. I figured once I clicked into the ad, it would say something about total top or looking to get sucked off, no recip.

Instead, it said; *Married guy, likes to walk on the guy side every now and then. Body builder. NSA lunch hookup, let's see what develops.* Okay, first off he's straight, or virtually straight. There's something so hot about fucking a married straight guy, especially one with muscles. NSA, no strings attached, I'm good there; I don't need endless phone calls or someone to send me flowers.

But what got to me was the photo he posted. If it was really him, and not scanned from a magazine, I had just won the jackpot and gone to heaven.

It was professionally lit and photographed, maybe for his work. It showed very little of his face because he was looking down at his awesomely bunched bicep. The lighting was dramatic and he'd been sprayed down, so his skin was shiny, with droplets of sweat (okay, glycerin, it's a photography trick) rolling down his hard arm. His cheekbones were scary they were so chiseled, and his lips were sensuous and full.

There was a tat on his flexed arm, one of those calligraphic oriental letters that everyone says means something uplifting like, future happiness or spiritual awakening, but could just as easily say, *'my sister walks like a duck'*.

But whatever. Swoon.

Muscles, tattoos and married. My cock was nudging at my zipper, trying to break out. I told it to quiet down, we hadn't bagged this one yet.

I typed in an answer and searched on my laptop for a photo of me, in boxer briefs. It didn't show my face, just from my left nipple down to my hipbone. The way I was turned, you could see the outline of my erection shadowed under the dark purple fabric, the tip almost popping out the waistband.

In under a minute, he'd answered my reply and given me his location, saying he was at work and couldn't leave, but it was cool for him to host.

That was kind of puzzling; what kind of straight guy arranges a lunch hook up at work with a horny gay guy and expects to keep it on the down low? However, that was his problem, mine was getting him bent over and willing.

I did ask if he wanted to see a face shot of me, but he said no, surprise me.

I donned my jacket, shut down my laptop and caught the elevator downstairs. I was lucky, I caught a cab right in front of the building. It was totally worth the fare to have the extra time with this guy. I couldn't wait.

The cab dumped me out in front of a large, exclusive gym on the upper east side. Okay, must be where he works. I went inside, wondering just how I was going to locate him, seeing as he hadn't given me a name or directions.

And this place was exclusive; if you didn't have a membership or one of those tryout vouchers, you had to prove your citizenship just to speak to the girl at the front desk, I'd heard all about it from one of my friends.

But all my worry went for nothing, because he was standing behind the front desk, flirting with the receptionist, who, if I had been straight, I would have been all over her. She was cute.

I recognized him by his tattoo. He flexed his arm, making the symbol jump. I gasped as he glanced up and I got my first full look at his face. He was fucking gorgeous, black hair, green eyes,

full lips, straight perfect nose, and those little dents bodybuilders get on either side of their mouth when they're down to fucking 3% body fat.

My mouth dropped open but no words came out. Instead I sort of squeaked. He smiled at me in that superior I'm-so-gorgeous-everyone-wants-me way that truly beautiful people have when they know how hot they are.

"Sorry, Julie, gotta go, my next appointment is here," Beautiful Muscle Dude said.

The blonde girl gave me a condescending smirk. "See you later, Steve," she said throatily.

This Adonis couldn't be called Steve, it was too common for him, I thought as I followed him. He was wearing silk shorts and I could see his awesome gluteus maximus bunch lusciously as he walked. I jammed my hands into my pockets. If he were on the DL, he wouldn't want to walk through the gym with a man gnawing on his ass hungrily.

He led the way through a forest of machines, opening the door to a massage room. It was dimly lit, and smelled a little of incense, massage oil and manly sweat. Perfect.

I wondered if I should rip off my clothes first or his.

He smiled at me and locked the door. "You can make all the noise you want, but don't say anything like, '*My God, I've never seen one so huge*.' I'm not sure I could explain that away."

I promised God that I would believe in him and floss every morning and night if this stud turned out to be hung too, that would be too good to be true. Did I have a fairy godmother pulling strings for me today?

"I want to fuck you," I said hoarsely.

"You sweet talker, you. And they say romance is dead," he smirked. "Get your clothes off. You can hang them on the hooks." He pointed at the back of the door and turned on some sensitive new age music before crossing his massive arms and leaning against the wall to watch me.

I stripped hurriedly, reveling in his attention. He watched me closely and he seemed to like what he saw, judging by the bulge distending his shorts. I was glad that I'd put in the extra ab work. I might not be in this guy's weight class but I was firm, lean and toned, enough not to be embarrassed about being naked in front of him.

He reached out and trailed a finger down my iliac furrow and I shivered. My cock was hard, aching to be buried inside him. I wanted him bent over his massage table, where I could watch the muscles in his shoulders flex and dance while I pounded his ass.

"Your turn. Strip!" I ordered.

He pulled his T-shirt over his head, and shoved his shorts down to his ankles, stepping out of them casually, as if he did that with everyone he gave a massage to. Maybe he did for all I knew. His giant snake jumped out, rock solid and standing up against his stomach. I licked my lips. I would have liked to lick his cock instead. Can you say cockzilla? He left his socks and sneakers on. I liked that, it seemed to accentuate his nakedness. That and his wedding ring.

"I don't usually let guys fuck me, but you sounded kind of hot," he said, eyeing my cock eagerly.

Even though I was crazy horny, I didn't want to just bend him over the table and stick my cock up his ass. I like kissing, and I'm curious about people. Did he like his nipples played with hard or soft? What would he sound like when he moaned? Would he suck my tongue into his mouth when I kissed him?

I stepped closer, reaching for his nipples, pinching them softly between my finger and thumb. We were pretty well matched in height, so I kissed him, closed mouth at first, but he opened his lips, sucking my tongue in softly, wetly. Our tongues tumbled over each other, playfully wrestling back and forth in our mouths.

I rubbed my thumbs over his nipples, feeling a ripple shudder through his cut abs. It turned out to be a deep moan working its way out and then his hands were on my ass, cupping my cheeks, rubbing them with strong fingers that bit into the muscle.

It was my turn to groan appreciatively, so I did. He liked it.

Our cocks were rubbing together. There's something so masculine about that, two guys with hard cocks trapped between their bellies, feeling skin on skin, with nothing between them. I kept rubbing and pinching his nipples until he let my mouth go.

"Turn around," I ordered. He did and gave me another surprise.

His ass was breathtaking, stellar. Big round muscular globes, hairless and smooth, his skin perfect. But what really got to me was another tattoo, a Chinese dragon whose wings stretched over the top of his ass cheeks, low enough that it wouldn't show, even in bikini briefs. The tail curled sinuously into the cleft between his cheeks, as if pointing the way to the gates of gay heaven.

I moaned with sheer lust and he chuckled. He flexed his cheeks, making the wings flutter as if the dragon was about to take off and fly. I spread his buttocks apart. The tail curled around his asshole, as if it were a target.

Which it was, for me, not that I needed the extra help finding it.

"That must have hurt like a sonuvabitch," I observed respectfully.

"What's a little pain? It was worth it, wasn't it?" he said, a little muffled.

"Oh, fuck yeah." I bent and bit each cheek gently, nipping at them hungrily.

He put his hands on the table and bent forward at the waist, sticking his ass out toward me. You might not get this but for a skinny guy like me, it's a total turn on to see a muscular stud like that, every line of his body expressing a submissive desire to get fucked, waiting for me to have at him.

I bent over him, rubbing my dick between his legs, nudging at his balls. I sniffed his armpits. The clean masculine scent of fresh sweat turned me on and I licked at the silky hair. If I'd had

more time, I might have eaten his pits out, but right now I wanted to munch on his ass.

I slid off him and kept my hand pressed on the middle of his back. He gasped and kind of reared up when he felt my tongue tickling his crack. “What –? Holy fuck,” he moaned, as I slid my tongue in the crease and found his hole.

He was clean and fresh, as if he’d showered and soaped for me, just a hint of his natural scent under the fragrance of soap.

I licked and slobbered and savored every inch of that beautiful valley while he moaned and squirmed for me. When I pointed my tongue and stabbed at his hole, he almost broke my nose rearing back at me he was so aroused. If I’d wanted to, I could have stood up and shoved my cock in without lube and he would have taken it.

But I never do it without a condom, and I’m not really into hurting people so I stood up panting, saliva dripping from my chin, and asked, “Supplies?”

He pushed himself up from his position as I wiped at my mouth. His arms were fucking hot, so hard, with tough sinew moving under his smooth, tanned skin.

“I want to return the favor first,” he murmured, and kissed me. A straight guy, kissing me after I’d had my tongue up his ass. I bet you can imagine how hot that made me. I could have come right there and then.

But first, there was his offer. I love sucking cock, getting and giving it. I love fucking. I even love being fucked, by the right man at the right moment. But there is nothing that rocks my world like getting my ass eaten. My knees melted when he said he wanted to tongue me.

“Where do you want me?”

“Lean on the table,” he said, bending me over his massage table. Luckily it didn’t have wheels. That would be important later, you better believe it.

I bent over obediently, resting my chest on the table. He kicked my feet apart, his hands spreading my cheeks. I shivered

when I felt his hot breath waft over my hole. I'm sure it was clenching visibly as I was almost crazy with anticipation.

And then at last, I felt his tongue, wet and velvety soft against my hole... it's the most amazing feeling, so hot. The feeling of his tongue probing my ass made me hard as a spike, and I started moaning, my hands gripping the sides of his table as I fought to stay on my feet.

My brain turned off because I needed all the blood to run things down below. I hoped I wouldn't simply slide to the floor in a puddle.

His hands slid over my body and the sure, confident way he handled me melted me as much as the sensation of his tongue licking my pucker. He didn't let up until I was a whimpering, writhing mess. He stood up, but held me down with one hand planted on my waist, while two fingers invaded me, conquering my resolve to be the one to do the fucking that day.

"What do you think you're doing?" I asked weakly, even while I spread my legs farther apart to give his fingers better access. They were thick and beefy, and hitting all the right places inside.

"I'm going to fuck you," he announced. His voice was calm, but he was breathing a little heavy.

"I came here to fuck *you*," I protested, even while I arched my back, lifting my ass to him like a cat in heat.

"Maybe next time," he said.

The fingers pulled out, leaving me feeling empty. I could feel his dick, rubbing up and down in my crack, teasing my hole.

"You'd better be wearing a fucking condom, or I swear, I'll rip your fucking cock off," I threatened.

"Spoken like a top," he said, sounding amused. He grabbed my hand, moving it back so I could feel the latex covering his awesomely tumescent rod.

"Remember that," I warned, and lost the ability to speak further when I felt the blunt heat of his cockhead nudging at my

hole. I whimpered and wriggled, hoping I'd be able to take all of him. He felt huge in my hand and my memory of how big he looked scared me a little. I reached back and spread my cheeks apart, giving him a target he couldn't miss.

I tried to relax my muscles, but even so, it fucking hurt when he pushed inside my ring. I was gasping and thrashing, but I wanted it so fucking bad. His hands tightened on my hips, preventing me from hurling myself backward in an attempt to swallow him whole.

"Take it easy there, boy, I'll give it all to you but I'm doing this my way," he said.

It gave me the shivers to hear the dominant note in his voice and double for him calling me boy. I didn't get into this kind of game too often, but his cock was too awesome to pass up. I was so frigging horny by now, I was desperate for him to start fucking me properly.

"Yes. sir," I said meekly enough. It's not like I could move, he had a grip of iron. I knew I'd be looking at ten bruises on my hips later on.

He seemed to like it that I called him *sir*. My channel was burning and so far he only had the head in. He smacked my ass, which took my mind off the rock hard pole pressing inside me. "You like being my bitch, don't you, boy?" he asked, still in that teasing voice that showed he wasn't taking this too seriously.

"Shove it in. Fuck me," I ordered, rather peremptorily for a man gasping for breath with a red hot poker shoved up his ass.

"Take it like a fucking man," he said, but despite his rough words, he worked his cock inside me gently, inch by inch.

And let me tell you, every inch made me quiver with joy, especially when he rubbed over my sweet spot. Some guys are just long enough to hit it, some guys are thin enough that they have to angle to rub over it, but this guy, man, he was so long and hard, every move sent tingles through my ass. I'd never felt anything like it.

The burn melted into absolute pleasure. I couldn't remember when I'd felt so full and he *knew* how to fuck. Every sensation of his balls smacking against mine as he slammed into me, the way my hole clung to his cock when he pulled out, the dirty words he kept whispering in my ear, the sound of his panting, it was hot as hell.

I almost came a couple of times, and he seemed determined to fuck the cum out of me, but I tightened up to prevent it. Sometimes that feeling right before you come is almost better than an actual orgasm. The anticipation is so fucking hot.

I could tell he was close when he started to lose his rhythm, his thrusts shortened up and he was jabbing me as he huffed and puffed away. I could feel drops of his sweat fall on my back and run down my spine.

Finally, I felt his teeth sink into the side of my neck, like he was holding me still. His chest was sliding over my back and he thrust hard inside me. Even through the condom, I could feel the hot spurt of his cum before he collapsed over me, breathing hard.

I could feel him shrink up within me. Even that I find erotic, to know that I made a guy so horny he emptied his load into my body. And besides, I'm fascinated by dick, in all its stages. He slipped out of me wetly and I pushed at him.

Sighing, he stood upright. He had that dazed, freshly fucked look that I really like to see on a man's face. I grinned as his gaze dropped to my dick. I'm not too badly equipped in that department myself and I liked the look of awe.

"Oh fuck," he said softly, as if he knew he was in trouble now.

"My idea exactly," I said with an evil grin. I swiveled my hips, watching my erection sway from side to side in front of me. It was sticking straight up and dripping with precum. "Bend over. My turn."

He actually whimpered when I bent him over the table. He'd fucked me so hard the table had moved, but like I said, at least it didn't have wheels, or we might have sailed out the door and into the gym, giving everyone an eyeful. Not like that

wouldn't be hot, I'd love to have the patrons watch me fuck this guy.

He grunted as my slick fingers found his hole. I wasn't rough, but I didn't start out with one finger either. I figured this guy wanted to be fucked and I wanted him to feel me afterwards, so I slid two fingers inside him.

The rim of his ass gripped my fingers eagerly as I twisted them inside him. He felt so smooth, like satin, and blazing hot inside.

"Who's the bitch now, bitch?" I asked triumphantly as his knuckles whitened while he gripped the table.

"I'm the bitch, sir," he said, playing along just as well as I had moments earlier.

"Remember that," I instructed. I pulled my fingers out to unwrap a condom and cover my dick. When I was gloved up, I spread his cheeks again, looking at that dragon's tail wrapped around his opening. His frantic clenching was making the tail wiggle enticingly, calling me to him.

I aimed my cock at his hole and pushed a little. He pushed back and the head popped in. He froze, gripping the table and I waited till he loosened up a little around me. "Okay?"

"Yeah, fuck me," he grunted.

That was all the reassurance I needed. I fed my cock into his hungry hole in one long thrust, knowing it would burn. He gasped and I spanked his ass, to pay him back for the slaps he'd given to me. His skin turned a pleasing shade of pink as I alternated between both cheeks.

His channel was clenching around me with each smack. I quit, because I didn't know how much more I could take before I came, and I didn't want him to just milk me, I wanted to give him a ride.

I pulled out all the way, watching his hole flex hungrily, before I plunged back into the depths.

"Holy fuck, do that again!" he begged.

I pulled out and breached him again and again. Every time I entered him, he gasped and lunged back at me, until I was buried to the root inside him. The pressure coiled in my belly, reaching for my balls. They were full and tight, and that little tickle started at the base of my cock.

“Give it to me,” he pleaded. “Hard and fast...”

Okay, I can do that.

I grabbed his hips, determined to leave the same finger marks on him, pleased to think about his wife seeing them and asking about them. And then I wasn't thinking at all, just thrusting hard into him, looking down at the awesome muscles of his back jumping and trembling as I pounded him.

Each time I thrust into him, the table scooted with the power of my lunge, and his ass jiggled, making the dragon jump for joy. The sight mesmerized me; I stared down at him, my gaze flicking from his back muscles to his ass, until my climax hit me.

I came so hard my vision went black. The smooth, soft inner sanctum of him seemed to suck my pleasure from me. I wished I could prolong the intensity of that orgasm. Ecstasy cascaded throughout my body, as if all the pleasure of him fucking me was stored up and lying in wait for me. I thrust until I couldn't move any more, stretching up onto my tiptoes as I rammed inside him one last time, planting my seed as deep as I could, in the condom.

Gradually I remembered how to breathe again.

“Holy fuck,” he commented faintly.

“Yeah.” I grinned, even though he couldn't see me. I didn't want to pull out of that tight, warm place, so I bent over and kissed the back of his neck, lipping at the skin.

“You're the best fuck I've ever had,” he said.

“You're not so bad yourself, big boy,” I said almost flirtatiously. “I'd say we do this again sometime, but...”

“No strings,” he supplied. “Better not.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. I didn’t want a relationship and a married dude? No way. No matter how muscular or hot.

I slapped his ass one last time and pulled out. He sighed and stayed bent over for a moment, flexing his hole before he stood up. “Sorry, I know I wasn’t supposed to fuck you, but licking your ass was so hot,” he apologized.

I shrugged. “It was great. Don’t worry about it.”

He went shakily to another door and opened it to reveal a small bathroom, complete with shower. “You can clean up in there if you want.”

Grabbing onto this one last opportunity, I dragged him into the shower with me, so I could explore that awesome powerful body with soapy hands. We were both too spent to get it up again, but it was very pleasurable to slide against his muscular chest. I circled him to get one last glimpse of that dragon disappearing between his cheeks, following the tail with a finger just to hear him moan. I cupped his buttocks in my hands, squeezing the swell of the globes, thinking about how he gave dangerous when wet a whole new meaning.

We made the shower quick, and I was back at work in time for my boring afternoon meeting, although I knew I wouldn’t hear a word. I’d be thinking about that flying dragon, guarding Steve’s hole, knowing I was one of the few who made it past the portal.

I needed to go to the men’s room before my meeting. My lunch date had been so hot, I was hard again just reliving the whole hot scene. This was going to fuel a few jackoff sessions to come. If I was going to make it through my dull meeting, I had to rub one out first. I know, I know, I came when I fucked him, and now again.

I fingered my used hole as I jacked off, relishing the lingering soreness. His cock had been huge and I could still feel it jammed up inside me, but it had been one great fuck. One for the books, if I were keeping score.

Don’t worry about my date, though, I had enough left to take care of him too.

But one thing was for damn sure; tonight *I* was the one who was going to be doing all the fucking.

Catt Ford

Catt Ford lives in front of the computer monitor, in another world where her imaginary gay friends obey her every command.

She likes cats, chocolate, swing dancing, sleeping, Monty Python, Aussie friends, being silly, spinning other realities with words, and sea glass.

She dislikes caterpillars, cigarette smoke and rude people who think the F-word (as in faggot, or bundle of sticks) is acceptable.

A frustrated perfectionist, she comforts herself with the legend about the weavers of Persian rugs always including one mistake so as not to anger the gods, although she has no need to include a mistake on purpose. One always slips through. Writing fiction has filled a need for clever conversations, only possible when one is in control of both sides, and erotic romances, where everything turns out happily ever after, for the most part.

Visit Catt's Blog at <http://catlover2x.livejournal.com/>

The Proposition

Rhianne Aile &
Madeleine Urban

EYES dark and shimmering in the low light of the bar, Marcus watched the slim younger man at the bar, drinking with two others, likely friends out on a pull. The older man had seen him there before, several times, and Marcus had studied him at length before making his decision. So tonight, he waited patiently for the other two men to leave the bar so he could approach the object of his thoughts.

Gerard drained the last of his drink before following Benjamin and Denny toward the door to head home for the night. The bar had been absolutely dead tonight. About an hour ago, Ben, rebuffed by yet another potential conquest, had turned his charm on Denny. Denny hadn't stood a chance against Ben's baby blues. Telling them to take the car, Gerard planned on grabbing a cab. He hadn't been laid in a month and watching the two of them all over each other all the way home wouldn't have done a thing for his libido.

Watching his target finish his drink and head his way, Marcus decided to speak up now since he didn't seem to be leaving paired with anyone. "Leaving early tonight?" Marcus commented from his lazy sprawl in the leather armchair, a cigarette between his fingers, just as the other man passed by.

Gerard jumped slightly at the husky voice. Turning, his eyes hit black leather boots, traveling up long legs encased in black denim. Slender fingers surrounded a glass of amber liquid, balanced enticingly next to an impressive ridge. The soft cotton of a well-worn T-shirt stretched over a broad chest that was framed

by a dark jacket. When his eyes finally reached a face, the man was smirking at him, green eyes glowing smugly. They both knew that Gerard had been surveying his body, and the man obviously was confident that he wouldn't be found lacking. Gerard smiled, tilting his head provocatively. "Didn't find anything to hold my attention," he parried.

The corner of Marcus's mouth lifted in amusement, and he lifted his glass as if to say *touché*. "Guess you hadn't seen me then?" he drawled, confident. "Let me buy you a drink," he said in a charming, warm voice. He enjoyed looking over the other man's body now, dressed in tight blue jeans and a loose shirt, artfully half unbuttoned and sleeves turned up. Lovely.

"You aren't easy to spot, skulking in the shadows. Should I be worried that you waited for my friends to leave before saying anything to me? It makes me think you have less than honorable intentions." The tilted smile added a playful tone to Gerard's words.

Marcus's smile grew larger as he caught the teasing hint in the man's voice. "Had to make sure you wouldn't be attached to one of them by the hip, didn't I?" he said logically, flagging down the waitress. "Sit and have a drink with me," he said again, persuasively.

Gerard shrugged, spinning his leather jacket off his shoulder and onto the back of the nearest chair. He lowered himself to the seat, consciously mirroring the older man's pose. "I'm guessing by now they are attached in another location." Turning to Brittany as she approached with an empty tray and her usual flirtatious attitude, he smiled brilliantly. "My usual, darlin'."

"On my tab," Marcus added, and the waitress nodded, heading off to the bar. "Why either of them would choose someone other than you is beyond me," he said right away, stating his opinion of the man now facing him.

Gerard laughed. "I wouldn't sleep with either one of them, the dogs. I'm a little more discriminating in my taste of bed partners. Thank you for the drink. My name is Gerard, by the way." He would have extended his hand as courtesy required, but he was hesitant to touch the dynamic blond just yet. The man did

strange things to his equilibrium, and he suspected that physical contact would make it worse.

Nodding in acknowledgement, Marcus lifted his drink. "M' name is Marcus, Marcus Steele. And I have a proposition for you," he said, eyes glittering in the smoky light as he looked over the younger man.

Gerard raised one perfectly arched eyebrow. "Oh?"

Marcus's smile tipped up a bit further, and he waited as Brittany approached with their drinks. After she left, he exchanged his glass of ice for the fresh drink, leaning back in his chair. "I want you to come home with me for the weekend. I'll make it worth your while."

Gerard weighed the words, not quite liking the feel of them. He sat his drink untouched on the small round table and started to stand. "I think maybe you've made a mistake. I'm not a professional." God, this night had gone from bad to worse... nothing like getting your hopes up before really being slapped in the face.

"I don't believe anything of the kind. And I'm not talking about money, Gerard. Please, hear me out," Marcus said quietly, leaning forward just a bit, not wanting to appear at all threatening.

Hesitating, Gerard dropped back to the chair, perching on the edge, back straight. Something in Marcus's eyes came across as sincere or he'd have been out the door, but he was only willing to bend so far. "You are on borrowed time."

Marcus nodded his understanding. "For reasons I won't go into, I am throwing a large weekend party for a group of out-of-town business guests. It is expected that I have a companion at this party, and I'd like you to stand in. No strings, no expectations, and you can name whatever you would desire in recompense for your time."

Gerard thought about the offer silently for several breaths. He had nothing better to do at the moment. He had just finished a fairly successful showing of his sculpture, and his agent wasn't pressuring him for more work as he completed a large series of

sales. “Would I have to lie, pose as your long-term lover, or could I be myself?”

“I want you to be yourself. Young, refreshing and full of life,” Marcus insisted. “They won’t be able to resist your charm.”

“That’s quite a character assessment for someone you’ve known all of fifteen minutes. I’m not sure why, but I’m tempted to trust you. I’ll put it to the light-of-day test, and if you pass, the answer is yes. Do I have to tell you what I want up front or can I think about it?”

Marcus relaxed slightly, setting his drink on the table. “Feel free to take all the time you want. To decide what you want, I mean.” He slid his hand in his pocket and pulled out an embossed business card. “Take this. When you make up your mind tomorrow, give me a ring.”

“I’ll save the quarters. Meet me for breakfast at nine. You know the deli on Third and Amsterdam?” Gerard waited for Marcus’s affirmative nod. “If you look as good over a cup of coffee as you do over a glass of scotch, you’ve got a deal.” Standing, he shrugged into his jacket, the leather falling perfectly over his shoulders. Reaching down, he dragged his thumb over Marcus’s bottom lip. “Night, lover.”

Gerard didn’t look back, though he could feel Marcus’s green eyes following him every step to the door. The night wasn’t ending quite as well as he had hoped when the older man had called out to him, but it was considerably better than the way it had been shaping up. He was still faced with an empty flat, an empty bed and his hand, but at least now he had a face for his fantasies.

GERARD strode into the deli dressed casually in jeans faded pale white at the knees and across his thighs and ass. A white T-shirt stretched enticingly over his muscular chest under the familiar leather jacket. A matching leather bag was slung over one shoulder. “You’re early,” he greeted, dumping the bag on the chair opposite Marcus and taking the seat to his right. He waved at the young waitress behind the counter, letting her know with a smile and a nod that he’d have his usual.

With a tilt of his head, Marcus offered a quiet greeting before sipping his espresso. "I've been up and going for a few hours now," he said, leaning back comfortably in the chair, studying the younger man who was, impossibly, more appealing now than he had been last night. "So," he said, a grin creasing his face, "Am I an ogre by the light of day?"

"Hardly, and well you know it, I'd guess," Gerard taunted back. A few days with this man wasn't going to be boring, that was for sure. "So where exactly is 'home'?" he asked, reaching for the cream and sugar.

"Manhattan," Marcus replied easily.

"So we're staying in the city?" Gerard pursed his lips. The answered surprised him. "I had you pegged for the 'sprawling estate on the Cape' type."

Marcus chuckled, his red-blond hair catching the light. "Aren't you perceptive? I have a home at Hyannis Port as well. But no, this party is here in the city."

Gerard blew over the cup of heavily altered coffee, running his tongue along the edge to capture a sweet dollop of foam. "Glad to know I haven't completely lost my touch. I threw a few basics in a bag, but if we need formal, it'll have to be part of my compensation."

"Shopping isn't a problem," Marcus said smoothly. "I can have a car take you wherever you wish."

"Oh no... Shopping is much more fun with a partner." Gerard's eyes darkened seductively. "Even better with a lover. If I need formal or anything of a special nature, you're coming with me."

The older man's eyes sparkled. "If that's what you want. Your company will be worth it." His eyes glinted when he was amused.

Gerard leaned close, brushing nonexistent wrinkles from Marcus's silk sweater, feeling the hard muscles beneath the smooth knit. "I promise." He paused meaningfully. "You'll have fun."

Marcus's lips twitched. He inhaled, catching a snatch of the dark-haired man's scent: warm, clean flesh, creamy-smelling soap, a whiff of spice... He let his eyes rove over Gerard again. Marcus hoped the other man meant that fun literally. "So you accept my proposition?"

"We're staying in the city? I can keep my cell phone?" Gerard paused after each question for Marcus's answering nod. "Then I accept."

THE limo came to a stop outside Bergdorf Goodman, and Marcus good-naturedly laid his cell phone aside as he watched Gerard's reaction to his choice of stores.

Gerard smiled brightly at Marcus's decision, but didn't react further than that. If the man had been hoping to impress him, he was going to have to do better than Bergdorf's. Gerard had cut his teeth of Bergdorf's, Saks and Tiffany's. When he wasn't with his mother, he didn't get greeted at the door by a manager with a glass of champagne, but he knew his way around. He got out of the car, sliding easily across the black leather seat, turning back to offer his hand to Marcus. "Shall we?"

Chuckling, Marcus saw that he had better stop anticipating reactions from the handsome, intriguing man. He scooted across the seat and climbed out at his side, ready to face the store. Something in Gerard's confidence told him the other man would have no problems finding what he wanted.

"So what do I need to prepare for?" Gerard asked, sweeping through the rotating door.

Marcus glanced around, one hand slung casually in his trouser pocket. "Friday night will be a small cocktail party. Saturday a late breakfast, business in the conference room with a light lunch. I would like you to join us to eat," he added. "Then that night, a formal dinner, followed by entertainment. Sunday will be quieter, and brunch will be served."

"So Friday night – casual elegant. I'm guessing you'd prefer me in slacks and shirts on Saturday even during the day. Will Saturday night be black tie or can I get away with a suit?"

Gerard flipped through a rack of linen slacks as he questioned Marcus.

“Black tie,” Marcus answered, watching the other man rifle confidently through the designer clothing. A small smile took his face. He knew he had chosen well.

“Hmmm... I’ll send your driver to my studio for my tux then. There isn’t enough time to have anything tailored, and I can’t stand off-the-rack tuxedos.” Gerard stepped back, looking Marcus up and down, lingering suggestively over certain areas of his anatomy. “You strike me as the elegant cut in classic neutrals type. Am I right? I wouldn’t want to pick out anything that would make us clash when standing together.”

The older man’s smile grew as he nodded. “Very astute,” he complimented.

Gerard leaned close, letting his arms slip casually around Marcus’s waist and nuzzling slightly behind his ear. “It’s important because I intend to stand very close.”

Marcus indulgently allowed Gerard to tease him. He chuckled. “It will do wonderful things for my image,” he replied.

“That’s the point, yeah,” Gerard said, starting to load Marcus’s arms with garments. The pile grew as they meandered their way through racks and stacks of trousers, shirts and sweaters. When Gerard felt he had enough to choose from, he grabbed Marcus’s shoulders and maneuvered him towards the dressing room. Truthfully, Gerard knew exactly what sizes and designers looked best on him, but he was anxious to put himself on ‘display’ for Marcus.

The older man followed Gerard around, content, for now, to serve as pack mule. Although he hoped to be rewarded by seeing some of these clothes on that gorgeous body. When Gerard wasn’t looking, Marcus ran his eyes over the long legs and seriously sweet ass.

Seating Marcus in a comfortable chair next to the raised platform and three-way mirror, Gerard disappeared into an adjacent dressing room. Quickly donning a pair of black linen trousers and a cream silk shirt, he strolled out side, spinning in

front of Marcus, hands slid casually in well-tailored pockets. “Well?” he asked, turning to give the other man a good view of his ass. The shirt was so fine that it was almost translucent. His dark nipples were clearly visible through the ecru fabric.

Raising a brow as he enjoyed the show, Marcus lit a cigarette and breathed in deeply before replying. “Very flattering,” he said, meaning both toward himself and Gerard.

“Dressy enough for Friday night?” Gerard noted with satisfaction that Marcus’s eyes followed his fingers as they slipped in and out between the buttons on his shirt.

“Quite appropriate, as well you know,” Marcus answered, rolling the cigarette between his fingers before holding it between his lips. A shop girl appeared silently with an ashtray and disappeared just as quickly.

“With the right shoes and belt, it’ll do,” Gerard announced, beginning to unfasten the pants as he walked past Marcus to the dressing room. He appeared next with the values reversed. A light pair of slacks in a heavier material and an Egyptian cotton shirt the color of Swiss chocolate. “Saturday?”

Marcus eyed the shirt critically. “I like the color, it matches your eyes. But the cut doesn’t hang well. It looks heavy.”

Gerard raised an eyebrow. Marcus obviously wanted him ‘on display’ for his guests, which he supposed was partially the role of the partner, to distract the guests with their physical and mental charms. “I’ve got a similar color in silk. Will that work better?”

Nodding, Marcus tapped ashes into the crystal tray at his elbow. “You know you’re beautiful,” he said mildly. “So show yourself off to your best advantage.”

“And yours, too, I imagine. Exactly how distracting would you like me to be?” Gerard asked, leaning up against the wall within easy touching distance of Marcus.

The older man’s lips pulled slowly into a full-blown, sexy smirk.

Gerard's fingers danced around the buttons of the shirt. "Wouldn't want me to appear too uptight." A quick tug popped the top button. "Is this low enough? No," the younger man answered his own question, slipping the next button free. Marcus's eyes glittered in appreciation as the shirt revealed the handsome man's chest, even a hint of brown nipple if he shifted one way or the other. Freeing all of the buttons, Gerard pulled the tails free from his pants. He'd have to remove the shirt to change anyway, and it was more fun to do it where he could watch the expression on Marcus's face. Smoothing a hand over his chest, he asked, "Do you like my chest?"

The smirk yanked into a smile. "Very handsome," Marcus commented before placing the cigarette back between his lips.

Gerard's eyebrow rose out of habit. So Marcus wasn't going to be bated that easily. He smiled mysteriously, spinning and disappearing back into the cubicle. When he returned he was redressed in his own clothes and had three outfits over his arm. He headed towards the register, confident that Marcus would follow. "Greta, I thought you didn't like working days," he greeted the saleswoman. "Pick out the accessories I need for these and have them sent to..." Gerard paused for Marcus to fill in the address. "Thanks, love," he leaned over the counter, pressing a kiss to the young woman's cheek, making her blush. He waited patiently while Marcus gave Greta his gold card and slipped his arm through the other man's as they walked away. "Now back in the car, I think it's time you took me home."

Content to let Gerard have his way, Marcus gave directions to the driver. Stealing another look at him, Marcus decided he had made the perfect choice for the weekend... and perhaps even beyond. Perhaps. He picked up his PDA and started checking his messages.

GERARD ran his fingers through his glistening locks, glancing in the gilded mirror one last time before knocking on the connecting door between his room and Marcus's.

Hearing the knock from where he stood in the bathroom shaving, Marcus called out for the person to enter. It would either be Gerard or his housekeeper, who was arranging the party plans.

Gerard opened the door, surprised to see the sumptuous bedroom empty. He looked around for Marcus. The room was the mirror image of his, decorated along elegant Scandinavian lines. Walking past the focal point of the room, he stroked a hand across the black silk bedding, catching a glimpse of his host in the mirrored wall of the bathroom. Marcus was only partially dressed. Custom-tailored pants hung from slender hips, the muscles of his back and shoulders flexing as he shaved. "I figured you'd be the one waiting for me to get ready," he teased, sitting on the corner of the bed.

Marcus smiled as he pulled the razor over his cheek, glancing to the other man as he tapped the razor in the sink and stuck it under the running water. "Probably true, if I hadn't kept answering my phone," he admitted, pausing and taking a moment to look out at Gerard, eyes skimming up and down the lithe figure.

Getting to his feet, Gerard walked over to stand directly behind the blond. "So am I going to have to seize your phone to have your undivided attention?" His hands slipped into the deep pockets of Marcus's pants, not surprised or disappointed when he found them empty. Curling his hands, he stroked the hard muscle of Marcus's thighs, brushing dangerously near the older man's cock without actually touching it.

Pausing in mid-stroke, Marcus looked dryly at Gerard, then down at his trousers. "I can truthfully say you have my undivided attention," he replied as he reacted physically to Gerard's proximity.

Gerard propped his chin on Marcus's shoulder. "Just as it should be." His hand slid sideways, using the silk lining of Marcus pocket to stroke the hardening length. "Want me to do something about this before we go downstairs? A hard-on this big really ruins the lines of a good pair of trousers."

Marcus raised an eyebrow as he finished his shave and washed off the razor under the running water. "Is that a rhetorical

question? Or just a compliment?" he asked as he wet a washcloth to wipe away the remaining foam.

Throwing a towel down on the tile floor, Gerard slid to his knees, using his hands to turn Marcus to face him. Nuzzling the hard shaft through Marcus's pants, he grazed the head with his teeth, careful not to wet the fabric too much. "Both," he answered, looking up through a dark fringe of lashes, desire pooling in his eyes.

Tossing down the washcloth, Marcus leaned back against the sink. "Far be it for me to flaunt the rules of fashion," he said, the look on his face one of pure want.

"Just give up talking now, lover. I wouldn't want you to bite your tongue," Gerard teased as he opened Marcus's pants. Damn, but the man was hung. "This is going to feel fuckin' awesome buried in my ass," he mused out loud, stroking the hard length. "You do top, don't you?"

The older man chuckled. "I think I'm up for it," he answered, sliding his fingers of one hand into Gerard's hair. "You said something about giving up talking?" he questioned pointedly as his fully erect cock bounced against the other man's cheek.

Gerard licked his lips for effect, swirling his tongue around the rim of Marcus's cock. "You taste good," he murmured, pursing his lips and swallowing around the hard length. He knew they didn't have much time, so he pulled out every trick he knew, alternating between deep throating the long shaft and teasing the head with his fluttering tongue.

Shuddering, Marcus let his head fall back as he pushed slightly into that sinful mouth, his hand gripping the back of Gerard's head. As enthusiastic as the younger man was, it didn't take long. "Coming..." Marcus groaned as he felt his balls draw up tight.

Gerard relaxed, allowing the older man to fuck his mouth to get just the right pace to find his climax. With gentle suction, he suckled the sensitive shaft clean, only teasing the spots that made Marcus hiss once... or twice. He glanced up impishly as his teeth barely grazed the soft head, tucking Marcus in carefully and re-

zipping the expensive trousers. Patting the sated cock, he stepped back to examine Marcus's crotch. "There. Much better," he pronounced, pleased.

Marcus rolled his eyes and sighed deeply, shaking his head and smiling at Gerard's teasing. "Anything in the name of fashion," he murmured.

LOOKING across the room of people, Marcus studied his "companion" with amused eyes. Gerard was obviously comfortable in high society surrounds, and he mingled effortlessly with Marcus's business contacts as well as other guests, some minor celebrities and more. As the younger man moved, Marcus shook his head slightly, unable to believe how much sensual appeal Gerard radiated. The other guests noticed as well. A curl of jealousy formed in Marcus's gut, but he tried to ignore it. They were, after all, practically strangers, despite the blow job. Not that anyone here could tell that. He turned his attention back to his discussion.

Gerard worked the room. He'd been trained well at his mother's skirts. He was surprised at the number of people in attendance. He'd expected a smaller, more intimate group, but it didn't matter. Flatter, listen, keep eye contact. He could do it in his sleep. The only new part of the equation was the compulsion he felt to keep track of Marcus: where he was, who he was talking to, and how to plan a track around the room that would make their paths cross.

Marcus accepted another compliment upon the elegance of his high-rise condo and the entertainment provided in the form of a string quartet on the balcony. Nodding his agreement, he noted the caterer standing at the door, ready to ring for dinner. "If you're ready," he said in a raised voice, "I believe dinner is prepared." He paused at the door, eyes sweeping the room for Gerard. Marcus wanted the man to sit next to him so he could subtly claim him in front of the assembled.

Hearing the subtle chimes indicating that it was time to be seated, Gerard moved gracefully to Marcus's side. Appearing from

behind, he felt the blond tense as he took his arm. Not sure if it was surprise or uneasiness with the intimate gesture, Gerard whispered, "Do you want me beside you or should I strategically place myself to help keep the dinner conversation going?"

Watching one of his business guests eye Gerard appraisingly, Marcus settled his free hand over Gerard's as they walked in to the dining room. "Sit with me," he stated, rather than inviting. Once again, he stamped down on the flare of jealousy. It simply wasn't appropriate in this temporary liaison between strangers.

Gerard felt a warm glow spread up his arm from where Marcus's hand covered his. Impulsively, he leaned his head over on his companion's shoulder for a brief moment. It was easy to see himself standing by Marcus as a co-host of many more events like this, but knew he was jumping way out of line. Marcus had asked him to join him for a weekend, not his life. "So which of these people are key to your success this weekend, so I know where to concentrate my efforts?"

Marcus glanced about the table as they walked through the room to the head of the table. "The three older men on your right, and the two women across from them. They're the management of the company I'm dealing with," he said, stopping to pull out Gerard's chair gallantly with a smile for appearances.

Resisting the urge to look up at the handsome man and flutter his eyelashes, Gerard scanned the faces at the head table. Three of the people Marcus pointed out he'd already spoken with. Feeling the magnetic draw as the elegant man slid into the chair by his side, he couldn't resist placing his hand on the strong thigh, safely hidden by the heavy linen tablecloth. Turning his chin to look at Gerard evenly, Marcus held the other man's eyes for some time.

Dinner went smoothly. The woman to Gerard's left had just returned from a trip to central Africa, and she kept them entertained with stories about the children she had met at the orphanage she was helping to rebuild. Well, her money was helping to rebuild, Gerard corrected mentally. Ashley Corbin-Narcett wouldn't know the business end of a hammer if it hit her in

the head. The dinner plates were discreetly whisked away and a bowl of cherries jubilee was placed in front of Gerard. He licked his lips absently. Oh, the things he could do with a bowl of this and Marcus... He glanced to his side, dark brown eyes colliding with green.

Marcus caught himself watching Gerard several times during dinner, more than satisfied with how well the younger man was charming his guests. He wasn't sure he could have chosen better. He'd gotten away with stealing looks several times, but this time he met rich chocolate-colored depths, and he was caught. Marcus could feel his pulse pick up.

Gerard raised one eyebrow and silently mouthed, "Cherries?"

Frowning slightly, Marcus nodded. "Want something different?" he asked quietly, ready to gesture to a server.

Laughing, Gerard shook his head, leaning close and whispering for Marcus's ears only. "Neither one of us qualifies as 'cherry', darling, but oh, the things I can think of to do with them." The slow smirk that grew on Marcus's face garnered a few comments from nearby guests, and the older man just raised an eyebrow at them, looking smug.

Gerard lifted a spoonful of brandied cherries to his mouth, licking the sticky red sauce from his lips, his eyes never leaving Marcus's. Lifting the edge of the delicate crepe, he suppressed a grin. "Oh, look. Cream filling." Eyes wide and innocent, he asked, "How long before dinner is over?"

Marcus chuckled, setting down his spoon and pulling the napkin from his lap to stand. "Afters in the lounge for anyone who is interested," he announced. "Music as well. Please enjoy yourselves this evening." He looked down to Gerard expectantly.

"I take it we aren't interested?" Gerard asked conspiratorially, standing and taking Marcus's arm. "Think we could run through the kitchen and snag an extra dessert?"

Turning deliberately to settle his hands at Gerard's waist, Marcus murmured, "Whatever you desire." He was aware that

several sets of eyes were on them, some appreciative, others jealous.

Gerard wanted desperately to kiss Marcus, but settled for nuzzling the hollow of his neck. "I want you. The cherries would just be a bonus."

Sliding one hand up Gerard's back to his neck, Marcus slid his fingers into the shining black hair that brushed Gerard's shoulders, lightly gripping his skull. "Don't mind putting on a show, do you?" he asked.

"They're your people, not mine. You could throw me across the table and fuck me, for all I care. Actually, I think it might even improve your chances with a couple of them." The young man held completely still, waiting for a cue from Marcus.

With a suddenly feral grin, Marcus pulled Gerard to him and claimed his mouth roughly, his tongue plunging between soft, red lips to search out the elusive, sweet cherry taste turned tangy with brandy. Gerard melted against him, arms winding around his neck. The kiss eventually slowed to a soft nibbling at each other's lips. Most of the guests had moved on to the lounge, but Gerard could feel several pairs of eyes on them as they kissed, and he suddenly felt possessive. He didn't want to share even that much of his lover, even if he couldn't claim him past this weekend.

Finally lifting his head, Marcus discovered he had gathered Gerard into his arms and pulled him close. "I could become addicted to that taste," he whispered.

Eyes unfocused and knees weak, Gerard kept his arms wrapped around the stable strength of the older man. "The cherries or me?"

"Oh, definitely you," Marcus purred, his hands sliding down the other man's back to grip his backside.

GERARD skipped up the stairs to the upper level of the condo, a bowl of cherries in his hand. He'd get the cream from Marcus. The older man's instructions had been very specific: Go to the room, get undressed, wait for me on the bed, and I'll make you

writhe. Gerard grinned. Deciding to take the older man up on his proposition had been a very, very good idea.

After ensuring his guests were more than entertained, Marcus slipped up the stairs, anticipating what would be waiting. He'd been hard since dessert, and now he was practically throbbing as he reached his bedroom door. Gerard would comment on the hang of his pants, he was sure. Licking his lips, Marcus opened the door.

Gerard looked up as the door cracked open. With the side trip to the kitchen, he'd had to carelessly strip and toss his clothes in a corner, not his usual ritual. Finding the lube and condoms he'd packed in his bag, he left them in easy reach, arranging himself alluringly on the top of the bed. Covers were for sleeping, not fucking. He smiled as Marcus strolled across the room towards him. "You seem to be having a problem with the drape of your trousers again, darling. You might need to consider a new tailor," he smirked, propping his head on his hand.

Stopping at the foot of the bed, Marcus raised an eyebrow, letting his gaze drag over the lithe body artfully arranged on his bed. "I guess you'll have to stick around to help me with that, won't you?" he drawled, starting to unbutton his shirt. Gerard was truly gorgeous, and the older man's cock was so hard he felt like it would split the seams of said trousers.

"You've got me until Sunday night. I've got to meet with a gallery manager at eight Monday morning." Gerard greedily eyed every inch of skin as it was revealed. When Marcus's hands got to his trousers, letting the weight of the belt drop them to the floor, he moaned softly, "Of course, it may take every minute until then."

Smiling lazily, Marcus stepped out of his trousers and crawled onto the bed, deliberately rubbing his hard on against Gerard's hip. "You said earlier this would feel fuckin' incredible in your ass," he rasped. "I'm not so sure I want to bother with cherries. How about we skip straight to cream..."

Gerard rolled away from the muscular body playfully. "Uh... uh... uh... I want my cherries *and* my cream," he drawled, pushing Marcus flat on the bed and licking at the rose-colored nipples buried in the soft red-tinted golden hair.

The older man groaned, his cock jumping as Gerard took control. “Whatever, baby, just don’t leave me like this,” he rasped, sinking his fingers into dark hair and stroking.

“Oh, I don’t intend to,” Gerard hummed, buzzing his lips down the center of Marcus’s chest to the soft trail of hair disappearing under the band of his boxers. Shifting so that he was kneeling between Marcus’s legs, he nuzzled the obvious bulge, rubbing his cheeks against the soft silk of the older man’s boxers. “Nothing but the best for you,” he commented, licking at the dark, wet spot spreading on the silk and sucking at the head underneath through the cloth.

Marcus’s eyes rolled back as he moaned long and deep, stretching as Gerard rubbed against him, teased him. “I like that idea,” he answered. “I think I must have hit the jackpot with you.”

Gerard chuckled, his voice low and husky, “You have nooo idea.” Sliding his hand through the loose leg opening, he circled the hard shaft, lifting it so he could take more of the length into his mouth, still sucking through the silk, manipulating it with his tongue to increase Marcus’s sensation. “I could make you come like this,” he purred, rubbing his tongue in circles over the blunt tip. “But I’m afraid it would ruin your boxers.”

Enjoying the sinful sensation of wet silk and Gerard’s tongue, Marcus growled quietly while shifting back and forth. “To hell with the damn boxers, I want your mouth,” he said.

“Tsk... tsk... tsk... so impatient. You want my mouth, and I want my cherries.” Gerard swatted at Marcus’s ass playfully to get him to lift his hips so he could remove the boxers. Reaching for the bowl of cherries, he began paint Marcus’s cock with the sweet, red brandy sauce, arranging a row of cherries along the heavy vein up the underside. He licked his fingers clean, complaining when Marcus’s cock jumped and the older man undulated slowly under him as he watched the long, graceful fingers disappear between his pink lips. “Hold still. You are going to ruin my creation,” he chastised.

“Hold still?” Marcus rasped. “You’ve got to be joking.” The older man’s head thudded back onto the soft coverlet. “Christ. I’m a dessert.”

Gerard sat up, admiring his handy work. “Exactly,” he drawled, pleased with himself. Beginning with the lowest cherry, resting nestled on the soft skin of Marcus’s balls, he began to lick and nibble his way to the top of the long shaft, soft noises of appreciation and pleasure rumbling up from his throat as he went. When he reached the last cherry, propped enticingly in the depression just under the cap of Marcus’s cock head, he sucked at it with great relish, licking his lips and sucking Marcus’s cock deep into his throat.

Marcus’s fingers were digging into the fabric beneath him as he struggled not to writhe uncontrollably under Gerard’s mouth. “Please tell me you’re ready for the cream.” His voice was a dark rumble, brimming with anticipation.

“Oh yeah,” Gerard crooned, sucking at the hard cock ravenously.

“Sweet Jesus,” Marcus groaned, his hips thrusting upward to encourage the sucking, and with a sharp inhalation, he shivered and climaxed, and the thick, white seed caught on Gerard’s cherry-sweetened tongue.

Gerard suckled and licked as his lover bucked, squirmed and trembled through a series of extreme aftershocks. Gently laying the clean, sated cock back against Marcus’s belly, he grinned. “Cherries a la crème Marcus could easily become my favorite treat.”

Opening heated eyes, the older man puckered his lips in thought. “I think I want some cherries now,” he purred, reaching for Gerard’s hand to pull him down on the bed.

Lying on his back, one arm thrown seductively over his head, Gerard smiled. “Two desserts are always better than one.”

Smiling, Marcus sat up and reached over the side of the bed to pick up the bowl. Turning back to Gerard, an evil glimmer sparkled in his eyes. “Turn over.”

Gerard’s eyes widened at the predatory look in Marcus’s eyes. So far he’d been the aggressor, at least sexually, in their relationship. This new side to the laid-back businessman was a little bit more than just exciting. Keeping his eyes locked with

Marcus's, he turned over slowly, crossing his arms under his head and watching over his shoulder. "Now what would you like me to do?" he asked.

Smile widening, Marcus stood at the foot of the broad bed. "Scoot up further, to the pillows," he drawled. "And spread your gorgeous legs for me."

Gerard did as he was told, pulling a pillow under his chest and spreading his legs. "This the way you want me?" he asked, his eyes dancing with playful lust.

"Lovely," Marcus murmured, climbing to kneel between his lover's knees. "Hold still, now," he parroted, lifting a finger full of the sticky sauce and sliding it through the exposed crease of the younger man's ass.

Unable to help himself, Gerard squirmed at the touch. "You are going to be a good boy now and finish all your dessert, right?"

Smearing more sauce over the rounded buttocks, Marcus made a sound of assent mixed with hunger. "Oh, baby, I'm going to lick the plate clean." Setting the bowl aside, he leaned over to slide his tongue into the cleft coated with sweet.

Gerard shivered as the blond's rough tongue traveled over his ass. Spreading his legs wider and canting his hips back, he tried to lure the man's tongue closer to where he really could feel it. He moaned wantonly as the tongue ghosted over his opening. He was going to be reduced to begging if Marcus didn't give him what he wanted soon.

Chuckling, Marcus moved away from the core of his tempting treat, laving along the smooth, broad muscles of his rear, cleaning them both thoroughly. All the while, he made deliberate, sensual moans of enjoyment. Every hair on Gerard's body rose as Marcus's tongue continued its torturous exploration. His nipples hardened until they were painfully peaked and sensitive. Closing his eyes, Gerard concentrated on the feel of his lover's tongue, trying to relax. He shifted, and shifted again as his cock complained about being trapped against the bed. With a frustrated gasp, he lifted his hips off the bed and begged, "Fuck... please Marcus..."

“Fuck, you say?” Marcus rasped. “Not just yet.” Then he lowered his head and dragged his tongue slowly into the sensitive crack, sucking the berries he’d placed there into his mouth, even pausing and sucking little patches of skin into his mouth as well.

“I want your tongue, Marcus, please...” Gerard never begged. It was against his principles, but if Marcus didn’t touch him in a more substantial way soon, he was going to explode. It was like his control was nonexistent.

Humming against the heated skin, Marcus continued to lick at the last of the sweetness before giving in and lapping at the spasming hole where he hoped to soon bury his aching cock. But not yet. After a few more licks, he drove his tongue as deep as he could reach into the tight entrance.

Gerard cried out, hands twisting the delicate material of the duvet cover. “Oh fuck,” he panted, rubbing his swollen cock against the luxurious fabric as he pushed back insistently against Marcus’s face. “Oh, oh God, Marcus, so close, make me come. Make me come, and I’ll be your slut for the rest of the weekend. Want me to sit at your knee and suck your cock during the business meeting tomorrow? Anything, just please!” he wailed.

Spurred by Gerard’s words, Marcus pressed as close as he could get, fucking the younger man with his tongue for all he was worth, burying it deep inside him and stroking the sides of the clenching passage. By the tone of his lover’s voice, it wouldn’t take much. And then Marcus would enjoy the results.

The rapid slide of Marcus’s tongue combined with the friction from the silk duvet was driving Gerard crazy. He slipped his hand between his body and the bed, squeezing his balls and massaging the base of his cock. Turning his head in the opposite direction, he caught a glimpse of himself in the large gilded mirror over the bathroom vanity, tan skin against chocolate silk, Marcus’s golden head buried between his legs, his lover’s ass extended invitingly as he leaned over to pleasure him. That was all it took. His climax exploded from deep inside him, covering his fingers and the expensive bedding. Holding himself up and away from the mess, he worked his cock with his hand, whimpering and shaking.

Lifting up to see Gerard getting himself off, Marcus growled and climbed off the bed. He pulled open the bedside table drawer and grabbed a plastic packet and a small bottle, stalking back to the bed. He made short work of the condom, his cock well aroused again, and slicked himself up. He reached forward to slide his hand along Gerard's ass and pressed his thumb into the pucker. "I'm going to fuck you into the mattress," he growled.

Rolling onto his back, Gerard let his legs fall apart in invitation. "Fine with me, but I want to watch in the mirror."

"Look at you," Marcus growled. "Spread out before me, lying in your own come. Such a slut, at least for me." He slid his hand between Gerard's legs and prodded again at the hole hidden there. "Will you let me sink into you, my pretty?" he rasped, pressing a finger past the tight muscle that clenched about his knuckle with a pop. "Sink into you and fuck you 'til you scream for more?" He scooted up against Gerard's propped-up knee, rutting slowly against it, letting the dark-haired man feel how hard he was.

Gerard gasped as Marcus's finger penetrated his body. Opening himself even wider, he planted his feet firmly on the bed and pushed up into the invasion. "Fuck yeah, make me scream."

Marcus quickly added another finger, pushing in and out of the slick hole. He held close to Gerard's leg, still stimulating himself. "How do you want it, baby? What can you take?"

"Anything you can dish out." Gerard held Marcus's steady green gaze. "Unless you're backing out on me," he taunted.

The older man surged forward, lifting Gerard's hips and lining himself up, just barely breaching his body, and then with a passion-filled glance up to dark brown eyes, Marcus thrust forward hard, sinking himself as deep as he could get.

Gerard gasped as Marcus's cock filled his body. "Holy fuck! You're fuckin' huge!" Rocking in small pulses against Marcus, he reached up and stroked the strong chest. "Move for me. Make me scream."

"Hold on tight," Marcus growled, shifting his arms to under Gerard's knees, and he began sliding in firmly and dragging out

slowly, drawing out his pleasure, occasionally thrusting in hard with a grunt and a soft groan upon withdrawing. “You’re like hot satin,” he said. “Hot, wet, silky, grasping satin all wrapped around me.”

Lifting his legs to Marcus’s shoulders, the younger man met every thrust, his cock hard and heavy against his stomach. “You want to watch me touch myself?”

A hungry growl expanded from the older man’s chest. “Yeah, stroke that cock,” Marcus taunted as he settled into a faster, thrusting rhythm that he could easily maintain to keep their bodies bumping solidly. “Let me see you work yourself, show me how you like it.”

Gerard’s head fell to the side watching their reflection in the mirror. His hand splayed across his hip, fingers stroking the smooth skin, tunneling into the dark curls. He pulled at the sensitive skin of his balls, gasping as Marcus hit a particularly sensitive spot. “Oh yeah, right there,” he sighed, hand circling his shaft.

Shifting to accommodate, the older man kept his hips moving, slowly building in impact. The sound of warm, damp flesh slapping echoed in the room. “Is this what you like? What you live for? Someone to fuck you to orgasm after orgasm?” Marcus questioned breathlessly. “You’re made for this,” he hissed as he added a sharp, hard push for good measure. “Made for taking my cock.”

“Perfect fit,” Gerard agreed breathlessly. “Harder! Make me come.” His hand moved faster, fisting his cock, his wrist twisting at the top to sweep over the tip.

“Tell me when I hit the right spot, pretty. Scream for me,” Marcus purred, thrusting harder, searching for just the right angle to drive his new lover wild. “I want to hear it and know it’s all for me.”

Gerard shifted slightly encouraging the position he wanted. With Marcus’s next thrust, he saw stars and found himself pinching the base of his cock to slow down his climax. Marcus felt so fucking good inside him, he wanted it to last. “Oh, God, more

right there – ahhhhhh!” Every strike caused an exclamation that degenerated rapidly into incoherent cries. “Now, Marcus,” he screamed. “So close.”

Marcus’s laughter was low and evil. “C’mon, pretty, thought you wanted to come?” he teased, thrusting mercilessly right at that spot. “I can see you jerk every time I hit your sweet spot. I can see your cock swell. You want to come for me, don’t you? Let me see that cream again, and I’ll lick it up this time.”

Every word out of Marcus’s mouth was like a physical touch. Gerard’s body tensed and started to tremble. “Yes, yes! I’m coming! God, your great big fucking cock is making me come so hard!” He let go of his cock completely, letting Marcus’s almost brutal thrusts push him over the edge. Just like Marcus wanted, he screamed as he came – screamed Marcus’s name. Moaning in appreciation at the vision presented him, Gerard’s head thrown back, his face contorted in climax, shrieking Marcus’s name, it made Marcus feel damn powerful. He kept up his movements through his lover’s orgasm, deliberately extending it, wanting to make his own personal slut absolutely insane. He could feel the beginnings of his own climax prickling in his balls, especially with Gerard clenching around him so tightly, and thrusting into that slick, hot hole was heaven in itself.

Gerard’s body continued to clench and spasm around Marcus’s cock with every slow withdrawal. The continued stimulation was keeping him at a level of hypersensitivity. His cock was still hard and even as he twitched through heavy aftershocks, he could feel another orgasm building. “Oh, God, Marcus, I can’t... no... can’t come again.”

Feeling the building orgasm, Marcus was breathing hard as he sped up his pace, slamming his hips against Gerard’s split legs, his cock burrowing over and over deep into the wet heat. “Oh, you will, baby, you will. Don’t you want some more cream?” he breathed, almost to the edge. “I can pull out and come all over you, if that’s what you want. All over your cock, your chest, your pretty face...”

“Yes! Come on me!” Gerard’s hand moved on his cock again as Marcus pounded into him. An almost painful sound was

torn from his throat as a third deep orgasm racked his body. His cock pulsed in his hand, releasing very little, but tightening his ass around his lover. The telltale squeeze let Marcus know he'd been successful, as if he couldn't tell from the look on Gerard's face. He thrust almost uncontrollably fast into him several more times, then pulled out all at once, ripped off the condom as he knelt up, and pumped his cock hard. A look down at Gerard's tongue lazily extending shot him into orgasm and he came in several spurts, the first landing on Gerard's abdomen, the next his chest, then deliberately splattering the rest on his lover's face as he howled ecstatically the whole time.

Exhausted and sated, Gerard watched as Marcus's cock unloaded on his body, mixing with his own come. He lapped lazily at what spattered across his mouth. "Give me your cock," he rasped, voice hoarse from screaming. Grabbing Marcus's hips, he guided the older man's erection to his lips and suckled the softening length. "You taste almost as good as you fuck," he pronounced once he let the limp cock slip from his mouth. He tugged on Marcus's arm to get him to bend over and kiss him. Replete, the older man willingly lay down next to his lover and gathered him close, meeting his mouth in a slow, languorous kiss as they basked in the afterglow of their passions.

"I think we need a shower," Marcus stated later, finger-painting through the cooled fluid on Gerard's chest.

"Too much effort," his young lover murmured sleepily, turning into the warmth of the blond's body. "Warm rag would feel good."

Chuckling from where he lay propped on one elbow, Gerard's body curling against his, the blond smiled. This relaxed, sleepy man was yet another aspect of the multifaceted Gerard. "You earned it. Be right back." Marcus levered himself off the bed and padded across the room into the bath, flipping on the light. Water ran for a long couple minutes, and then he was back, a washcloth wet and warm in hand. He climbed back onto the bed next to the dozing young man and gently started cleaning him up, a thoughtful look on his face.

Gerard purred his pleasure, his eyes never opening. When Marcus started to rise from the bed, he grasped his lover's thigh. "Don't go. Come sleep," he mumbled drowsily.

Reaching up to peel the coverlet and sheets down, Marcus grinned, tossing the damp rag to the floor. "Now that I've cleaned you up, you don't want to roll back into the wet, do you?" he asked logically. "Let me pull down the sheets."

Gerard grumped and grumbled, but allowed himself to be maneuvered between the crisp sheets and under the fluffy duvet. "Sorry about the mess," he said, curling immediately into Marcus's side and pillowing his head on the broad chest, one leg thrown possessively over his lover's thighs.

"That's what cleaning services are for," Marcus murmured, curling his arms about the smaller man and exhaling slowly, enjoying the closeness. He hadn't expected this. Any of it. Gerard was a mind-blowing, talented lover and highly intelligent to boot. He'd handled himself extremely well socializing while maintaining a foolproof façade of a relationship with him. He reflected seriously on the idea of that façade for several long, quiet minutes, listening to the younger man breathe. Closing his eyes, he cuddled Gerard closer.

GERARD woke, aware that he was not in his bed at home. In near-complete darkness, it took him a span of two deep breaths to remember where he was. Snuggling closer to Marcus's warm body, he molded his front to the blond's back, his arm curling around his middle. His body ached in a very intimate way, reminding him of the activities and promises of the night before. Running his open palms over the lightly furred chest, he skimmed them lower to brush and stroke Marcus's now flaccid cock. He grinned. It was the first time he'd ever touched the man that he wasn't hard. The sleeping man didn't stir, deep into dreams after his body had been totally relaxed by the escapades of the evening. His breathing was low and even, soft and quiet in the darkened room.

His body stirring as he stroked the hard muscles of his lover's chest, abdomen and arms, Gerard pressed his rapidly awakening cock against his sleeping lover. Placing his lips close to Marcus's ear, he whispered in a voice rough and deep from sleep and being thoroughly loved. "Your body feels so good next to mine. Like we were made to fit together." He slid his completely hard cock between Marcus's legs so it was thrusting in and out over the older man's balls.

Spurred by sensation, Marcus shifted just slightly, still well asleep. But his body could react even if his mind was disconnected. His breath hitched once, then evened out again, slow and steady. Gerard grinned, adjusting the angles of his thrusts so that the head of his cock was bumping the tender spot just behind Marcus's balls, his motions becoming rhythmic. "You felt so fuckin' good inside me. I wonder if it'd feel as good to be buried in your tight ass." He pulled his hips back, the fluid leaking from the tip of his erection allowing him to glide smoothly through the crack of Marcus's ass. He paused, the head of his cock nestled against the puckered opening. He rocked back and forth, applying the gentlest of pressure. "I doubt any of those high-powered friends of yours would ever guess that you'd take it up the ass. Would you? Would you do that for me?" Exhaling more heavily, Marcus stirred again, his body alerting him to the sensual contact even as his mind clawed for more sleep, to continue the heated dream. And one heat was beginning to bleed into another. The older man sighed again, his knee shifting over as he unconsciously exposed himself to his lover's attentions.

Nibbling on the tender earlobe and down the side of Marcus's neck, Gerard took advantage of the unconscious offer, sliding deeper into the crevice and brushing back and forth over the tight opening. Reaching behind him, he brushed his hand over the covers, searching for the lube they'd had last night. "Ah ha," he said triumphantly as his hand closed around the smooth bottle. Twisting the top with his fingers, he poured some of the slippery liquid into his hand. One finger ran over Marcus's tailbone and deeper until it circled its target. Gerard slipped it in completely, pulsing it gently in and out until he felt Marcus start to move with him. The clenching of his muscles started to rouse Marcus just

enough that he couldn't decide if he was still dreaming. He moaned quietly and pushed back against what had entered him. In his dream, it was an erotic houri with black hair and chocolate eyes teasing him mercilessly. He shifted almost uncomfortably, pushing his face into the pillow.

Gerard's leg pressed forward between Marcus's, one hand vigorously stroking his swollen cock and the other finger-fucking his ass. "Marcus, wake up for me, handsome," he teased, nipping at the smooth shoulder. Curling the finger inside, he stroked his lover's prostate.

The sparks lighting inside woke Marcus as soft caresses had not, and he gasped aloud, inhaling harshly as he was torn from sleep to feel his body already aroused and throbbing. "Fuck," he hissed, mind again focusing on the sultry man he hoped he remembered rightly was in his bed.

"Ah, there you are. Fucking you soft and slow while you dream sounds like fun, but I really wanted you awake for this first time." A second finger joined the first, stretching the tight hole. Marcus made a soft whimpering sound, and Gerard showered kisses over his back and shoulders. Using both fingers to tease the tight bundle of nerves, he purred, "Tell me what you need, lover."

"Christ," Marcus swore, his voice a gravelly rasp as he pushed back. "Fuck me. Let me feel you," he groaned, sliding a hand behind him to clasp Gerard's hip and try to pull him closer.

An unexpected tingle swept through Gerard's body, tightening his chest as Marcus begged. Fuck, he didn't need to be attaching feelings to an extended one-night stand. Pushing the serious thoughts aside, he focused on the feel of Marcus's body writhing against his. "I want to push my way inside you, feel your body surrendering to my cock. You okay?" he asked, his fingers withdrawing from the slick hole and rolling on a condom. He hadn't prepped the other man as much as he could have, but the idea of Marcus's muscle stretching around his cock was just so appealing.

"Gerard, fuck me already. Let me feel if you fuck as well as you suck," Marcus growled, fingers digging into the soft skin of his lover's ass.

Grabbing Marcus's hips firmly, the younger man thrust forward, penetrating his body. Rolling on top of the larger man for better leverage, he rocked in and out of the tight channel, loosening it as he sank deeper. "Godohfuckin'hell..." he gasped. "Nothing legal should feel this good."

Flat on his belly, Marcus buried his rasping cry in the pillow as his lover sank into him balls deep after several pushes and pulls. Fuck all, Marcus was out of practice bottoming. He tossed his head back, groaning and biting his lip. "Don't stop now," he gasped. "Fuck me wild, pretty," he urged, fingers gripping the sheets tightly.

Swatting Marcus on the ass sharply, Gerard scooted him up to his knees. "Up, big boy," he ordered, his hand lingering to sweep over the blond's flank. "You look so fuckin' sexy, ass up, beggin' me to fuck you."

Letting Gerard manipulate him up, Marcus grabbed hold of the headboard to have some leverage. "So what else do I have'ta say to get to that fucking?" he rasped. "You're driving me nuts buried all deep and hot, not giving me a promise of movin'." His words were thick and run together, his voice practically throbbing with want.

Gerard groaned; he'd been using slow measured movements mainly to maintain his control. Marcus was so hot. So tight. Having the elegant, powerful man bent over at the end of his cock was enough to make him come even without moving. Marcus's words snapped what remained of his control. "You're mine," he growled. "Scream for me." Fingers sinking into the flesh of the older man's hips hard enough to bruise, he thrust hard and fast.

The shock of the sudden thrust was more than enough to wrest a strangled yell from Marcus, after which he hissed, pushing back, encouraging. "Yeah, come on, harder, harder!" he growled, voice raised and hoarse. He reached down with one hand to jerk on his own stiff erection.

Gerard pounded the tight hole, pushing Marcus forward with each penetration, changing his angle, searching for that

certain reaction. “God, yes, touch yourself for me. I want you to come all over your hand, so I can lick it clean.”

Grunting with each thrust that pushed him forward, Marcus pushed back, his cock jerking in his hand every time. “Fuck,” he swore. “Gonna come, come hard and feed you every bit of it. Want to see it on your tongue, on your lips,” he ground out, now thrusting his own hips against his hand in counterpoint to Gerard’s fucking.

“Arghhh...” Gerard ground out a strangled groan, coming long and deep. “God,” he panted, shaking with cataclysmic aftershocks. “God, wish we didn’t need condoms, would love to see my come streaming from your pink hole. I did promise to lick you clean.”

“Fucking hell!” Marcus groaned long and loud, body clenching as he came all over himself just thinking about Gerard’s dirty talk. “Your absolutely dirty fucking mouth. I adore it,” he rasped, pressing forward and back into his own fist, milking his orgasm.

Gerard collapsed onto his back, completely drained, stripping the condom and dropping it off the side of the bed. “Then come fill it,” he taunted. “Want to taste you.”

Shifting on his knees, Marcus moved and pressed his sticky palm to Gerard’s lips, wiping the thick cream all over his mouth and chin. “Lick it up, pretty,” he growled. “Then you can clean up my cock, too.”

Gerard licked his lips, eyes locked with Marcus’s. Rising up, he joined their lips, sucking on the blond’s tongue, savoring all the flavors of his lover. Pushing him onto his back with a sharp shove, he kissed and licked his way down the sculpted chest, nuzzling the musky curls and sucking the soft shaft completely into his mouth. He gently suckled it clean, stopping short of arousing his lover again, and gratefully relaxed on Marcus’s chest when the blond opened his arms in invitation. “So, it’s early. More sleep?”

Already relaxing, the older man hummed his assent quietly, gathering Gerard close. “Need my rest to keep up with you,” he murmured.

Chuckling sleepily, Gerard buried his face in Marcus's chest. "Give it up now. You'll never keep up with me."

MARCUS opened his eyes to see sunshine streaming into the room, making him blink several times. He pulled himself up on one elbow, and the mussed sheets pooled at his waist. He instinctively turned his chin, feeling the heat of another body close by.

The younger man's eyelashes were dark where they lay upon pale cheeks, repose making him look even younger than his sparkling attitude projected. Marcus just looked at him for long moments, entranced by his incredible luck to have found Gerard, even for just so short a time. Unable to resist, he reached out to lightly caress his cheek. The light touch roused Gerard from dreams of Marcus, opening his eyes to see the real thing. He thought about batting his eyelashes and saying something about 'the man of his dreams', but the look in the older man's eyes stopped his tongue. Now wasn't the moment for flippant. "Good morning, lover," he rasped, licking at his dry lips.

Still serious, the older man slid down, supporting his head on one hand though he was now only inches away from those gorgeous lips. "Morning," he murmured, sliding his thumb gently along Gerard's chin.

Gerard relaxed as Marcus's fingers explored his face, perfectly comfortable with the intimacy of the touch and the intent gaze. Lifting up, he nuzzled the blond's chin, silently asked for a kiss. It was a simply answered request, and Marcus pressed their lips together, rubbing and catching until his tongue slid along Gerard's lower lip, soothing the dry skin. Hooking a hand behind Marcus's head, Gerard pulled him down, his other hand on his hip encouraging him to roll over on top of him. He sighed, a soft hum of a moan escaping as Marcus's tongue slipped between his lips, deepening the kiss.

Shifting his hips, the older man moved to lie in the cradle of Gerard's thighs, their bellies and chests aligned. Braced upon his elbows, he continued the warm, slow, luxurious kiss. He

surrounded his lover, subtly claiming him. Gerard melted, purring deep in his throat. He could lie here all day and bask in the warmth of Marcus's attention – but a sudden thought jolted him out of the erotic glow. He tensed, his lips pulling away as his head swiveled to the side. "Shit! Marcus, it's almost ten. Weren't you supposed to meet with Allen and John at 9:30?"

Marcus glanced to the bedside clock, and he groaned. "Fuck all," he muttered, looking back down at Gerard. He didn't want to leave this... With an annoyed growl, he captured one more kiss, this one more heated and sharp, before climbing out of the bed, cursing under his breath as he headed to the bathroom to clean up.

In no hurry to jump up, Gerard turned on his side, watching his lover through the open bathroom door, head propped on his hand, sheets riding low on his hips. He'd been the one to remind Marcus, but he still felt slightly put out that the older man had jumped up to leave him so quickly. With an impish grin, he rolled onto his back, pushing the sheets lower. He'd give Marcus something to regret leaving. His hand drifted across his chest, lifting his half-hard cock and brushing across the head with his thumb. Digging his heels into the mattress, he lifted his hips up, fucking his hand, his head falling to the side and a throaty moan drifting towards the bathroom.

Annoyed but obligated to see to his guests and business, Marcus made quick work of cleaning up although he had to take the time to shave. As he turned his head to pull the razor along the curve of his chin, movement flickered in the mirror. He narrowed his eyes and kept shaving, tilting his head to try to make out the movement. He dragged the razor up the length of his throat, changing the angle of the mirrored door, and the sight made him twitch. He swore as he nicked himself, and then he swore again as he realized what Gerard was doing.

Turning his head the opposite way to hide his smile, Gerard slipped his other hand between his thighs to massage his balls and finger his hole. "Ah fuck," he gasped as his finger probed the tender opening, remembering the feel of Marcus inside him. The sounds from the bedroom made Marcus's hands shake as he

finished shaving and pulled on clothes from the walk-in closet on the far side of the bathroom. When he strode out a matter of minutes later, he prowled to the bedside, crossing his arms. “Are you proud of yourself, Rascal?” he rasped.

His trousers didn’t hang right.

Gerard smiled, openly proud of himself. He gasped again as his hand drove him closer to climax. He lifted sultry eyes from his lover’s obvious erection to his glittering eyes. “I know how important the right look is to you. I’d be happy to help you with that.” He licked his lips, knowing that Marcus would refuse, but having to push nonetheless.

Desire flashed in Marcus’s eyes, and he glanced at the clock again, only to grimace. But still he paused. “Let me see it, pretty,” he said, sliding one hand casually in his pocket, his voice a purr. “Let me see you milk that gorgeous cock so I know what I’m missing when I go downstairs.”

Pouting, Gerard tried one more pleading look. When Marcus shook his head with an affectionate chuckle, the young man let his eyes drift closed and squeezed the base of his cock, remembering the feeling of his lover’s hand. “Your hands are so big,” he groaned. “They feel so good on my cock.” It didn’t take long with Marcus’s eyes on him. He moaned, writhed and fucked his hand until his chest was covered with a sheen of sweat. His balls tightened; his eyes locked on his lover standing next to the bed. “Kiss me,” he panted, licking his lips. “Kiss me while I come.”

With a soft growl, Marcus moved from where he’d been frozen, swooping down next to the bed. He captured Gerard’s face between his hands and kissed him voraciously, pouring all the heat and passion that flooded him into it.

Gerard whimpered, lifting up into the kiss, body trembling. His hand flew as he sucked the fresh minty taste from Marcus’s tongue. “God, oh, God,” he cried. His cock surged and creamy white liquid covered his hand. He collapsed boneless on the pillows, lazily stroking his spent cock, chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath.

Marcus purred as he caught Gerard's gasps. With a grin he looked down to see the other man's slick hand, and he reached out and pulled it to his lips, licking some of Gerard's come from his fingers. "Something else to remember you by," he murmured, swirling his lover's flavor on his tongue, banishing the taste of toothpaste.

The sated man groaned, his cock twitching against his belly. "I'll be right here when you get back," he murmured sleepily. Marcus turned to leave reluctantly, and Gerard reached out to grab his pants. "Don't be gone long."

GERARD pulled the covers up on Marcus's bed. He was sure there were housekeepers to see to such duties, but he felt guilty about how badly they had destroyed it. As he rearranged and fluffed the pillows, he realized he was just stalling, trying to figure out exactly what he should do next. Last night, he'd had an assignment, a role to play as co-host. Today, with the focus shifted from social to business, he wasn't quite sure what his place was. A naughty thought shot through his mind, causing his lips to twitch.

He shouldn't. But he was going to. Marcus would learn not to leave him to his own devices unless he was comfortable dealing with whatever Gerard's fertile imagination would devise.

Strolling nonchalantly down the stairs, Gerard greeted several of the guests from the night before who were either leaving from or returning to their rooms. He stopped to exchange pleasantries with Mr. Namonra, who mentioned he was eager to discuss a new service contract with Marcus that afternoon. Millicent Ratterly passed as they were talking, and Gerard lifted her hand to his lips with a smile and a wink that he wouldn't have added if the woman had been on his side of eighty. She giggled like a teenager, blushing and shooting him looks over her shoulder as she walked down the hall.

Finally extracting himself, Gerard stopped in the kitchen to ask about the day's schedule. Experience had taught him that no one knew more about a home than those who fed its inhabitants. Armed with both Marcus's present and next location, he headed

quickly to the older man's office to get set up before Marcus and John arrived. Kicking his shoes out of sight behind the couch, he folded himself comfortably under the large mahogany desk.

It wasn't long before his quarry and John entered. Marcus moved behind the desk as he talked about a real estate deal in the hundreds of millions of dollars, apparently John's hundreds of millions of dollars. He sat in the comfortable leather chair and leaned back, listening as John answered with his concerns.

Gerard ran his hands up Marcus's legs, grinning as he felt the muscles clench under his fingers and the almost unnoticeable hitch in his lover's breath. His thumbs drew circles to either side of the already prominent bulge. Marcus's slightly strained voice replied to something John said, and Gerard leaned close, his mouth hovering over the hard ridge, allowing his hot breath to seep through the thin fabric.

Facing John, Marcus struggled to keep his voice even and his face composed, succeeding in hiding his shock. Gerard. His new lover was definitely a rascal. He'd warned Marcus about the dangers of leaving him alone... Marcus swallowed as he felt his cock harden even more, painfully pushing against the fabric of his pants.

Letting his teeth graze up the hard length, Gerard mouthed the head with his lips. He was careful not to linger too long. Marcus didn't need an obvious wet spot. His hand joined his mouth in teasing the erect cock.

Marcus's voice wavered, and he feigned a cough to cover it, the percussion just pushing his cock harder against Gerard's mouth. Hoping against hope the phone would ring so he could kick John out, Marcus forced himself to focus on the discussion at hand.

Gerard's nimble fingers worked Marcus's belt and zipper as quietly as possible, letting his fingers trail inside the open trousers, grazing warm, smooth skin. He pulled the stiff treasure free of the fabric. The tip of his tongue traced the heavy vein from base to tip, placing a wet, open-mouthed kiss on top of the broad head. Taking a risk, he whispered softly, "I'm gonna suck you until you could care less if John hears you scream."

Freezing in place, Marcus heard the quiet whisper and the promise in it, but since John continued on, prompted by his grunts of acknowledgement, he knew the other man hadn't heard. He shifted uncomfortably in the chair, hand tightening on the pen as he felt the hot heat of Gerard's mouth close on his throbbing dick.

Wanting Marcus undone, Gerard sucked strongly, sliding the entire length deep in his throat, his tongue fluttering against the head as he moved up for air. His fingers formed a tight ring, gliding easily over the wet, slick shaft. Mouth and hand worked in tandem, driving the blond higher. He couldn't quite stifle a soft moan when one of Marcus's hands slipped beneath the desk to tangle in his hair, guiding his head. If they'd been alone, he'd have begged Marcus to fuck his mouth and come on his face. Just the thought sped his actions.

Marcus could feel himself losing control. "John," he interrupted, forcing his voice to be as even as possible, "Could you give me a few minutes? I just remembered that I need to make an important phone call." Thankfully, the other man agreed and departed with only an odd look at Marcus. Marcus didn't care. As soon as the other man shut the door, he rolled his chair back, pulling his saliva-slick cock right out of Gerard's mouth as he buried both hands in his lover's hair. "Rascal," he said dangerously.

Looking up at his lover through a dark fringe of lashes, Gerard gave voice to his desires. "Let me taste you," he rasped. "Fuck my mouth." Scooting forward, his swollen lips closed over the purpled head as he gave himself over to Marcus's guidance.

"Christ," Marcus muttered, sliding forward in the chair as his cock was engulfed. He pushed himself to his feet, Gerard moving with him, and soon he was shifting his hips, pulling out and pushing in, hands clenching in his lover's hair. It was so fucking hot and wet, and Marcus grunted as he thrust harder and faster, fulfilling Gerard's request as his cock bumped against the back of the other man's throat.

Gerard knelt on the plush carpet at Marcus's feet, humming his pleasure, his hands clutching Marcus's hips. Opening his eyes, he looked up, watching the look of unadulterated bliss on his

lover's face. He felt his own cock twitch and surge in his pants. He'd never come just from giving pleasure before, but he was damn close. He hadn't intended to do anything but get Marcus off, a sort of quid pro quo for teasing him this morning, but since Marcus had dismissed John, why not? He lowered a hand to his own fly, quickly opening it and pulling his cock free.

Marcus's eyes flashed with rampant hunger. "Yeah, pretty, let me see you get yourself off on sucking my cock. I want to see you out of control," he said harshly, his hands holding Gerard's head gently despite his rough thrusts into the younger man's mouth. "When I see you spill, I'm gonna come hard and hot down your throat, and you're gonna swallow every bit and thank me."

Gerard moaned, fisting himself erratically. He had never really gotten off on being submissive, but there was something about the older man's confidence that aroused him when Marcus talked to him that way. His thighs trembled as he spilled over his hand, creamy droplets spattering the charcoal gray carpet. A deep groan vibrated up from his chest as he sucked on Marcus's cock hungrily.

"Oh yeah, my Rascal, such a hot, dirty little mouth, suck me in." And with a groan, Marcus was coming, his hips snapping to ram his cock against the back of Gerard's throat.

Gerard swallowed, sucked, and swallowed more, refusing to relinquish Marcus's cock even as the older man stumbled backwards and collapsed to his chair. He settled between the spread knees, suckling the softening length until his lover's body twitched with every touch on his over-sensitive flesh. Letting the cock slip from between his abused lips, he rubbed his cheek along Marcus's inner thigh like a cat asking to be petted, head coming to rest on his leg. "I really didn't intend for you to run John off," he said, his voice slightly hoarse from the intense session. "Just thought I'd make good on my promise." He grinned up at his lover, his expression turning thoughtful. At some point in the last day and a half, Marcus had changed from a pleasant weekend fling to his lover. That was going to take some processing, but in the meantime, the older man had a meeting to finish. He stood up and started to straighten the mussed clothing.

Sighing as he tucked himself back into his pants, Marcus reached out and snagged Gerard's arm, pulling him into his lap and capturing his mouth in a long, soft, wet, lingering kiss that promised more to come soon. Once their lips parted, he breathed. "Rascal."

Gerard stood again on slightly shaky legs, making sure he was at least somewhat presentable. He wiped his hand on the tail of his shirt before tucking it in. He could sneak back to the room and clean up before lunch. Stealing one more kiss, he slipped on his shoes and exited through the balcony doors.

Marcus watched him go, whispering to his disappearing form, "My Rascal."

HAVING apologized and finished his meeting with John – successfully – Marcus grinned as they shook hands and the other man went off to find something to drink. Rolling his shoulders, Marcus decided he wanted to celebrate the very, very lucrative deal he had just sealed, and finding Gerard would be a fabulous start. Preferably, fucking him 'til he screamed with pleasure would be included. Oh, he loved to hear Gerard scream his name.

Greeting a few of the other relaxing guests, Marcus took the stairs two at a time and entered his suite, shutting and locking the door. Hearing the shower, he smiled, stripped down, and padded into the bathroom, already stroking himself in anticipation. The slim outline within the silvered glass only whetted his appetite.

Gerard leaned back into the shower of water, eyes closed, letting it sluice over his face and body. Unlimited hot water was a luxury he didn't have at his apartment. He'd chosen it for the wonderful studio space, not the plumbing. His mind conjured an image of Marcus, naked in the light from the two-story windows. His fingers itched with the desire to form the blond's sculpted muscles in clay. His lips parted, and he sighed.

"I could listen to that all day," Marcus murmured, standing at the entrance to the tiled walk-in shower. "I hope that moan was for me."

Gerard opened his eyes, turning slowly with a smile. "I'll moan for you all day long if you want me to. You missed your shower this morning," he invited, pushing open the glass door.

Stepping into the steamy enclosure, Marcus pulled the door shut behind him and slid arms about the warm, wet body. He made a noise of contentment, burying his face in black, waterlogged hair.

Gerard curled around Marcus, skin sliding against skin. "Mmmm. How'd you manage to disappear so fast?"

"Was almost done, really, just nitpicking when we got to the office," he murmured. "Then, for some reason, I was more motivated than ever to get finished." He licked down Gerard's neck, nipping at the sensitive flesh behind his ears. "Fuck, you're like a drug in my blood," he groaned, shifting to rock his half-hard cock against Gerard's thigh. "I haven't gotten off this many times so close together for years."

Gerard laughed, arching his neck, granting Marcus easier access. "Maybe I should change my name to Viagra?" he teased, sliding his leg between the older man's thigh and rubbing against Marcus's interested erection.

"I like your name as it is, Rascal," Marcus growled, biting into Gerard's shoulder as he slowly rutted against him, feeling the desire curl in his gut.

"I like it best when you're screaming it as you come." Gerard turned in Marcus's arms, guiding one hand down to his cock, bracing himself against the tile and pushing his ass back into Marcus's groin. "Hand jobs and blow jobs are great, but I really want to feel you inside me," he begged.

Marcus cursed colorfully. "I didn't bring a condom, pretty," he groaned, fingers gripping Gerard's hips as he dropped his head to the other man's shoulder.

"Fuck!" Gerard cursed, glaring playfully over his shoulder. "Next time you interrupt a perfectly good shower, make sure you come prepared." He winked. With a sigh, Marcus made to move to the door, but Gerard stopped him. "Stay. I have serious fantasies about this shower that you're about to fulfill. I'll be right back." Grabbing a towel off the heated rack, he slung it carelessly around

his hips as he shot into the bedroom. Marcus leaned back against the wall and let the water splatter all over him. He knew he was in for a wild ride. And he couldn't wait.

Gerard stumbled back into the bathroom, losing his grip on the towel as he attempted to hold it, a handful of condoms and two bottles. Giving up, he let the towel fall to the floor. The other things were far more important. Stepping back into the steamy shower, he set his booty on the tile ledge, holding out one of the bottles to Marcus. "Pina-colada flavored," he provided with a sultry look back over his shoulder as he turned around, presenting his ass to Marcus, "and it would be a crime not to taste a flavored lube, don'tcha think?"

"Taste it? I thought you wanted me to fuck you," Marcus replied with a grin, accepting the bottle and squeezing some lube onto his fingers.

"It's been almost eight hours since you fucked me last. You have to open me up somehow," Gerard replied innocently. Growling, Marcus shoved Gerard closer against the wall and dropped to one knee, sliding his lubed fingers down through his cleft, then spread his cheeks and thrust his tongue right into him. "Fuck!" Gerard's head fell against the tile with a thump, spreading his legs wider. "If you ever decide to give up the whole millionaire business mogul thing, you have awesome potential as a prostitute," he said breathlessly.

Marcus laughed against Gerard's ass, sucking and licking and thrusting and biting as he tried to drive his lover wild. At the same time, he slid a lubed finger into him, sinking deep and aiming for his prostate, wanting to hear him howl.

Between the assault of Marcus's tongue and fingers, Gerard's legs were threatening to give out, and what had started as an encouraging moan was reaching the level of an all-out scream. "God, Marcus, fuck..." He reached around, attempting to pull the older man to his feet. "Need you, want to come with you inside me," he pleaded.

Rising from his knees, Marcus made quick work of rolling on the condom and slicking himself up. He pushed Gerard against the wall again with a firm hand against his lower back, nudged in

between his legs with one knee, and after lining himself up, thrust in hard. “Fuck!” he hissed as he was sucked deep into Gerard’s tight hole.

“God, don’t stop,” Gerard panted, pushing back into the penetration. “Move! Fuck me!”

With a strangled moan, Marcus bent his knees and started pushing up into him, pulling back slowly and then in again, ramming hard, encouraged by Gerard’s breathy gasps. “I told myself I’d fuck you until you screamed,” he growled. “You scream so pretty for me. I like hearing it.”

“So make me scream,” Gerard challenged, already biting his lip stave off his orgasm.

Grunting, Marcus drove into him, his thrusts pushing Gerard’s body up the slick tile, and gravity forcing him back down on Marcus’s cock. The older man’s hands dug into his hips, sure to leave bruises. “Christ, I still want you,” he ground out as he fucked him as hard as he could, the sensations driving him swiftly to the edge.

“You better still want me. I’m no where near done with you yet.” Gerard reached behind him, fingers clutching at Marcus’s slippery skin, trying to force him deeper, faster. Twisting his head back, he parted his lips, begging for a kiss.

Marcus’s mouth ground against Gerard’s just as his body ground into him, plundering and biting at those glorious lips, and Marcus felt the buzz gathering in his balls. He pulled his mouth back, sinking his teeth into Gerard’s shoulder. “Rascal likes it rough, does he?” he hissed.

“Only from you,” Gerard groaned, pushing back, matching the force of the other man’s thrusts into his body enough so that water splattered from his darkened-to-copper hair across Gerard’s shoulder. “Fuck! Gonna come!” the younger man swore.

Snapping his hips, jaw clenched, Marcus let loose of Gerard’s hip and slapped his ass just enough to sting. “Come, then!” he growled as his thrusts became erratic and he shuddered. Then he thrust again as he started coming hard enough to see stars.

Gerard started to reply, “Couldn’t stop if I...” but the force of his climax stole any coherent thought from his mind as he moaned, impaled on Marcus’s cock, each piercing push sending him soaring higher. “Fuck ... fuck ... fuck ...” he chanted as tremors racked his body, and he started to slide towards the shower floor.

Marcus barely had the presence of mind to catch Gerard, cradling him close, and he moved to sit on the tiled bench just outside of the spray of water. He pulled Gerard onto his lap and then let his head fall back against the wall as he just breathed.

GERARD stepped out onto the balcony, a glass of orange juice in his hand. He’d raided the refrigerator after his siesta with Marcus. Tipping his face up to the sun, he let the warmth soak into his skin.

“Hello, gorgeous,” an appreciative voice drawled from behind him.

Startled, Gerard turned towards the door. One of the few guests he hadn’t had a chance to get to know was standing directly behind him, a little too close for comfort. He took a step back and smiled his most polite, but distant, smile. “Mr. Carson. It’s nice to finally have a chance to talk with you. We’ve been at different tables. Marcus tells me you flew in from France.”

The man’s rakish smile befit his mannerisms, and he leaned forward familiarly, lightly touching Gerard’s elbow. “Please, call me Stan. I saw you last night and did not get a chance to express my regard,” he said smoothly, sea-green eyes sparkling.

Gerard’s eyes narrowed, taking stock of the man in front of him. His innate warning system flared. If he’d met Carson at a random party, he might have been interested in taking him up on the obvious overture. He was good-looking and seemed quite charming. But everyone here knew Gerard was with Marcus, which made the man’s approach not quite kosher.

It wasn’t really a problem. He’d been handling polite brush-offs of society matrons and bored businessmen at his mother’s parties since he’d gotten old enough to stay up past ten.

“Marcus hasn’t mentioned exactly what it is you do, Mr. Carson. What brings you to New York?”

“I’m in media relations,” Carson said, shifting around to put himself between Gerard and the view. “We handle all of Marcus’s publicity, advertising, research and the like. But it’s boring stuff. Tell me, Gerard, what is it that *you* do for Marcus?” he asked, charm oozing.

Refreshing his smile, Gerard easily sidestepped, putting distance between them again. “Oh, I’m not here for business. My relationship with Marcus is strictly personal.”

“Oh, I’m certain it is,” Carson drawled, looking up and down Gerard obviously. “Maybe once Marcus leaves town, I could give you a call.”

“I don’t think so.” Marcus’s voice from the balcony door was a low growl. The older man pinned Carson with his eyes. “Don’t you have board members’ asses to lick, Stan?” Marcus continued flatly, arms crossed.

Gerard was surprised at his lover’s crude comment. He hadn’t seen Marcus be anything but perfectly polite to any of his guests, and here he was radiating alpha male energy and possessiveness. Stepping toward him, Gerard hooked his arm through Marcus’s, leaning his head against the broad shoulder, leaving no doubt who he wanted to be with, surprising himself again. He could handle a team of Stans without breaking a sweat, but it felt damn good to have Marcus ride unexpectedly to his rescue.

Carson chuckled, raising both hands as if to ward Marcus off. “I get it, I get it.” He still offered that same charming smile. “Nice to meet you, Gerard.” Then he strode off the balcony, casually whistling.

“Bastard,” Marcus muttered under his breath, watching Carson go. His arm moved to curl about his lover’s waist, and he pulled Gerard closer. “Am I going to have to keep you close by?” he asked, heat still in his voice, shoulders still tense from the burst of adrenaline and jealousy he’d felt when he heard Carson practically propositioning the man in his arms.

Gerard bared his neck for Marcus, eyes closing at the scrape of teeth. "I'm not going to object to being close to you, but I could have handled him. Stan is minor league, barely a nuisance."

The older man's arms tightened further, and the growl was back, rumbling in his chest. "I don't share," he said evenly, sliding his lips along Gerard's throat. "As long as you're here – you're mine."

The younger man's stomach flipped at the first comment, heat suffusing his body, to be replaced by a strangely empty feeling at the qualification. Would it really end with the weekend? Gerard was sure that he didn't want it to, but he wasn't quite sure what to do about it. Could you go backwards? Start a real relationship with a weekend pick-up at a bar? Pushing off the surge of melancholy, he nuzzled Marcus's neck.

Marcus's growl muted to a purr, and he kissed Gerard's forehead. "I have to get back to the meeting. I was just on the way to the bar when I overheard Stan," he said regretfully. "I almost wish..." Then he shrugged. "I hope you'll find something to amuse yourself for the rest of the afternoon?" he asked. "I won't be back in my office," he added as an afterthought.

"Guess hanging out under your desk isn't an option, then," Gerard teased, finger combing Marcus's hair. "I think I'll go up to our room and think about tonight. That should get me nice and worked up. Would it be terrible if I skipped dinner and just waited for you upstairs?"

"Only if I have to keep explaining to people where you are," Marcus murmured. "'Course, I could just tell them you're waiting and I'm leaving after the entree to take terrible advantage of you."

"You do that." Gerard grinned, placing a quick kiss on the older man's nose before bouncing through the door towards the hall. This was going to be a night Marcus would never forget.

Marcus watched him depart, that gorgeous ass swinging. He swallowed on another thump of desire in his gut. He was liking the idea of announcing Gerard was waiting for him. Maybe it would get the point across to others like Carson that the younger

man was off limits. Gerard had certainly enthralled a lot of his guests. With a dissatisfied grunt, Marcus adjusted the hang of his pants and walked inside.

PATIENCE at an end, Marcus wiped his mouth and tossed his napkin on his plate just as dessert was being served. "If you'll excuse me," he said to his guests as he stood, "I have dessert waiting upstairs."

There were several chuckles and not a few envious gazes as Marcus strode out of the room. He headed up the stairs, stopping at a small bathroom to wash his hands before heading to his suite. He wanted to be ready for whatever he might find. His weekend lover had proven quite adept at driving him to distraction so far. Marcus already hated that it was Saturday night.

He stopped in front of the door, hand lightly brushing the wood. He didn't want to the weekend to end. His eyes closed as he let the wanting for more roll through him, and with a steadying breath he pushed it away, ready to focus on tonight. Marcus opened the door, stepped inside, and closed the door shut firmly behind him, flipping the lock.

Gerard held his breath as he heard the doorknob turn. He stood in the almost dark room, next to the floor-to-ceiling windows, the lights from the city bathing him in multicolored light. He forced himself to keep his eyes out the window and not turn to see Marcus's expression when he saw the setting for seduction that he had designed.

The older man let his eyes coast about. Candles flickered all over, bathing the room in a soft gold light. There was a covered tray on the table, along with an ice bucket and bottle. The bed was properly turned down and the pillows had been fluffed. Then he saw the light-outlined figure at the window. He swallowed hard, his cock immediately hardening. "You didn't have to work this hard," he said. His voice was a warm caress.

Gerard turned slowly from the window and walked gracefully across the room. "Maybe I wanted our last night together to be special." Standing in front of the elegant blond,

Gerard raised his fingers to Marcus's chest, pulling them in a light scratch down the front of the white tuxedo shirt, the nails catching the erect nipples.

Marcus stepped back a bit, a hungry glitter in his eyes as he slowly and deliberately dragged his gaze up and down the lithe figure. "Just how 'special' are we talking?" he asked hoarsely. He lifted a hand to trap Gerard's under his, holding it to his chest.

"I'm yours. Here to do your bidding. Let me start by getting you out of that jacket and tie and fixing you a drink," Gerard suggested, his hands smoothing up Marcus's chest to brush the formal jacket from his shoulders. Taking the half dozen steps required to hang the jacket in the closet, he gave Marcus a good view of his ass. On his way back, he poured a glass of champagne, dropping a strawberry in the bubbling liquid. Placing the delicate flute in Marcus's hand, he efficiently pulled off his bow tie and began to unfasten the buttons down the front of the tailored shirt.

Darkened green eyes soaked in Gerard's every sultry step. The complete care he was showing Marcus was an undeniable turn-on, no matter how unneeded. He took a long drink of champagne and growled ever so slightly as he felt nails slide down his bare chest. He reached with one hand to take Gerard's chin and tilt it up to him. "You've got gorgeous lips," he commented.

Gerard licked them, holding Marcus's eyes as he lowered his mouth to Marcus's chest, scattering kisses over the tan skin before closing them over a pink nipple. Releasing the erect nub with a sharp nip, he sank to his knees, unfastening Marcus's trousers. "I bet you'd like the look of them stretched around your cock," he purred, pulling the stiff shaft free through the front of the silk boxers and rubbing the blunt head over his lips.

"You read my mind," Marcus rasped. His hands moved to slide into Gerard's silky hair, gripping his skull lightly. "Show me."

Puckering his lips, Gerard slid them over the smooth head, letting a subtle thrust of Marcus's hips push it past his lips. With a wanton moan of pure desire, he sucked the length deep into his mouth, letting his lover know how much he wanted this.

“Fuck,” Marcus breathed, watching those red, wet lips wrap around him and slide. Deciding this was Gerard’s game and that he should just go with it, he started to move his hips, dragging his cock in and out of the hot wet. “More,” Marcus panted, shifting a little to move one hand to the nape of Gerard’s neck.

Tilting his dark eyes up, Gerard released the hard shaft. His hands circled the base, supporting it as he teased the slit with his tongue. “What do you want? How can I please you?” Standing up, Gerard’s hands ran over his own chest and down onto his thighs, pulling his shirt apart to show off his smooth, muscular chest. “Do you like what you see?”

“Oh yeah,” Marcus growled, walking forward to stand right against Gerard’s chest. He reached behind the younger man and slid his hands over the tailored trousers, cupping firm buttocks. “Take these off,” he rumbled.

Gerard spun against Marcus’s chest, maintaining as much bodily contact as possible. Unfastening his belt and pants, he bent from the waist, pressing his ass back into Marcus’s groin as he stepped out of the slacks, flinging them to the side. Standing tall, he looked at Marcus over his shoulder. “Help me with the boxers?” he asked, leaning into the strong chest, pulling Marcus’s arms around him and pressing the blond’s hands firmly against the hard ridge hidden under soft silk.

Letting out a shaky breath, Marcus fingers fumbled, the sheer sexual force radiating off his lover making him tremble. Hooking his thumbs in the covered elastic, he pushed the boxers down over slim hips. As they dropped to the floor, he again cupped that sweet ass. His hands slid down to caress Gerard’s thighs. “Your ass is just as pretty as your lips.”

“Maybe you should fuck it, too,” Gerard breathed, bending over and placing his hands flat on the bed.

Marcus gasped, Gerard’s obvious pleading catching him in the gut. “But first, I want to see you on your knees again.” He sauntered over to the table and sat down, sprawling suggestively with his legs well apart, hand placed on the table.

The sultry sway of Gerard's hips was much more obvious as he walked across the room. Stepping behind the businessman, he pushed the open shirt off Marcus's broad shoulders and began to massage the tight neck muscles. "Anything," he whispered close to Marcus's ear, sliding his lips against the reddish blond hair that curled there. "I'd do anything for you." His voice caught slightly on the last phrase as he realized how true those words were. He was really falling for the sexy man. Letting his fingers curve over Marcus's shoulders and trail down onto his chest, he continued kneading the hard muscles. Reaching for the food he'd had brought up, he dragged a finger through the fresh whipped cream. Holding it to Marcus's mouth, he asked, "Hungry?"

The older man smiled and opened his mouth, tongue sliding out to lick up and down Gerard's finger, sucking off the cream. "Mmmm. Sweet," he rasped.

Winding around Marcus, Gerard draped himself over his lap, reaching for the delicacies on the table. "Let's see what other tastes you enjoy. Close your eyes," he instructed, lifting a cracker with caviar to Marcus's lips.

With a twitch of a grin, Marcus groaned as Gerard climbed up into his lap and settled on the hard ridge in his pants. With a sigh, he opened his mouth and chewed what was placed on his tongue. The crunch of the cracker and the salty burst identified the tidbit. He murmured wordlessly in approval.

Gerard watched as Marcus devoured treat after treat, sucking and nipping at his fingers more with each bite. He squirmed, his own body screaming for contact. He wasn't sure he'd ever been this turned on. Finally, slipping between Marcus's knees to the floor, he rasped, "I need to keep my strength up too." With a quick yank of the older man's hips, he had the unfastened pants free, so he could strip them off completely. Rubbing a dollop of chocolate mousse over the head of Marcus's cock, he began to feast. Mousse, whipped cream, slices of fruit – everything tasted better off of Marcus's skin.

"Hell yes," Marcus encouraged, sliding his hips in and out slowly. "Eat me. Eat me and suck me. Then you can have some cream to wash it down."

Gerard's body trembled at Marcus's words. Gently pulling each ball into his mouth, he meticulously sucked it clean. Getting to his feet, he took Marcus's hand and pulled him backwards to the bed. Lying flat on his back, he encouraged Marcus to straddle his chest. "Paint me with your cream," he purred, his mouth returning to Marcus's cock.

Marcus arched his back as he slid into Gerard's mouth, leaning forward to start moving in earnest. He growled as his hips snapped forward, pushing his hard, leaking cock into Gerard's throat. He could feel his balls tingle and tighten. "You ready for it?"

Mouth full, Gerard moaned his encouragement, his fingers sinking into the muscle of Marcus's ass to pull him closer.

The older man began to fuck his lover's mouth in earnest, and after several thrusts, he groaned and pulled out, catching himself in hand and pumping hard as he climaxed. His come spurted out erratically, landing on Gerard's cheek, his hair, those swollen, red lips and his chest before Marcus moaned and slapped his cock against his firm abdomen. He squeezed himself again and his erection twitched, another splatter landing on Gerard's chin.

Gerard watched Marcus's face as he came, his own cock surging, his tongue swiping at the come he could reach. Reaching up, he caressed Marcus's chest and shoulders. "Kiss me."

Marcus pushed himself down Gerard's body to lay his hips between the other man's legs. He braced his weight on either side of his lover's torso. He leaned forward to capture those sinful lips, and the kiss was slow and lazy as he tasted Gerard mixed with himself thoroughly in the hazy remains of his orgasm.

Gerard whimpered as the full weight of Marcus's body trapped his erection between them. When Marcus started to lift away, he grabbed the back of his head and shoulder to hold him in place, arching up into the friction, moaning as he sucked at his lover's tongue.

Deliberately keeping his part of the kiss languid, Marcus lowered himself back against his lover, feeling Gerard jerk up against him. The thought that the younger man would make

himself come like that filled Marcus with a low, sizzling heat. He continued to stroke Gerard's tongue with his own, letting him use his body.

"So close. So close," Gerard chanted against Marcus's mouth, rubbing himself wantonly against his lover. He could feel Marcus swelling against him, but he couldn't wait, couldn't hold back. "Fuck! Need to come!" As breathing got more difficult, he guided Marcus's mouth to his neck. "Mark me. Show Stan exactly who I belong to!"

Passion swamped Marcus's gut and he immediately pressed his lips to Gerard's neck, sliding down from his pulse point to soft, soft skin, and he began to suck voraciously, even sinking in his teeth as he felt the heat pool under the mark he was leaving. It appealed to every dominant instinct within him.

Gerard gasped as Marcus's teeth claimed him, the edge of pain pushing him headlong into a cataclysmic orgasm. "Fuck! Oh, fuck!" he screamed, thrusting up against Marcus's body, his own release providing a slick surface that enhanced the sensation. His entire body convulsed as Marcus held him tight through his aftershocks. Head turning blindly, his lips sought his lover's, needing the connection of a kiss.

Marcus obliged. He wanted more kisses himself. He wanted to turn Gerard inside out and back again, that same dominant need within him hoping he would mark his lover permanently, somehow. Never to be forgotten. When he pulled back to look at that gorgeous face, he said hoarsely, "No more fucking." He started to shift his hips slowly, sliding helped by Gerard's come between them.

Gerard's heart clenched at Marcus's words. His first reaction was that Marcus meant they were finished – fantasies acted out – time to go home, but the way Marcus was moving against him and a look at the older man calmed that fear. The warmth in the Marcus's gaze burned right through the chill that had settled inside him. Holding the emerald eyes, Gerard undulated, matching Marcus's rhythm, watching as the look became even more heated... even more tender.

Unable to resist, Marcus lifted one hand to lightly touch Gerard's cheek, caressing it, tracing the lines of his brow and jaw, then his lips. Then he followed those movements with soft kisses, a gentle rub of his lips. He didn't know how he was going to be able to let Gerard go tomorrow. His gut clenched just thinking about it, and he felt himself harden, sliding against Gerard's cock and hip. But he wanted this, at least this, to last. It was a fucking miraculous fantasy, and his body was really engaged in it.

Grasping his shirt, Gerard slipped it off his shoulders. "Nothing between us," he said softly, not sure if it was a statement or a request. He shivered as Marcus's fingers skimmed over his heated skin like he was memorizing every inch with his touch. Reaching up to thread his fingers into the golden hair, he smiled, the sheer joy inside him pushing its way to the surface. "Make love to me."

The older man looking up into Gerard's shimmering eyes, and he nodded, lowering his mouth to press a kiss to one thigh, then the other, nuzzling as he went, worshiping. He was storing up memories as he breathed in Gerard's scent and the musk of their sex. But now it would be something else. He settled again between the younger man's thighs, just rubbing their bodies together as he sought those sinful lips.

With a moan, Gerard wrapped himself around Marcus, legs lifting off the bed to circle the narrow hips and pull his lover closer. In perfect synchronization, they moved against each other, seemingly able to read each other's minds. Gerard's hands skimmed the strong muscles of Marcus's back, his mouth moving from lips to jaw to neck and back, unable to get enough of Marcus's taste.

The heat sizzled between them as Marcus stroked and squeezed, one hand reaching back to slide from Gerard's knee down to the curve of his buttock before sliding between his legs to stroke lightly. They still rubbed against one another, and Marcus could tell Gerard was already hard again.

Gerard whimpered, dropping a foot to the mattress to arch up into the touch. As wonderful as the last hour had been, he

wanted, he needed Marcus inside of him. "Fill me. Love me," he begged as Marcus's fingers found his entrance.

Marcus lowered his forehead to Gerard's shoulder and pressed his lips to the sweaty skin, just barely stopping the clichéd "I do" that threatened to fall from his lips. He pressed his thumb slightly into the tight hole, then pulled back to reach over to the bedside for a condom and the small bottle of slick.

"I want to do that," Gerard said, reaching for the condom. Quickly disposing of the wrapper, he rolled the latex over Marcus's cock, wishing fervently that 'nothing between us' meant this, too, but he loved Marcus for taking such good care of him. He swallowed past the tightness in his throat. He was used to being the one in control of all his relationships, but would it really be so bad to be a little vulnerable? Instinctively, Gerard knew that Marcus would never hurt him, and that certainty opened his feelings like a flower facing the sun. Sitting facing his lover, his thighs over Marcus's, he watched as his lover coated his cock with lube, and he stole a quick kiss. "Make me yours," he asked. "Not because of anyone else. Just for us."

Leaning forward, Marcus guided himself to the tight portal. Just before penetrating, he lifted his chin and leaned forward on one arm to capture Gerard's lips. As their tongues met and twisted sensuously, he pushed in as carefully as he could, as gently as he could, feeling the muscle squeeze and then give to his body.

Taking a deep breath, Gerard relaxed, accepting Marcus into his body, joining with someone in a way he had never experienced before. The feelings he had developed for Marcus made every touch, every sensation, more intense. He couldn't get enough. "Deeper," he begged.

On soft exhale of breath, Marcus surged further, sliding into Gerard's tight passage. He lowered himself upon the other man's chest, his elbows to each side of his head, and kissed him softly, their lips rubbing and catching over and over as his hips slowly rocked. He felt consumed with more affection than he'd thought possible, and to keep from expressing it, he stole yet more kisses. Silence would have to do, for now. With every touch and reaction, Gerard sought to show Marcus exactly how much he

meant to him. No rush. No hurry. Just an incredibly gentle building of emotion. He felt every inch of Marcus's cock as it dragged enticingly in and out of his body, stroking all the right spots until he saw stars behind his closed eyes. He swallowed the words dancing on the tip of his tongue, afraid to shatter the moment. Their deal had been for a weekend of fun, not a lifetime of love.

They seemed to move smoothly against one another for hours before Marcus's breath grew short, the buzzing and burn in his groin becoming too much to resist. "Come with me, Rascal," he breathed, shuddering as he tried to wait.

"Right with you," Gerard replied, a warm glow spreading at the nickname. Pulling Marcus even closer, he let the friction of their bodies push him closer and closer to the edge. "Want to feel you come."

"Christ, you're beautiful," Marcus whispered, his eyes focusing on Gerard's face before they glazed and rolled up as he slid into climax, his body quaking as his smooth thrusts became erratic.

The sentiment combined with watching the bliss wash over Marcus's face pushed Gerard to his own peak. Burying his face into Marcus's neck, he breathed in deeply, surrounding himself with the scent and feeling of his lover as he came. Rocking his hips up in shallow thrusts, he milked Marcus's cock with the force of his own release. His arms and legs closed around Marcus's body, pinning him close, unwilling to relinquish the moment of complete connectedness. Groaning as he collapsed against the man beneath him, Marcus burrowed close, sliding his arms under Gerard and holding him tight – the closest he could come to expressing what he was feeling without speaking.

GERARD pulled Marcus's arm tighter around his chest, sinking back into the sleep warm body curled behind him. Sun streamed through the cracks in the vertical blinds. It was Sunday. The weekend was officially over. He knew that Marcus's guests were scheduled to depart at various times over the next three hours and couldn't bear the thought of having Marcus see him off along

with all his other acquaintances. Turning to face his sleeping lover, he ran a gentle hand down the stubbled cheek before placing a kiss on the parted lips.

Even in sleep, Marcus reached out to him, but Gerard careful unwound himself from the seeking arms, standing at the side of the bed thinking all the things he couldn't get his mouth to say. Funny how easy it was to beg Marcus to fuck him when it was so hard to ask the other man to love him.

Blinking rapidly, he dressed, collected his clothes, stuffed them in his duffle bag and placed it by the door. Stopping at the small desk, he took out a sheet of paper and wrote a short note.

Dear Marcus,

Thanks for a great weekend. It was everything you promised it would be and more. Sorry about the quick departure, but I'm not very good at goodbyes. If you ever want me, you know where to find me.

Gerard

With a last wistful look at Marcus, he placed the note on his pillow and picked up his bag, slinging the strap over his shoulder. The doorman would catch him a cab.

Some time later, the older man stirred slowly, stretching, stopping when the bed felt cool next to him. Confused, Marcus blinked open his eyes and sat up to find himself alone. He looked about and his eyes fell on a piece of paper on the pillow next to him. His chest tightened as he reached for it. He knew what it was. He let it fall to the sheets as he stared out into the sterile, empty room. Aching.

EYES dark and shimmering in the low light, Marcus watched the slim young man at the bar, drinking alone. The older man had seen him there before, a month ago, and seeing him now

helped him make his decision. Now he waited patiently for the object of his thoughts to make a move.

Gerard drained the last of his drink before grabbing his jacket and heading for the exit. His heart just wasn't in being out on the town tonight. The bar had been absolutely dead and every time the door opened, he'd held his breath, hoping that Marcus would walk in.

Watching his target finish his drink and head his way, Marcus knew he had to speak up now – the other man didn't seem to be leaving paired with anyone. "Leaving early tonight?" Marcus commented from his lazy sprawl in the leather armchair, a cigarette between his fingers, just as the other man passed by. His nonchalance didn't reflect his racing pulse and pounding heart.

Gerard jumped slightly at the familiar smoky rasp, his breath catching. Turning, his eyes hit black leather boots, traveling up long legs encased in black denim. Slender fingers surrounded a glass of amber liquid, balanced enticingly next to an impressive ridge. The soft cotton of a well-worn T-shirt stretched over a broad chest that was framed by a dark jacket. When his eyes finally reached a face, the man was looking at him, an inscrutable glow in his green eyes set off by reddish-blond hair. They both knew that Gerard had been surveying his body, and the man obviously knew he wouldn't be found lacking. Gerard smiled, tilting his head provocatively. "Didn't find anything to hold my attention," he parried.

The corner of Marcus's mouth lifted in amusement, and he lifted his glass as if to say *touché*. Neither of them would mention it if his hand was shaking slightly. "Guess you hadn't seen me then, yeah?" he drawled, trying to stay true to character. "Let me buy you a drink," he said in a charming, warm voice. He enjoyed looking over the other man's body now, dressed in tight blue jeans and a loose shirt, artfully half unbuttoned and sleeves turned up. Lovely.

"You aren't easy to spot, skulking in the shadows. It makes me think you have less than honorable intentions." The tilted smile added a playful tone to Gerard's words.

Marcus's smile grew larger and more confident as he caught the teasing hint in the man's voice. "Had to make sure you weren't with someone else, didn't I?" he said as he held dark brown eyes, intensity in his own. He flagged down the waitress. "Sit and have a drink with me," he said again, persuasively.

Gerard shrugged, spinning his leather jacket off his shoulder and onto the back of the nearest chair. He lowered himself to the leather seat, consciously mirroring the older man's pose. "I've sort've been saving myself for someone special." Turning to Brittany as she approached with an empty tray and her usual flirtatious attitude, he smiled brilliantly. "My usual, darlin'."

"On my tab," Marcus added, and the waitress nodded, heading off to the bar. "Someone special. That's a tall order," he said, studying him with a brow raised in amusement.

Gerard grinned. "I'm more than a little discriminating in my taste of bed partners. Thank you for the drink." The verbal banter was fun, and it was easy to slip back into the playful dynamic they had shared, but inside, Gerard was desperately searching for some sign as to why Marcus was here. The man had done strange things to his equilibrium from the first moment they'd met, and he still was reeling from the effects of their weekend together.

Nodding in acknowledgement, Marcus lifted his for a toast. "I have a proposition for you," he said, eyes glittering in the hazy light as he stared at the black-haired and chocolate-eyed man who had been on his mind constantly for the last month.

Rhianne Aile

Rhianne Aile has an unhealthy relationship with her computer, iced tea and chocolate. Growing up, she split her time between Oklahoma and Chicago, making her equally fond of horses, skyscrapers, cowboys, and men in well tailored suits. Facilitating retreats for women and authors keeps her traveling enough to stay happy.

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Wanna Ride?

sonja spencer

HE wore black leather pants.

Painted on.

And nothing else but sweat.

His defined arms raised over his head, Raul gyrated to the music. The sweat ran in rivulets down his back, over the shifting muscles, and disappeared into the waistband that rode low on his trim hips.

As he danced, his bare chest gleamed. The perspiration illuminated the lean lines of his ribcage down to the trail of dark hair that marked his belly and led down, down, down... into black leather.

Cris sat in a corner at the club, letting the low light cloak him in anonymity. Watching the crowd, he tapped his black-painted nails impatiently against the bottle in his hand. Eyes sweeping the dance floor, his gaze focused on one man. In black leather and skin. Cris's brown eyes narrowed as he studied the other man.

Letting the music move him, Raul kept dancing, not caring who rubbed against him or stepped into his space as men and women alike throbbed on the dance floor. The chain bracelets were warm on his wrists, the links about his neck felt damp, and the rings in his nipples reflected the spinning lights that revolved above them. Slinging his long hair out of his face, he tipped his head back, ignoring the world.

Running a hand through the spiky mess of his black hair, Cris stood. The chains and straps on his bondage pants swung as he walked across the floor toward the vision of writhing sex on the dance floor. Stopping just behind the taller man, he dared to reach out. His fingertip traced the path of dripping sweat down to where it disappeared below a dimple peeking above a leather waistband.

Feeling the touch but paying it no mind, Raul kept moving to the music. He'd been danced with, rubbed, fondled, and practically fucked on this dance floor at some time or another. It was part of the reason he came here, for this outlet of sexual energy. He opened his eyes, the black paint around them accentuating their size as he glanced over his shoulder.

As the other man's green eyes opened in the semi-darkness, Cris leaned closer. Lights flashed over his pale skin. "Dance with me."

Turning in time with the beat, Raul shifted his hips and moved right into the other man's personal space, dropping his arms onto his shoulders and pressing their bodies together as he moved.

Cris's hands bracketed slim hips, letting him feel as if he could control the raw power harnessed in that man's lean frame. He felt the blood in his cock pound, and he sucked his lined lower lip into his mouth, gnawing at it as his eyes held the piercing, heated green gaze.

Holding the other man so close aroused Raul even more than the music. Watching him chew his lip didn't help, so Raul leaned down to capture the abused lip between his own, laving it with his tongue before letting go. His body moved gracefully to the music the whole time.

Cris tried to hide his surprise at the bold move, but he couldn't hide the reaction his body had: his cock hardened under the black canvas of his pants. His banded wrist bent delicately as his hand slid along the other man's ribcage, heading for the pierced nipples that he so wanted to touch... to taste...

Raising a brow as the man tentatively touched, a grin pulled at Raul's lips. To give him a hand, Raul reached out, took his hand, put it firmly over one of the rings and pushed it down,

rubbing in a circle. His movement slowed as the music shifted into a lower, darker beat and the lights dimmed even more. Perfect dancefuck music. His other hand slid to the man's ass and pulled, landing his sexy partner's weight right against Raul's groin.

A sharp gasp escaped Cris's swollen lips as he thumped firmly against the taller man's body. He'd never been as thankful for being short as he was at that moment. Dipping his head, he flicked his tongue against the ring on the other side of the stranger's chest even as his fingers continued to pluck at the first nipple.

A pleased rumble was Raul's answer as he gripped the man's ass with one hand, the other sliding into his hair, encouraging the stranger's attention to his piercings. The two men swayed, slowly rutting against one another, the friction ratcheting up the heat between them.

Hooking his tongue in the small hoop, Cris sucked it into his mouth, tugging gently and twisting the metal through the flesh that held it. His hard cock vibrated, jolts shooting through him each time he bumped against the flushed, lean body. The hand that wasn't occupied with tweaking a nipple slid just beneath the waistband of the tight leather, wedging between two very nicely developed globes of ass.

Groaning, Raul pulled the man against him tighter, instigating a constant rubbing instead of a bump and grind. He could feel his cock swelling inside his pants. He grinned as he felt his dance partner's body respond as well, and he shifted his stance wider to allow them more room to writhe against one another. He tipped his chin back, sucking in a breath as the pull on the ring in his nipple shot a buzz through him.

The hand that fiddled with a nipple slid lower, hooking in the front of the other man's trousers. His fingertips brushed against damp heat, and Cris growled around the flesh in his mouth, abandoning playing with the ring to suck earnestly at the nipple itself.

With a groan, Raul hitched himself into the man's hand, pinning it between their bodies, rubbing his erection hard against

it. Sliding his hand back into the man's short black hair, he tugged his head up, eager to taste some skin himself.

Cris met the other man's lips forcefully, letting his tongue push out to play, the metal shaft that pierced it clacking harmlessly against his own teeth. He pushed his hand farther into the trousers, fingers barely wrapping around the pulsing cock inside.

Raul grunted into the man's mouth, pleased by the piercing he discovered there – and even more pleased by the hand closing around him. He slid his tongue into the man's mouth, stroking, circling the bar, and sucking on his lip again. At the same time, he moved his hand from his partner's ass to work it into the front of his pants as well. He took one moment to glance up and see they were near a wall, and then he had the other man pushed against it, much like other couples around the club. The lighting was more than dim enough.

Sprawling against the brick, Cris spread his legs, making room for the long-haired man to press against him. When a wandering hand pushed into his pants, he gasped, sucking harder at the tongue in his mouth, wishing it were another part of the stranger's anatomy.

Giving up the hot mouth to taste and bite at soft skin, Raul slid his lips to the man's neck and started to jack the other man's erection just as he felt the fingers moving on his own cock. He groaned in pleasure against the man's throat and gyrated against him.

Reaching out with his other hand, Cris unsnapped the button and lowered the zipper to the stranger's tight leather pants, groaning aloud as the hot, hard cock fell into his hand. He pulled at it firmly, purring at the sensations caused by a hand on his cock and hot lips on his skin.

Grunting, Raul followed suit, loosening enough buttons to get his hand in and moving more quickly as his tongue and teeth feasted on the pale neck. The sound of the throbbing hum made his cock jump, and he thrust into the fist around him, moving to grasp the man's chin with his fingers for another consuming kiss in the darkness.

Tongues fighting against each other, the kiss was messy and wet and perfection. Cris pumped harder, reveling in the feel of the soft, hot skin sliding over the snub, swollen penis in his hand. At the same time, he bucked back and forth between the wall and his partner's body.

"Fuck..." Raul hissed as he felt his balls draw up. He thrust harder into the fist and leaned over to bite into the neck presented so nicely to him just as he shuddered all over. His own hand gripped the other man's cock tight and firm, and then Raul gave it up, spurting his come in thin streams.

Cris cupped his fist over the end of the other man's thick cock, catching each burst of come and then rubbing it over the tanned, sweat-streaked flesh of his belly. He gulped, biting his lip again as the sweet pain of teeth marking his neck made him explode and mark them both with sticky jizz.

Shivering, Raul licked his lips and the bite marks he'd left behind as he caught the come with his palm and added it to his own, spreading it over his belly and rubbing some back onto the man's own cock, working him through his climax. He set one forearm against the wall to brace himself, leaning his whole body over his dance partner, just breathing as the music continued to swirl around them.

Hot, sweet breath against his face pulled Cris's eyes open, and he looked up to see sparkling green eyes. Still panting from the force of his climax, he smiled instead of speaking. The action would have to suffice, considering the volume of the music.

Raul smiled in return, slowly and carefully tucking the other man away and buttoning his fly, hand smoothing over the sheer shirt covering Cris's chest. Cris returned the favor, barely managing to fit the sizable flesh into the tight trousers. When he finished the job, he patted the bulge fondly.

Chuckling, Raul wiped his sticky hand on the man's shirt, dropped his head to kiss him soundly, then turned and disappeared into the crowd still moving on the dance floor.

Cris straightened and tugged at his shirt, a grin on his face. He left the confines of the club with a satisfied swagger. He'd got what he'd gone for, after all.

Some minutes later, a large chrome motorcycle pulled around the corner of the club, stopping in front of the door where several people waited for cabs. The rider was totally covered in black leather, including a full-face helmet and gloves. The reflective helmet turned to look over the people who stood and talked.

Cris glanced idly at the anonymous cyclist and admired the bike for a moment before turning back to the curb and sucking at the cigarette he held pinched between his fingers.

Pulling off his helmet, Raul had his hair pulled back into a tail, and he grinned toward the man standing on the sidewalk. "Wanna ride?" he offered in a low rumble.

Glancing up, Cris blinked and slowly smirked. He took a final puff before flicking the cigarette to the gutter and grinding it beneath his boot. He stepped toward the sexy stranger, letting the smoke filter through his nostrils, and climbed silently onto the back of the motorcycle, arms wrapping around the leather-clad form of the taller man.

Eyes flashing with promise, Raul pulled his helmet back on, and the biked peeled away from the curb to disappear into the night.

Power Struggle

Anais Morten

“WHY do I always have to do the donkey work for you, no matter which positions we play?”

The intonation is sharp, attacking, and by the look in Jason’s provoking green eyes, Gero can tell the tension that smoldered throughout the day is about to go up in flames.

After the coach finishes the training and dismisses them until the game the next day, Jason and Gero sit on the grass in the little garden in front of Gero’s terrace, drinking beer and discussing soccer politics like so many times before. Gero has invited his friend – who also became his team mate recently – in order to relax the atmosphere. But soon an edgy undertone creeps into their conversation.

And now this question.

“Why?” Gero shrugs, casting intrigued looks over Jason’s face. “It’s all just about tactics. You see any problem? Haven’t you been the one who always stated that personal vanity has to stay back for the sake of the team’s success? Or wasn’t that totally honest? It doesn’t count as soon as you are involved?” Gero knows he’s aiming at Jason’s most sensitive spot.

Jason shifts in his seat, unconsciously licking his lips. “I *never* lie.” Pride and indignation add a metallic color to his voice. “But it’s not fair. Besides, the coach high-handedly made you the captain of the team. He didn’t even allow an open competition to find out which of us might be better suited for the job. You got the leading position from the start, only to avoid the conflict.”

“What?” Gero is astonished at the passion he hears in Jason’s voice. He’s usually not one of those who are constantly muttering about the coach’s decisions. And Gero always thought official titles like “Captain” wouldn’t matter to Jason. “You used to say it’s destructive to criticize the coach as long as we’re winning. And we’ve been winning for weeks, haven’t we?”

“Come on, man, what would you say in my place?” Jason growls, waving away whatever comments Gero had poised on his lips. “I didn’t imagine it would be like that when the club brought you in. I thought it would be a chance to increase my capability and effort due to inspiring concurrence with you, but instead I’m pushed aside to a marginal position and might sit on the bench sooner or later, just because I get no chance to show what I can do.”

Gero never noticed before how dark the vocals are rolling in “concurrence,” threatening like the rumble of thunder.

And again the defiant look, forehead high.

“I did support your transfer to us,” Jason continues. It’s true. They had both been looking forward to playing on the same team, and secretly Gero had even hoped for more. “But we both knew that meant we had to carry out this rivalry in honor,” Jason explains with grim determination.

Gero chews at his lower lip and swallows down the remark that this hadn’t been so clear to him. Ironically, it seems they had been less of opponents to each other as long they were still playing against each other.

“But now the confrontation is cowardly avoided, and I must bite the bullet.” Jason snorts with contempt and cools his heated tongue with a large gulp of beer. “You know I strictly separate private life and career. It has nothing to do with personal envy. I only think the team should be led by the one who is best for the task and, with all friendship and respect, I think that’s me. We have agreed to openly talk about such issues,” he adds justifyingly, and Gero nods. Jason’s honesty is one of the qualities he especially appreciates in his friend.

“If that’s the way you see it, I’m not surprised you simply couldn’t bring yourself to pass the ball over to me today.” Gero grins; Jason frowns and grumbles. Every time Jason was expected to cooperate with Gero, the action went wrong. Jason’s an extraordinarily talented soccer player, and his failure is clearly not the result of a lack of ability but of his inner resistance against his seemingly subordinate role.

“Or...” Jason doesn’t answer, and Gero proceeds further on dangerous terrain, “... has there been another reason for your problems today?” A sneaky whisper enters Gero’s voice; Jason swallows. Gero smiles, his tongue plays behind his teeth, wily crinkles curl around his eyes.

Gero knows he can’t exactly expect an answer other than growling and grumbling. His remark hints at the hard bulge he felt between Jason’s legs during the partner exercises, when he repeatedly, deliberately but discreetly rubbed against him. His own erection blossomed right from the start when the coach assigned Jason as his partner, who at that point lay on his back, panting fast and heavy, still exhausted from the hard jogging training.

It was an integral part of the coach’s innovative methods to encourage the team mates to help each other with the stretching exercises as well as to apply mutual massages for muscle relaxation. Besides the physical aspects, the coach expects it to facilitate the bonding of the team, and today he certainly had chosen Gero and Jason as partners for each other intentionally, after becoming aware of the aggressive undercurrents in their interaction.

“Ow!” Jason complained because Gero’s hard knee hit his inner thigh as he knelt down between Jason’s legs, getting in the starting position for some gymnastics to increase general flexibility.

“Spread your legs wider,” Gero admonished, and in an instant he saw flying red spill all over Jason’s cheeks, and his eyes blinked with awkwardness.

Long before Gero’s brain could grasp the meaning of this reaction, his cock had its own interpretation ready and stretched out, curious for more.

During each of the following exercises – and thankfully there was a whole long series of them – Gero took more and more advantage of his position. Having Jason’s body before him and almost beneath him like this allowed him to lightly stroke Jason’s thighs, press his abdomen close to Jason’s... Jason’s scowl deepened when this intrusive behavior got approval, the coach being quite content with Gero’s enthusiasm for the partner gymnastics after all the quarrelling during the game.

There was no way that Jason could have missed the intent behind his teasing, and his increasingly bad temper had much to do with Gero’s shameless delight while he touched and cuddled Jason. Before the change of positions was announced, Jason managed to get away under a transparent pretext, something along the lines of having to make an urgent call.

Gero almost didn’t dare hope that Jason would accept his invitation after that. But he simply had to try. Since he had changed from his old club to Jason’s, he had waited for more signs that Jason’s feelings for him exceeded mere friendship, signs which had been relatively frequent *before*, and a hard cock seemed to be a reasonably reliable hint.

When he asked Jason to join him for a beer, Jason just murmured, “Why?”

“We should talk it all out,” Gero said awkwardly. Jason grunted agreement. But obviously he had a different topic in mind than Gero...

Jason is clearly not in the mood to comment upon Gero’s remark now.

Instead, he snaps, “Who wants *you* as captain? People here know me. I’ve played for this club since youth B-league, in good times and bad, while you went from team to team abroad, only looking for whichever club was willing to pay you best! Do you believe the people here would think it’s okay that the coach chose a stranger as captain and prefers you to me, who they know and respect?”

Silently, Gero partially agrees with him, but Jason’s arrogance is beginning to rub him the wrong way. “You’re

forgetting that soccer games aren't decided by democratic elections, Jason," Gero replies matter-of-factly. "The wishes of the people don't matter, and if you ask me, that's fine, especially if you look at the delusional psychotic they elected for president."

He hears the sharp intake of breath and knows Jason takes the last remark as a comparison. It wasn't meant that way, but that doesn't matter anymore now. Gero's blood slowly starts to boil. "It's not your popularity with the masses that makes a good soccer player, but speed, technique, intelligence, and strength."

"I'm faster than you and my dribbling is better."

"And I'm stronger than you."

"Ahhh – is that so?"

"May I suggest we don't let people vote to decide that question, but settle this between ourselves?"

"And how, pray tell?"

"With a fair wrestling match."

He is ridden by the devil to suggest it. But his desire to feel Jason pressed up against him once more, to roll over the ground with him, and the increasing want to try his strength and fighting skills with Jason, tempts him to challenge the other man.

"So, you want to fight?" Jason stands up and begins to rid himself of his T-shirt.

"Okay!"

"Might as well take off the belts, too," Gero says, facing a half-naked Jason with complete nonchalance. "You could cut yourself with the buckle."

Jason shrugs as he removes his belt. He's eager to put the arrogant captain in his place once and for all.

"Wrestling only," Gero reminds him. "No kickboxing. No knife fighting. No running amok..." he adds slightly worried, a little intimidated by the murderous look on Jason's face. A memory flickers in his mind, standing alone against a schoolyard bully, 'Biting and kicking don't count!'

A blue-black glance slides over Jason's well-built body. Not that he hasn't seen him stripped to the waist before, but now, tensed in anticipation, his swelling pectorals rising and falling with the rhythm of his fast and deep breathing, skin flexing above the clearly defined six pack, Jason is more beautiful than any sculpture Gero has ever seen.

Gero tears his eyes away from him, tries to lock up the secret admirer and set free the warrior in him. Holy shit, this nonsense was his idea! Now there's no chickening out without serious damage to his honor.

Gero undoes his own belt, draws in a breath, and then sends a silent signal of readiness. At once, Jason flings himself onto him.

Shit, Gero thinks as the breath is knocked from his chest, the man has experience with punches and a store of dirty tricks. His grip hurts right from the start as he bends Gero's arms to positions his joints refuse to accept, digging his fingernails into Gero's skin so painfully that a high-pitched grunt escapes his lips.

Jason's aggressive onslaught takes Gero by surprise, but he defends himself as best he can, wiggling like a snake. Both end up clinging to each other in a fierce clutch stronger than steel, intertwined like an inextricable knot.

Jason's sweat mixes with Gero's, fusing them together; Gero clings to Jason like someone drowning, and they stumble across the grass in a zigzag pattern like drunken Siamese twins until they fall. Gero knows seconds before it happens that Jason will bear down upon him far too hard, and then abstract paintings shimmer in front of his eyes until a vibrating black screen blinds him.

Gero successfully remembers how to breathe, but finds himself in a position less than preferred during a wrestling match, flat on his stomach with Jason hovering above him. His arm is wrenched painfully behind his back, and Jason's hand clasps around his throat. Jason's hand glides up to Gero's chin, then pulls the other man's head back roughly, shoving his arm higher up his back till he's arching like an Olympic gymnast.

Jason bends down, his lips slightly stirring Gero's hair.

“Now... Captain,” Jason says, sarcasm dripping from his voice. “What do you think I should do with you now?”

Jason’s lips are tickling his earlobes. Gero sighs and lets his shoulders sink in what Jason thinks is capitulation.

Enjoying the fruits of his victory, Jason feels too secure and pays little attention to his captive’s now-relaxed posture. The second Jason lowers his defenses, Gero smiles to himself. He can always rely on Jason to react impulsively, never seeing through Gero’s much more calculating mind.

Gero shoots up, bursting out of Jason’s grip.

“No need to worry about that,” he hisses, out of breath. “That’s a waste of time, because you will lose!”

He’s above Jason now, wrapping his arm tightly around his neck, taking him into a clinch hold and sending him in a throw that without question would have sent Jason to the ground, but one accurately placed blow hurls Gero back in circles.

Gero squirms and stares at Jason with shock-wide eyes. The next blow crashes against his ribs and Gero staggers back, finally caught against the fence like a fly in a spider’s net.

It’s unfair, but Jason doesn’t look like he’s willing to negotiate the rules any longer at this point.

And suddenly Gero understands the genesis of Jason’s seemingly senseless violence towards him. If Jason was stronger than Gero, their fight would have been Jason’s chance to deal with his frustration and get over it, to let out his rage and disappointment at being robbed of the leading position on the team. It’s finally clear why Jason has resisted every attempt at flirtation since Gero joined his team, even though Jason’s desire for Gero was visible to anyone familiar with the body language of intimacy. Of course Jason must fight his feelings of being drawn to Gero as long as he considers him a rival to his career.

Gero almost laughs, but it turns into a tortured cry after Jason’s next attack.

Supposedly, Gero is an ambitious bastard who chooses even his private contacts by measuring up their usefulness for his

career, while Jason is known as the simple soul to whom friends mean more than success. But now it's Jason who is unable to differentiate between private life and career. That is all more than obvious, but he hadn't expected it from Jason of all people, and therefore had been blind to it up to this moment.

Unfortunately, enlightenment arrives somewhat too late. And it's rather useless to contemplate complicated psychological complexities while well-aimed blows hail down on him.

He is stronger than Jason. And that's the problem, because if Jason can't win by regular means, there's no doubt he'll use whatever means he can, striking in the heat of the moment.

Gero reviews his options.

He can't defeat Jason by playing fair when Jason ignores the rules, but he's not prepared to let the fight get out of control, to strike back with the same violence and risk hurting Jason severely.

Gero dodges away from a punch aimed at his chin.

Is he willing to let Jason win?

That might be a good idea. There's a lot less risk in that – and again Gero ducks under a fist. His friend would calm down, would probably be satisfied and able to overcome his inner tensions and contradictions.

Gero locks eyes with Jason. He sees a green-eyed wolf, snarling and struggling for first place in the order of ranks. An alpha male, demanding submission from his opponent – from Gero.

Let *him* win?

NO.

Not on your fucking life.

Gero's never been a violent man. But there's a primal instinct lurking within him that comes to the fore.

He can't – won't – give in to Jason.

Gero dances aside to avoid taking another hit, but realizes this tactic won't help him much longer. His patience is slowly

fading, and he's quickly running out of ideas to peacefully diffuse the volatile situation.

Perhaps...

Gero falls down. Jason's own momentum makes him stumble and he lands on top of Gero. He grabs Gero's wrists and pulls them down to the ground. His face is inches away from Gero's, the eyes throwing green-gold sparks of triumph.

Gero's never seen his friend's face so furious and wild, his rugged features expressing hatred, power, and euphoria, and God, he's beautiful...

"Now, surrender, Ge...hmmmpf..."

Gero's tongue in his mouth ruins his victory speech. Gero's head shoots up, driving his tongue between Jason's lips and he sucks, licks... ahhh... Jason tastes salty and sharp from the fight, he could poison himself with an oral overdose of testosterone from that kiss, and Gero nearly forgets his plan, because he's finally kissing Jason. He's kissing Jason... Jason... Jason....

Thankfully, his brain enters the wicked stage again, like Judas thinking of betrayal while kissing. He fumbles for one of the belts – he has made sure his fall went in the right direction, just near the heap of clothes.

Jason will not beat any records with his reaction time. Frozen in shock by Gero's kiss for several seconds, now he jumps as if bitten by a snake, and Gero catches him unaware, hurling him down and catapulting himself over him.

While sliding forward, he raises Jason's arms over his head and wraps the belt tightly around them, grateful that the "little book of knots" comes in handy.

Jason rants and rages now, but with his hands bound, it's no real fight.

Gero finds the other belt – and okay, that a thin tree stands nearby is pure luck, but you have to be lucky sometimes – Gero throws one end of the belt around the tree and binds Jason's hands to it.

Jason kicks and writhes into exhaustion until the slim leather cuts his wrists, until the veins on his biceps swell to bursting and his hair clings in strands on his wet face.

Jason collapses, tired, worn out, panting helplessly.

“Do that again,” Gero purrs, very approvingly. “It’s nice to watch.”

“Untie me, you sick bastard! You asshole! Let me go! That’s unfair! That’s deprivation of personal liberty!”

“I would classify it as self-defense.” Gero strokes his bruises accusingly and pats gingerly at his hurting ribs where Jason’s fist hit like a comet.

“Fuck! Let me free!”

“I would consider the first option,” Gero muses out loud, causing another fierce struggle from Jason. The blonde man squirms and writhes. Once he sees the look of cool amusement on Gero’s face, he forces himself not to move.

Jason would be damned if he’d give that damn bastard something else to get hot and bothered over.

His eyes are haunted like the eyes of a wild animal caught in a trap, but Jason’s desperately trying to control his temper. Gero watches, fascinated, at how Jason’s eyes seem to change their color with the emotional roller coaster, turning from raging hatred to shame for the suffered defeat, from panic to resignation, from defiance to humiliation.

“Gero, please. Untie me,” Jason pleads softly with a rough and breaking voice.

Gero looks at him like a predator sizing up potential prey.

Jason’s body shivers from pent-up frustration, shaking from boiling rage like the lid of a pot clattering before the heated water spills over in founts.

He shuts his eyes, and Gero bets he’s focusing on meditation techniques like before the penalty kick in a sudden-death playoff after overtime, to calm himself and slow down his heart rate.

Gero has never seen anything in his entire life that compares to the glorious sight of this strong, proud man bound.

A captured hero. The pathetic suffering of a noble chief at the stake.

Gero approaches him cautiously, watching for signs of danger. He sees Jason tense up even more as if preparing for a last attack.

“Kick me and you’ll pay for it,” he warns, his voice low and cold. “I don’t think you need me to explain that you’re at my mercy now. One stupid move and I’ll whip you.”

Jason growls, clinging to some last shreds of rebellion, but they both know it’s an empty threat. Gero crouches between his legs, like during the partner gymnastics, now confident that Jason will not try anything. He leans over him.

It takes every ounce of willpower Jason has to hold himself down, trying to avoid Gero’s searing gaze.

Gero reaches out, touching his cheek gently. “Jason. You *know* that I know.”

Jason tries to look as if he hasn’t a clue what Gero is talking about. But Gero can see the truth in the lambent green orbs. He even knows that Jason knows he cannot deceive him.

“God, Jason, you were so hard I’d probably have felt it through plate armor.” He bows down a little closer and continues in a low, seductive murmur, “And so was I. You know that, too. Isn’t it foolish to deny that to each other?”

Jason doesn’t answer. In fact, he doesn’t react at all. He even seems to have forgotten his situation and his urge to escape, lying perfectly still and calm.

“I’m not a beginner, Jason,” Gero goes on, stroking him lightly, tantalizing the other man’s senses. “I’ve seen the heat in your eyes when you look at me and think no one else is watching. I know that look, Jason. I’ve been with enough men to know what it means.”

Gero leans down for a kiss, but Jason flinches away, wrenching his head to the side. Gero takes hold of his face with both hands, cradling it with a gentle force that will not be denied.

“Look at me and tell me it’s not true. I hope I don’t have to remind you that you *never* lie.”

Jason gives a desperate sigh – Gero never knew such a simple sound could contain so great a confession – and he smiles at Jason with fondness.

Gero slowly starts to kiss him again, tenderly and playfully exploring Jason’s mouth. Jason doesn’t do much in the way of returning the kiss, but there’s little resistance. Only when Gero begins to kiss his way down Jason’s throat, following the curved line of his collarbones to his shoulders, leaving a trace of wet kiss-steps and little sizzling spots where he sucked until Jason’s blood rose to the surface, Jason finally interrupts him with a choked voice.

“Stop it... Please.”

Gero gazes at his friend’s face and is filled with compassion as he sees the battlefield of contradictory feelings that war with each other. It’s more than indecision; Jason is literally torn apart inside. Minutes ago, he was insane with rage, but it was a rage partly born of suppressed desire, and now the feelings bait and switch like a disoriented magician who can’t make up his mind in which shape to appear.

He doesn’t quite stop stroking Jason, massaging his sides with deft hands, already sure - whether Jason’s mind likes it or not - that Jason’s body is joyfully joining the game.

“Gero, perhaps it’s usual for *you* to feel this way, but for me...”

“Really?” Gero asks quietly, struck by the sheer helplessness in Jason’s eyes. “Never once?” His voice is full of affection and respect and wonder, and maybe it’s the fact that Gero doesn’t make light of his inexperience that finally convinces Jason to let him continue his kissing research mission once more.

Gero acquaints himself with the parts of Jason's skin he missed during his first descent, making sure not to ignore a single inch; Jason trembles and sighs from the intensity, his former anger and rage melting quickly into lust like a glacier into a roaring waterfall.

Jason hisses quietly as Gero opens his jeans and pulls them down, freeing an aching hard cock. His cock certainly *doesn't* lie, Gero thinks to himself, soft eyes swallowing the length and breadth of Jason's erection. And Gero goes down, licking and sucking, tasting all of Jason's musky male flavors.

Jason groans in desperate need. "Please, Gero. Untie me," he begs, as if remembering his situation for the first time. "I want to touch you."

Gero's mouth slowly travels upwards, celebrating a short reunion with Jason's navel and nipples.

The two men lock passion-filled eyes.

"Only if you really want me to, Jason," Gero whispers, lying stretched out on top of Jason, full of urgency and hunger. "But, please, Jason, let me have you like this..."

Pulsing desire nearly strangles him, lust glowing in his ocean-dark eyes as the image of a bound and naked Jason is forever seared into his mind.

His voice is ragged and husky. "Oh God, Jason, it turns me on to see you like this, tied down and naked in front of me."

Jason lowers his lashes. Gero senses shame, but no outrage. His body language reveals awkwardness – the virginal flush, the way he averts his eyes from Gero's – and the contrast between these gestures of shyness and innocence and the rough beauty of his manly face is thrilling.

Gero's desire is so powerful it's almost frightening. A part of Jason wants to deny his request, but the refusal hovers there, just on the threshold of his lips, unwilling to formulate the words under Gero's intense stare. Jason opens his mouth, shuts it, and tries again, takes another go, but after several failed attempts the battle within is over.

Jason returns Gero's demanding gaze with a mixture of fear and trust.

Surrender has never had such a beautiful face before.

Interesting, Gero thinks to himself in the span of a few moments, how practical matters always reinsert themselves ruthlessly into romantic situations.

"Hang on a minute, love," Gero whispers, and disappears into the house, to rummage through drawers and return with a bottle of lube.

Very funny, Jason thinks with a certain wry irony, as if he had any other choice.

With Gero no longer covering him, that undeniable heat no longer clouding his senses, Jason's fears and doubts once again rise to the fore, though intrinsically he knows the arguments against his feelings are weak.

Still, what his body wants, he doesn't quite understand.

He does desire Gero. He has for a very long time, it seems, but...

But the panicked look in his eyes will not melt away so easily and by the time Gero returns from his quest, he realizes what happened.

Gero's glad he left him tied up, otherwise the man would have vanished on him. Isn't it possible to leave the boy alone for even a minute?

"Gero – untie me," Jason begins again, and can't he ask anything else? "I'm just not ready for this. I can't. I can't."

Shit, Gero curses silently, having managed to get so far only to watch it all unravel right before his eyes and having to begin again like some fucking game of dice.

"Jason." and Gero covers him again, hunting for the rest of his patience which has disappeared the moment his libido took over practically every rational thinking process. "You have thought of it before. You know you want to try. Why not now?"

Gero takes up his caresses again, first with gentle persuasion and then with tender demand. He prays he'll do it right and not blow it all with a mistake; do it well, not too fast or too slow.

Never has he wanted anyone as much as he wants this rough, golden-haired man laid out before him like a feast. Somehow he has to make Jason want him just as much or else it will all be for nothing and he will feel like a complete flop for the rest of his life. What use is it to have successfully picked up every single chance for a goal when you fail in the most important moment of your life?

Gero's hands are all over Jason, and he's whispering soothing words in his ear, "I'll go slowly, Jason, don't be afraid. I want you, Jason, please..."

Ironically it's Gero who's pleading and begging a tied-up man, but he doesn't give a damn as long as it works.

After a while, he feels Jason relax.

Eyes meet again, and Gero is relieved beyond imagination, because he doubts he'd have the discipline to release Jason at this stage, even if he insisted, and he really doesn't want to think too long on that scenario.

But he wants to hear Jason confess. "Say the words."

And Jason does, shaking from desire. "I want you, Gero," he groans, the green eyes heavily lidded with uncontrollable need.

The floodgates open and there's no turning the tide.

"Get on your hands and knees," Gero orders.

Jason maneuvers into the required position and both are thankful the restraints have enough give for this to work.

Jason's well-muscled buttocks are a temptation Gero cannot resist, and he strokes the smooth skin while using a lubed finger to lightly probe the cleft.

A faint cry from Jason, muscles already clenching.

God, Jason's so damn tight, to prepare him means work. Gero uses his arm to wipe the sweat off his forehead

Okay, he's done this before, he knows what to do; it shouldn't be an insurmountable handicap after all the trials and tribulations he's overcome in the last half an hour, and since Jason said he's a virgin, what did he expect? If only he wasn't so nervous, like some candidate for exam who's forgotten all he's ever learned.

Gero goes slowly, opening Jason up to new sensations, stroking and soothing him, whispering words to inflame and incite. With each gasp from the man beneath him, he pauses, allowing Jason to adapt and adjust.

He stretches him expertly, carefully, one finger only, murmuring, "Relax, Jason. Feel me inside you, like this, yes, come on..."

Jason obviously has other ideas. Craning his head over his shoulder, he snarls at Gero, "I'm not a nag shying or running wild, mate! Can't you just shut up and do it?" If Jason was a horse, he could be ridden a hell of a lot easier, Gero thinks, then he ceases to think at all as the image of giving Jason what he's asking for nearly undoes him.

"Is that what you really want, Jason?"

"Yeah, Gero, just do it..."

There is no way to enter Jason without hurting him, at least at first, in spite of the preparation and the generous amount of lube he's used to slick himself up and to coat Jason's entrance.

He has to push hard to force Jason open and get in just a few inches. The sensation of tight heat is overwhelming. Though he doesn't want to hurt Jason, he can't help moaning a deep shuddering breath of pleasure even as he feels Jason twitching with pain beneath him, quietly whimpering.

Hands gripping Jason's waist tightly, he waits, allowing Jason to accustom himself to the fullness.

Jason moans, the outer ring muscle contracting, unsure about this invasion. He relaxes, taking in deep breaths as Gero slowly breaches him.

Slowly and evenly, as much for his own benefit as for Jason's, Gero begins a steady rhythm with strong but not brutal thrusts, his hand stroking Jason's cock as he trembles beneath him.

Gero can sense the moment of Jason's surrender.

A sudden softness and pliability washes through Jason's body as if his muscles and nerves, every fiber of his being were connected to Gero's central nervous system, no longer obedient to Jason's will, but Gero's. He feels totally in control of Jason and a rush of lust for power floods his veins, more intoxicating than any drug Gero has ever sampled.

Yes, he will possess Jason, in every way possible – heart, mind, spirit, just as he possesses his body now. He will have him, claim him...

He looks down again at Jason, bound to him, begging with his sighs and hot whispers, and lust flickers within him like tongues of flame. But there is no thought of abusing his power. He needs to please Jason, to hold him, to love him, to make him want it, want it again, and want it forever and ever again.

He strikes Jason's sweet spot over and over, urged on by Jason's deep-throated moans of pleasure. At the same time, he strokes his cock with calculated pressure, making Jason last, longing, starving, until every single cell in Jason's body screams for orgasm and he's begging, not only with passion-ragged words, but with his whole body, offering himself to Gero completely, feverishly shaking with need.

Only then does Gero show mercy, finishing him with one last forceful surge, and Jason is gone, crying out and coming so hard he shoots hot onto Gero's hand and on the grass below him, whispering Gero's name again and again until the last splashes and drops are spent.

Now it's suddenly so easy to bend him even further, spread his legs wider, fuck him deeper.

"Down."

Gero's hard hand shoves his face down in the grass, holding him fast. He has the perfect angle to fuck Jason practically into the ground, and there's nothing Jason can do about it.

Only one thought, one want left – to fuck Jason, fuck him, fuck him in his tight ass, fuck his hot clenching hole... take him, take him, take him...

The force of Gero's orgasm causes him to cry out from the sheer magnitude of sensation that tosses him about. He comes hard and deep in Jason's body, collapsing on him and bearing him down with his weight.

Spent and almost drained, Gero starts to rise from Jason's back.

"Stay," whispers Jason.

Gero hesitates, unbelieving.

"I like to feel you on me," Jason says simply, and as Gero covers him with his body again, he sighs, satisfied, like a child rocked into sleep.

THE game is going on in full action, and so far Jason is doing well, the coach admits to himself. The relief changes to concern and tension again as he watches with baited breath how Jason tricks one opponent after the other, storming forward on the left wing, while Gero keeps pace in the center field, intelligently making use of the gaps in the other team's defense.

Jason passes by his attackers elegantly, dancing with acrobatic skill. The whole stadium is death-silent with awe, everybody's attention is utterly absorbed by Jason's incredible performance. He sends the ball... the cross shoot comes in, following an ideal line, the exact segment of a circle... The coach's lower jaw simply drops. Is that the same Jason who couldn't get one single cross shoot right only yesterday? The ball and Gero meet at the perfect point, he barely does more than hold his foot out... and goal!

The two men fly toward each other, and with a big jump, Gero flings himself onto Jason, and they roll on the grass, tightly

hugging each other until they stop with Gero lying on top of Jason, leaning down like for a kiss.

What the hell?

The coach raises an eyebrow. The last thing he sees are Jason's shining eyes looking up at Gero before other team mates throw themselves onto the pair and one of the joy-celebrations akin to mass copulations that drive morally strict soccer fans into indignation begins.

The coach shakes his head. *Soccer stars*. One never knows what's going on in their twisted little heads. He hadn't considered Jason a "diva" but... well, soccer stars, you know?

Moody as hell.

Anais Morten

Anais Morten is a teacher of physical education and loves mountaineering and traveling. She's German, married and the mother of two children. Her publishing experiences include various contributions in gay and queer anthologies.

Special Offer

Clare London

THE supermarket was almost deserted, quiet except for the squeaky background sound of piped-in music, nagging at the occasional shopper's ears with its continuous stream of generic pop. The tired announcement about the special offer on aisle four echoed against the cool, white walls with a nasal twang. One of the checkout girls was filing her nails, another one glanced up at the clock by the exit and yawned loudly. Only another half hour to go until the store closed for the night.

Mitch Matheson hitched up the loose waistband of his sweats and swore under his breath. The wheels of his cart had skidded sideways again, crashing it into the shelves of rice and pasta. Like it had bounced into dairy products – like it had careened crookedly into cooked meats. *It's not being paranoid*, he thought, gritting his teeth, *when things really are out to get you*.

He took a swig from his bottle of soda, sealed it and dropped it back in the cart. Then he pushed his loose blond ponytail back over his shoulder with an irritated gesture. He'd not taken the time to braid it or tie it neatly, just twisted it back with an old tie, in a rush to get out to the supermarket and back again with the minimum hassle. The same way he hadn't really bothered with dressing carefully, just throwing on a sleeveless vest and sweats. He frowned down at the vest – this one had shrunk again in the wash and now stretched tightly across his broad chest.

He jerked it down over his lean, muscled stomach, but it just rolled back up, exposing the thin band of naked skin around his navel. He grunted. Christ, he *hated* shopping! Or, to be strictly accurate, he hated rebellious carts; he hated running out of

a score of stuff, so that he had to go late shopping on a Saturday night like this; he hated the way the store moved the ketchup to a different place every week; he hated the washing powder box squashing his loaf of fresh bread; he hated...

Well, basically, he hated not having a date on Saturday night. How the fuck had *that* happened? His mood had been resentful when he set out, and it wasn't improving any time soon.

He didn't see the other cart until it spun an equally awkward path around the corner of the aisle and crashed into his. Its owner hurried around the corner, grabbing out to catch it.

"What the fuck?"

The two shoppers glared at each other, ready for the necessary abuse, but then they blinked and stared again, in an almost comical double-take.

"Looks like you drive a cart with the same carelessness you show your social life," growled the new arrival. He was as tall as Mitch, but dark-haired and slimmer. He was frowning, but that didn't hide the fact he was good-looking. He'd pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes. They were a striking shade of brown, flecked with hazel where they reflected the fluorescent lights of the store. He wore loose pants, the same as Mitch, and a close-fitting T-shirt that barely covered the well-developed lines of his torso.

"At least I can keep my eyes and my hands on the cart." Mitch shrugged, also frowning. The pair of them looked like they were squaring up for a confrontation. Obviously they both had the same opinion of grocery shopping on Saturday night.

They stared a moment longer. They sighed.

"Mitch," acknowledged the dark-haired man, finally, though a little grudgingly.

"Will," replied Mitch, with a return nod of his head. "You shop here often?"

Will Anders didn't seem to think he needed to dignify that cliché with a response. Instead, he pushed his cart to a stop and moved to Mitch's side of the aisle, though the last thing he wanted tonight was to make small talk with a guy he hardly knew except

as a neighbor from the next apartment down the hallway. He wanted in and out of this store as fast as was practical.

If it hadn't been for his refrigerator failing while he was out at work, he'd have had very different plans for the evening. But he'd come home to a puddle of liquid mess on the kitchen floor, and when he'd opened the door to salvage what he could, a couple of unidentified pots gave off a stench that might have been stagnating since Neanderthal times. He'd judged it wise to come out to restock. Now he'd chased his damned cart all the way past the canned goods and suffered scraped shins at least twice. No, pleasantries were the last things on his mind.

"No party for you tonight then?"

Mitch shrugged in reply. "It happens."

Will raised his eyebrows. He didn't know the guy much more than to say 'hi' on the stairs, but since Mitch had moved in over six months ago, Will couldn't remember a single weekend when there hadn't been a party going on at the blond man's apartment or when Mitch hadn't been crashing in and out of the block on his way to and from someone else's. He was a rabid fun-lover. Will peered at him, surreptitiously.

There were always plenty of guys at these parties too, and some pretty obvious sexual activity going on. The walls were paper thin in their apartment block, and Mitch had a loud and infectious laugh. He didn't keep his voice down at night, either. Will could recall several graphic and enthusiastic commentaries on the performance of anyone who stayed over. He peered at Mitch again, his eyes running down his neighbor's well-muscled body. He bit his lip, feeling a little warmer than he had before. The guy was *hot*, of course. That was something Will couldn't *help* but notice.

Mitch peered back at the other man. Was that a smirk he could see on his face? "So what about you? On your own tonight?"

Will grimaced. "Obviously." His shrug in return was slow and grudging. "Like you said, it happens."

Mitch bit back a grin. He had a pretty busy life of his own usually, but he still found time to be intrigued by the guy next door. Since Mitch had moved in, Will had nodded to him a couple of times, though they never seemed to meet up for long enough to take the conversation any further.

The first day he'd arrived, Will had given him some help with some boxes, and so had the cute blond man who'd been hanging on Will's every word. Then, when Mitch had knocked on Will's door a couple of days later to ask something about getting the antiquated heating system to work, he'd seen another young man lying casually on Will's sofa, flicking through the TV channels while Mitch and Will exchanged information at the door. This guy had been brunette. Then there'd been the tall, slim redhead, the stocky, bodybuilding guy with the sharp haircut, the pale, skinny guy with the striking Celtic design tattoos...

Mitch had rarely seen his neighbor with the same guy twice. And though he never heard much going on in Will's apartment, there was no mistaking the way he acted around his dates. Will always had a hand hovering possessively at their ass; always had fingers stroking at the small of their back, so lightly you might think you'd imagined it. But Mitch didn't mistake that kind of thing.

No, his neighbor was a definite guy magnet. Mitch ran a quick but searching glance over the dark-haired man opposite, his heartbeat quickening. He could see why, of course. Will was *hot*—Mitch had seen that from day one. Hell, he'd been *watching* that from day one.

Will coughed. He looked pointedly at the shelf just beyond Mitch's right ear.

"You're after the whole wheat spaghetti?" asked Mitch, eyes widening with assumed innocence. The stacks of pasta were just above his head, the red writing of its packaging peeking around from behind his blond head.

"Yes," said Will.

Mitch pursed his lips. Will's gaze flickered over his mouth as he did so. "A healthy eater, right?"

“Right.” Will found himself drawn to the slow, sensual drawl of Mitch’s voice. “Obviously.”

Just as obviously, Mitch didn’t move out of his way. It looked like he was being deliberately obstructive. He stared back at the dark-haired man, a smile teasing at the edges of his mouth.

With an exaggerated sigh, Will stretched up and across the other man, his body leaning into the curve of Mitch’s upper body; his hand reaching past Mitch’s cheek towards the shelf. He could see the dark shadows where Mitch’s throat curved into his shoulder. Short, blond hairs bristled where the hairline ran around to the nape of his neck. Mitch smelled of musk and raspberry soda, a combination that Will wouldn’t have imagined being sexy, but somehow worked on Mitch.

Mitch was watching too, watching the muscles flexing on Will’s upper arm; watching the dark, stray hairs of his armpit, just visible under his T-shirt sleeve; watching the sinewy movement of his torso, tight against the thin fabric. Will smelled of a hot, fresh shower.

Mitch’s belly tightened with an excitement he knew well.

He moved his head slightly, as if by accident; as if he were shaking a loose hair from his eyes. His hot breath brushed against the bare skin of Will’s inner arm.

Will shivered, almost imperceptibly. He was vividly aware of Mitch’s every movement, as if the man had deliberately touched him – *stroked* him. And that was just how Will liked to be touched. “You after this brand as well, Matheson?” he murmured, wryly.

Mitch snorted and shook his head. “Not my type, Anders.”

Will pulled his arm back down, dropping the packet into his cart. “So what is?”

Mitch tilted his head a little to the side. Will watched the way some locks of his hair slipped out of the tie and fell over his ear, nudging at his long, pale neck. “My type?”

“Uh huh.”

“Of pasta?”

The sudden smile on Will’s face was unexpected. Mitch also found it enchanting. “Whatever.”

Mitch smiled, too. “My type. Well, I’m pretty inclusive, you know.”

Will raised his eyebrows. “I guessed that. You’re that kind of guy.”

Mitch grinned more broadly. “A guy who likes a lot of pasta?”

Will laughed softly. “Of course.”

They both grinned at each other, their eyes suddenly rather bright. The grin seemed to answer whatever the question had been.

“So, it’s Saturday night,” Mitch said, slowly and thoughtfully. “And no other company. Maybe we need something to keep us occupied.”

Will’s eyes narrowed. “You want to browse around here with me for a while?”

Mitch’s shoulders lifted in a shrug; his throat tightened as he swallowed. “Sure.”

Will nodded. He felt goose bumps on his skin that had nothing to do with the store’s air conditioning. They pushed off down the aisle again, their carts nudging at each other.

MITCH paused by the frozen meat cabinet. “Chops or steaks? I can never choose.”

Will grimaced. “Not my problem. I don’t eat meat, Mitch.” His lips felt dry suddenly, his tongue flickered out to wet them.

Mitch’s gaze followed the swift, moist movement. “Yeah? And I’d have guessed your tastes were pretty carnivorous.”

Will's eyes were dark, glinting. "Maybe you have no idea of my tastes."

Mitch stared back, unfazed. "Maybe. I just feel that there's nothing as satisfying as sinking your teeth into a thick, succulent steak. Biting in, sucking the juices." He smiled, turning slowly to face the cabinet again and leaning forward over it. He bent in deep, reaching to the back of it. "But then, each to their own." He turned over a couple of the packets and shivered. "Damned cold here."

Will was watching Mitch's body carefully. His vest rode up his back as he stretched, the thin material showing the knobs of his spine; the shadowed lines of his ribs. Will wondered what that taut flesh might feel like; *taste* like.

He stepped up close behind him, leaving their carts locked together, creating a barrier between them and the rest of the aisle. Mitch's body was warm and strong, and Will savored the contrast against the chill of the cabinet. His proximity pushed Mitch further and very firmly up against the side of the unit. The blond man's head was still bent forward, down into the frosty compartments.

Mitch gasped.

"Still cold?" asked Will, conversationally. He was pressed up against Mitch's back, holding him in place, though never completely trapping him.

"Warm," Mitch grunted. "In places." His lithe arms gripped against the edge of the cabinet.

Will smiled, slowly. And then he slid his hand up under the edge of Mitch's vest, sucking in a breath as he touched the skin that had been teasing his view. He waited for Mitch to pull away or protest, but nothing like that occurred. He watched the shape of his fingers under the fabric, running up the center of Mitch's back; tracing the muscles along his ribcage. The flesh moved under Will's fingers, tightening with goose bumps from the caress. Will could imagine Mitch's nipples were erect by now – sharp, sensitive little nubs, caught between the stimulation of Will's warm hands

and the chill of the air from the cabinet. His fingertips ached with a sudden desire to find out for sure.

Mitch gave a soft moan. “Or there’s always the option of a rack of ribs,” he gasped.

Will laughed, very quietly. “There is, indeed,” he murmured. His own breath was getting shallow and his body tensed up. His groin ached, his cock swelling inside his pants. He licked his lips again. Touching Mitch was very stimulating. “That can be just as juicy, just as succulent.”

Mitch moaned again, so softly it was like a hiccup. His hips shuddered against the cabinet. Will smirked. He slid his hand back out from under the vest and took a step away from Mitch’s bent body.

And moved on down the aisle.

WILL paused at the fruit and vegetables display, apparently undecided, hands full of fruit. “Plums or apples?”

Mitch stopped beside him, his cart’s wheels squeaking to a halt. “You need plenty of fiber, Anders. Need to keep up that impressive physique.” His glance ran over Will’s body again, taking in the grace and athleticism of his limbs. Maybe not a product of the gym as Mitch himself was, but he obviously kept himself fit.

Mitch recalled the sight of Will’s strong, possessive hand on the shoulder of a date; the way he leant easily against his open doorway to talk to Mitch, knowing that Mitch could see into his apartment under his outstretched arm, over to the current young man lying sprawled and often half-dressed on his sofa. Will Anders had confidence and some to spare.

Mitch stepped forward abruptly, now close up to the other man and facing him, barely six inches away. The toes of their shoes touched; a swathe of Mitch’s blond hair swung forward, brushing at Will’s cheek.

Will tensed. Mitch could feel the muscles clenching against his own torso. He knew that’d feel even better if they were

naked, and for a second, he was sorely tempted to say that aloud. The breath caught in his throat at the thought of Will's reaction. Then he reached forward, grabbed the fresh green apples from Will's cupped hands and tossed them back on to the display.

Will looked down at the only things he still held; two soft, dark pink plums.

Mitch smiled, gently. "That'll do," he murmured.

Will raised an eyebrow, quizzically, but he was smiling as well. "It will?" He looked back up at Mitch, their eyes meeting boldly. Will rolled the fruits together slowly, in his palm, caressing them with his fingertips. Mitch glanced down, watching their shiny skins brush smoothly against each other, imagining the moist, plump flesh inside.

He sucked in a breath, just as Will had done earlier. Looking back up into Will's fevered eyes, he suspected their minds were on a similar track. Mitch prided himself on knowing things like that. Maybe it was his innate perceptiveness; or maybe it was the nudge of Will's gently swelling groin against his thigh.

"Important to have roughage, Will," he hissed, almost under his breath. "For maintenance of all bodily functions."

Will nodded as if giving it serious scientific thought, and leant back against the fruit display. Mitch leant forward in return, tight up against him. His arm reached down, in between the two bodies. To any shopper who chose to walk behind them at that time, there'd have been little to see except for a slight disturbance in the fabric at Will's hip, as if his pants were bunching up – or perhaps, filling out.

The muscles in Mitch's upper arm flexed gently. He spread out his hand and cupped at the flesh between Will's thighs, his hand reaching; searching. Grasping at something that fit his palm perfectly; that warmed it, under the fabric of Will's pants.

"Testing the fruit?" Will sighed.

Mitch laughed with quiet delight. He liked a confident man – one who couldn't easily be shocked. He dipped his head further

forward to whisper into Will's ear. "It's good," he whispered. "It's *ripe*."

Will's eyes closed. He took a deep breath, as if he were approaching the start of an exercise class, like the ones that Mitch enjoyed himself. His breath exhaled, on a soft moan. Mitch smirked, lifted his hand away and stepped back.

And turned to push his cart on down the aisle.

MITCH grunted as he stared up at the top shelf of toiletries. "This is on special offer this week. I always get this one."

Will picked up the can of body spray and peered at the ingredients. "Why?"

"Jeez, you looking for the ozone-friendly rating?" laughed Mitch. "I just choose it for the smell. It makes you smell sexy. Makes you irresistible to... well, to whomever you want to attract."

Will redirected his interest to Mitch's face. The man's smile was delightfully uninhibited. "How do you know it works?"

Mitch's eyes flashed, bright with amusement and challenge. "Trust me, I know."

"But maybe..." Will started, then stopped. He put a single fingertip to Mitch's throat and traced the pulse along the vein.

"What?" Mitch's voice was barely a whisper in return. His neck bared to the touch, instinctively.

"Maybe you don't need the spray," mused Will. He grinned, mischievously. "Maybe it's *you*, not the product."

Mitch chuckled. That was as good as a formal invitation, he reckoned. He slipped a firm hand around Will's waist and pulled the other man back into the archway of the nearby stockroom door. It was a quiet time, no assistants rushing about with pallets and cages. The announcements had ceased, the store was winding down towards closing, and their carts sheltered them again. Mitch's heart was beating quickly, pressing insistently

against the front of his chest. He reckoned he could feel Will's beating a similar rhythm. That was *really* hot.

"A sexy smell, already." Will's tongue slipped out of the corner of his mouth and licked at Mitch's neck. He drew in a deeper breath as if savoring the sweetness.

Mitch smiled, smugly. "Sexy to you?"

"Sure. *Maybe*." Will gave a low laugh. It vibrated down into the hollow of Mitch's throat, and the blond man shivered again. He was nowhere near the freezer cabinet, though.

"Well, well, well..." Mitch murmured, lips wide in a generous smile.

"Yes," sighed Will, answering something in that smile that didn't really need voicing aloud. He leant in against Mitch again and covered those generous lips with his own. Their words stopped immediately.

Mitch licked with delight at Will's plump lower lip and bit on it playfully, tugging it down between his teeth. He liked the low growl that provoked in the back of Will's throat. He thrust his tongue in gently, probing at the roof of the other man's mouth. That elicited more of a groan than a growl, but that was damned hot, too.

Yeah, Will thought, lost in similar thoughts of his own. The soda and musk taste in Mitch's mouth worked well for him. *Very* well.

The carts rattled as they took the weight of the gently writhing men.

"You think this is the place for this?" hissed Mitch.

Will ran a hand thoughtfully down the blond man's side. "You embarrassed, Matheson?"

In reply, Mitch turned him so that they backed up against the shelves again. He pushed at Will and bent his head to kiss him again. The stacks of toilet tissue behind them shifted out of place, and Will gave a strangled gasp of pleasure.

"What do *you* think?" Mitch grunted.

Will laughed against Mitch's mouth. "And the shopping?"

Mitch ran his tongue along the line of Will's jaw as if tasting him. "Fuck it," he hissed.

Will's chuckle came from deep in his heaving chest. "I'll pass. Too many sharp edges on the packaging."

Mitch's answering laugh was light, his tone teasing. "Let's leave it all, then. The shopping..."

"And the game?"

Mitch raised his eyebrows. That's what this all was, after all, and although it was a damned fine way to spend his early Saturday night, he could suggest some even better ones. "Yeah, we can leave that, too. Or take it to another place."

Will nodded. Mitch's breath was hot on his ear. He ran his hand down the firm line of Mitch's thigh, feeling the muscles responding to his touch. "Yes. Sounds good to me. You're the one who said we should find something to occupy ourselves."

Mitch grunted agreement and pushed at him again, gently thumping them both against the shelving. A couple of cans of antiseptic cream wobbled precariously and dropped off the top shelf. "Leave the cart and come with me," he hissed.

Will's voice was hoarse. "You sure?" His gaze flickered over to the abandoned shopping, then back to Mitch's face.

"Step away from the cart," warned Mitch.

Will did, grinning, walking backwards a few steps towards the exit. His chest was heaving; his face was flushed.

It was a damned good look on him, Mitch thought. He followed.

THE assistant clearing away the day's newspapers by the supermarket door stared as the two young men stumbled past her, spilling out through the brightly lit exit into the darkening night. They seemed a little agitated, like they were almost tripping over their own feet to leave quickly. They were laughing; their eyes

were fixed on each other; they were heavily flushed, breathing as harshly as if they'd been running.

She looked at them, curiously. They were really good-looking, too. She didn't know why *she* never met guys like that when she went shopping by herself. As she stared, the blond one paused and placed a hand on the other one's arm. The dark-haired one lifted a hand in reply and touched at the blond's hip. For a second, the amusement in their expressions was replaced with something much darker and more desperate. She thought she could hear one or other of them panting gently.

There was often an unusual clientele at this time of night, of course. She wanted to clear her throat, but was surprisingly scared of drawing attention to herself. They didn't look like shoplifters, though, so she didn't call for security.

Instead, she watched them recover themselves and turn again to leave. The dark one guided the other one out with a hand on his ass.

That figures, she thought ruefully.

She felt rather flushed, herself.

"COULD you have found a parking place further away from the store?" grumbled Will.

Mitch hauled open the door of his car, and pushed the dark-haired man inside, on to the back seat. "Quit complaining!" he growled. "No cameras here, CCTV... security... whatever."

Will laughed hoarsely. "Devious bastard."

"Just lucky, I guess." Mitch laughed breathlessly.

Will let himself fall backwards on the seat, first on his ass, then flat on to his back. He grabbed out as he went, pulling Mitch after him so that Mitch tumbled forward on to his chest. The car door creaked shut against their heels. The interior light clicked off, and the semi-darkness of the evening settled around them. Their mouths came together fiercely, tongues thrusting, lips sucking. The car rocked in complaint.

Will grunted. “Long time since I did anything in a car.”

Mitch laughed, raggedly. “You’re spoiled, Anders. Had it too easy.”

Will looked up at the dark, feral shine in Mitch’s eyes and he nodded, a little surprised. Wasn’t that just the truth?

Mitch knelt on the seat, fumbling at the waistband of his pants, pushing them down his thighs. One of his knees jabbed into Will’s thigh. He got one leg free, then the fabric twisted around his other ankle until he managed to wrench his foot out from it. He toed his boots off at the same time. With an impatient growl, he tugged his boxers down and off as well, leaving him naked from the waist down.

Will felt the pressure of Mitch’s lower body against his hips. Thick, muscled thighs; skin taut over slim hips. He wriggled around on his back to try and get a better look at Mitch’s cock. It hung heavily against the blond man’s thigh, half-hard and glistening with damp already. As Will gazed greedily at it, it twitched against the dark curls of Mitch’s groin, swelling even more. Will could feel its radiant heat against his own lap.

“Yeah?” Mitch’s voice was a soft, hungry whisper. When Will glanced back up at him, Mitch’s eyes gleamed with anticipation.

“Oh, yeah,” Will groaned. *This guy liked to tease.* “Shift over here. Let me taste you.” He started tugging at his own sweats.

Mitch’s eyes felt heavier at the mere thought, and his heartbeat racketed dangerously fast, but he shook his head. “Later.” His voice was uneven. “Another time. I want more than that, and now. *Here.*” He knelt up on the seat between Will’s feet and peeled off his vest. Then he reached forward to help Will squirm out of his clothes.

Both naked now, their skin shone faintly in the distant light of the store illumination. Will’s chest heaved with his racing breath, and Mitch’s torso was already smooth with the sheen of sweat. Will shifted his hips to try to get more comfortable and his cock bumped against Mitch’s hip. He could see a glassy bead of

pre-come already at its swollen tip; the moisture reflected faintly a neon-pink sign from the far side of the parking lot.

Mitch threw his ponytail back over his shoulder. This was the only time he was ever impatient with it. Getting in the damned way! He leant down again against Will's prone body, his lips and teeth seeking satisfaction from Will's mouth, and his legs unfolding along the length of the car seat, fighting for space with Will's own limbs. Their cocks brushed against each other, the skin wrinkling and stretching with frustration, the flesh dark red and aggressive. It was Will's turn to moan.

"Want – oh *fuck!*"

The car seats sagged under their combined weight. The windows steamed up; the suspension rocked. The men were slippery against each other, both from sweat and the leaking desire from their arousals.

Will could barely take his mouth from Mitch's for long enough to speak. The man's lips were delicious; thick, and firm, with that damned seductive sweetness of soda. Will was beginning to think it was natural, rather than the effect of Mitch's drinking habits. His hands reached around Mitch as the blond man lay on top of him, sliding his palms along the smooth, supple skin, enjoying the exciting warmth of an unfamiliar body. He ran his fingers along the clenched buttocks of Mitch's very splendid ass, teasing at the hairs on the strong thighs. Temptation made him strain to reach between the cheeks and to sneak a finger into the puckered skin that was hidden there.

Mitch sucked in a breath. His cock jerked impatiently, squashed against Will's belly.

"Come on," he hissed. "Do it!"

"Lube?"

Mitch grunted, shifting against Will's chest. "Under the seat. Everything there."

He groped down over the edge of the cushion. Will gave a sudden curse of pain as he was rolled over onto the discarded car keys, and Mitch didn't know whether to grimace or grin. He

snaked them out from underneath Will's hip and threw them away on to the floor with a loud jangling noise. Will's body was stretched out along the bench seat, the crown of his dark hair crushed against the handle of the passenger door, his legs bent rather awkwardly up against the other side. Mitch scooped up a tube and foil packet from under the seat, and sat up, straddling him.

"So fucking awkward," he complained, but he was smiling at the same time. He twisted open the tube with a practiced, one-handed motion, then slid a hand between his own legs. He pressed a dampened finger into his entrance, then two. For a second, the invasion, though familiar, made him shudder. His head dropped back, and he slipped his fingers in and out, stretching himself.

Beneath him, Will stared up at the sight, following the pattern of shocked and excited expressions on Mitch's face. He hadn't felt so hot for a long, long time.

"No room to maneuver." Mitch persisted in his complaints, arching his back and trying to twist back his knee, which had got trapped between Will's hip and the back of the car seat.

Will let out the breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. "Stop complaining and touch me," he ground out through gritted teeth. His cock reared up from his groin, hot and heavy and begging to be handled firmly. He tried to resist the urgent need to thrust his hips up against Mitch's ass. "Unless this is too *fucking awkward* to carry on?"

Mitch dropped his head back down, his hair loose from its tie, his pupils dilated widely, black pools of desire barely lit by the dim light of the parking lot. He grinned. Will's suggestion was, of course, rhetorical and completely ridiculous. But he took the hint. He reached his other hand down and curled damp, demanding fingers around Will's cock, the fingers slick with lube.

The dark-haired man groaned.

Mitch sighed, a rattling sound in the back of his throat. "Guess I'll manage, then." His hand moved for a few more strokes, almost languidly, up and down the stiff flesh that jutted out from Will's damp, sweaty groin. Will shut his eyes for a

moment, savoring the sensation, trying to regulate his breathing. "Condom?" he whispered.

Mitch shifted again on top of him, though still holding on to Will's dick. His fingers slipped out from inside his ass and scrabbled around on the seat for the packet. Will watched him tear it open with his teeth, the foil crackling and glinting in the semi-darkness. Mitch held his gaze and reached back down to Will's cock, feeling his way perfectly, nestling the condom on the tip, then rolling it slowly and surely down to the base.

Will groaned aloud. His hips shuddered involuntarily as Mitch's hand gripped him, spreading the lube over it generously... *teasingly*. He stared upwards as Mitch knelt up higher and positioned himself over Will's lap. Will opened his mouth to speak, then caught the look in Mitch's eyes. He closed it again, abruptly.

Mitch took a deep breath. His vision shivered and his entrance clenched and opened in anticipation of what was to come. Then he lowered himself down slowly on to Will's thick, swollen cock, damp with lube, the latex cool and slippery, penetrating his ass. He halted at the first resistance, grimacing, then breathed deeply again and pushed on down.

Will's hands gripped at Mitch's hips, fingernails scraping at the skin. It felt incredible! He tugged him down further, and with a gasp, Mitch let his body sink down, swallowing the invasion of his ass.

"*Shit...*" murmured Will, almost reverently. Mitch lifted up, carefully, then Will tugged him back down again. And again. Less carefully.

The car rocked; the seats creaked. Will groaned more loudly, as they built up a fierce rhythm.

Mitch cried out. It wasn't too clear whether it was an instruction or an expletive. Either way, he seemed happy to force the pace as fast as he could go, and Will was more than happy to oblige. He lifted his hips, and thrust hard into the body above him, again and again. Mitch's head dropped down against his chest, his hands gripping the cheap fabric of the seats as if it were the only

thing anchoring him to the Earth. His hair fell forward, and he no longer bothered to push it back.

The conclusion was swift and intense. Mitch's shouts became hiccups, then his own cock shuddered and spat its load over both of their bellies – hot, thick seed spattering on Will's skin and pooling in his navel. Will felt its warmth like a sticky caress, and when he gasped in response, he felt it slowly trickle down the side of his stomach. *More than hot*, he thought, dizzily, and he moaned in surrender.

His eyes widened, almost in shock, as his own climax hit him. His hips slammed hard against the spread of Mitch's thighs and his hands dug into the shuddering skin. He felt his cock swell almost painfully inside the condom, inside Mitch, and he burst up inside the other man, shaking and moaning underneath him.

He was thrust up against the panel of the car door. There was a nagging pain between his shoulder blades from the handle, and the seam of the window frame cut into his ear.

He grinned and panted heavily.

Like he cared.

MANY minutes later, the back reaches of the parking lot were still pitch dark, except for the reflected glare from the store. If anyone had been watching the last car left in a parking space, they'd have seen a man's head come into view, silhouetted against the back window. His long hair was messed up, hanks of it sticking out at odd angles.

Inside the car, Mitch spat gently, dislodging a hair that was stuck on his tongue. There were several of them, short, dark, curly hairs, at that. "You've got to love twenty-four-hour stores," he muttered blearily. "Even though I hate shopping."

The car rocked again, and the man beside him sat up as well. There wasn't much light left now, but if there had been, someone might have seen soft bruises and red, suckled patches on his torso. Will wasn't worried by them. He was still grinning and had been for quite some time.

They both shuffled around some more as their long, muscled limbs sorted themselves out and found enough space to stretch out. Muscles were sore; bare flesh was sticky.

The car seat gave a sweaty fart.

The two young men laughed softly. The sound was throaty; greedy. Will slid a hand around behind Mitch's neck and tugged him in for another kiss. The silhouetted heads melded together again with the soft, wet hissing of tongues inside eager mouths. The car creaked, complaining yet again.

"So who's going back in for the shopping?" came Will's muffled question.

Mitch snorted. "Not me. I'm going to take you back to my place and hammer your ass into the mattress."

Will snorted, too, but he sounded amused. "Or back to *mine*."

Mitch pursed his lips. "What is this, equal opportunity? I assumed your sexual navigation skills were no better than your attempts to push a shopping cart..."

Will threw a couple of mock punches, and Mitch twisted his arm back. There was more laughing; more fierce kissing. When they broke for air again, the windows were steamed up again, and their breathing sounded very harsh.

Will licked his lips, perhaps trying to regain feeling in flesh that had gone numb. "That's this week's special offer, is it?" he grunted.

"Very, *very* special," grumbled Mitch. "Buy now, or miss out. Once it's gone, it's gone."

Will stared at him, his eyes a pale gleam, suddenly serious again. "And I wouldn't want to miss out."

Mitch sucked in a breath. Suddenly he was scrabbling on the floor of the car, searching frenziedly for the abandoned keys in amongst the discarded clothing. He tossed aside a couple of mismatched socks and emerged victorious, holding the keychain up with a flourish.

He grinned broadly, “Special offer, eh?”

Will’s eyes were on his body and they were fevered. He was laughing again; challenging. He leant in to take another taste of Mitch’s smiling, mocking mouth, and slipped his hand around the keys into Mitch’s still-naked lap.

“Then what the hell are you waiting for? I’ll take two!”

Clare London

Clare took the pen name London from the city where she lives, loves, and writes. She juggles fiction with a frantic family life and waits for the far distant day when she can afford to give up her day job as an accountant. She's written in many genres and across many settings, with short stories published both online and in print anthologies. Most of her work features male/male romance and drama, with a healthy serving of erotica, as she enjoys both reading and writing about strong, sympathetic and sexy characters.

Clare currently has a fantasy novel in the process of publication, two more nearing the submission stage and plenty of other projects in mind . . . she just has to find out where she left them in amongst the frantic family life.

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ISBN: 978-0-9795048-9-1

Seven years ago, Roan Bucklin left the family ranch for college, leaving foreman Patrick Lassiter with a mix of sweltering emotions: relief, regret, and nearly overwhelming desire. Afraid that Roan would regret giving himself to an older man, Patrick let him go without a word about his true feelings. But Roan took Patrick's heart with him.

Roan had harbored a crush on Patrick from the time he'd turned fourteen. He thought he'd gotten over it, grown up, moved on, but now he's back and home to stay. After one look, he knows he has something to prove to Patrick – that he wants to be claimed by the cowboy who has always possessed his heart.

www.dreamspinnerpress.com

Size Matters: Short Stories Long Enough to Satisfy *A Dreamspinner Anthology of Gay Erotic Novellas*

Paperback \$20.00
ISBN: 978-0-9795048-0-8

eBook \$12.00
ISBN: 978-0-9795048-1-5

Snowfall In Seattle by Lucia Logan

Christopher Booth was just helping out a co-worker, never expecting it to catapult him into the spotlight. When he needs help himself in his new job as the host of a radio sex advice show, he shares some private secrets that lead his longtime friend, Neal Kenelly, to see him in a new light. However, Neal's past makes him leery of approaching the other man openly. Will a more subtle approach be enough to win him Chris's heart?

Healing In His Wings by Ariel Tachna

When the crew of the *Starfire* is struck by a mysterious plague, help comes from an unexpected source: the healers of a nearby planet. First Officer Ryan Nelson is sent to act as liaison officer between the Petari and the *Starfire* and finds unexpected healing in their tender care.

Ever Changing by Shay Kincaid

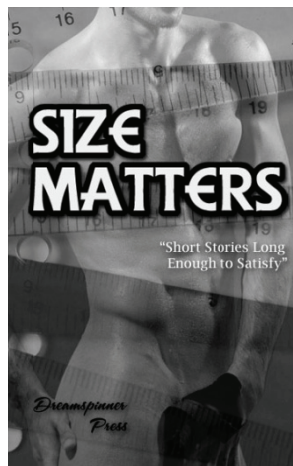
Born a Changeling, Chase Spencer had fooled his teachers, playmates, even his parents with his altered appearances, but as he reached adulthood, the games took on a whole new meaning. Each weekend it was a different 'persona' and a different partner, and that seemed to suit the young man just fine, until the night he set his sights on someone from his past. Will Chase emerge from his latest game unscathed, or will he be caught in a web of his own devising?

Dreamscape International by Connie Bailey & Rhianne Aile

Visiting dreams to grant paid-for wishes, Dreamwalker Lucien Clarke is the best at navigating the twists and turns of sleeping minds. While recovering from a job gone wrong, he discovers that fantasy's passion just can't match reality's love. Will unseen dangers ruin it all?

An Academic Dilemma by Alix Bekins

Rodrigo is an art history student who finds himself attracted to a new friend while also undeniably drawn to his professor. Exploring his feelings for them both leads him into a strange new world of trust, kink and surprising secrets.



Size Still Matters: Short Stories Still Long Enough to Satisfy *A Dreamspinner Anthology of Gay Erotic Novellas*

Paperback \$20.00
ISBN: 978-0-9801018-2-9

eBook \$12.00
ISBN: 978-0-9801018-3-6

Sight Unseen by Shay Kincaid

Famous actor Jackson Prescott wonders if anyone will ever look past the glitz and glamour of his Hollywood persona and love the person behind the name. So after accidentally dialing a wrong number and feeling an instant attraction to Devon Forrester, the stranger on the other end of the line, he decides to test the waters ... using a different name. After getting to know Devon through their daily phone calls, Jackson starts to worry: Will the relationship they've built crumble when they meet face to face? Or will Devon be able to forgive Jackson's deceit?



Take My Picture by Giselle Ellis

Aaron has no idea what he's walking into when he shows up to pose for a famous photographer. Instead of being the focus of the camera, he ends up working as Jake's assistant. Five frustrating, thrilling and crazy years later, Jake discovers Aaron has become the focus of his life, a life that's threatened when Aaron finds someone else, and Jake has to set his beloved muse free.

Start From the Beginning by Chrissy Munder

A heart attack leaves Miles wrangling with a slow recovery and a quiet retreat ... just one cabin down from wounded warrior Drew. Although he's unhappy to have his solitude invaded, Drew finds himself fascinated with Miles, but he can't bring himself to push aside his skittish nerves. Both men fear rejection for different reasons, but what if they've instead found the acceptance they crave?

Evan's Heaven by Nicki Bennett

Actor MacAlester Kerr wanders into a whole new world of pampering and pleasure when his director sends him to *Evan's Heaven* for a pedicure. Right off, he meets *the* Evan and finds himself head over heels. Mac's on Cloud Nine when he finds out Evan feels the same.

Desire Beyond Death: Tales of Eternal Love *A Dreamspinner Anthology of Gay Erotic Novellas*

Paperback \$20.00
ISBN: 978-0-9801018-4-3

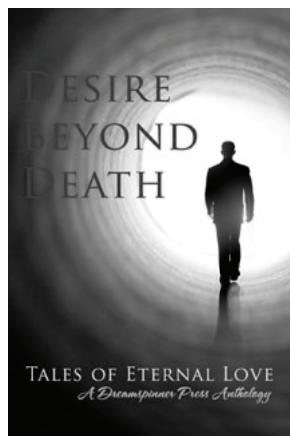
eBook \$12.00
ISBN: 978-0-9801018-5-0

Ink: The Tale of a Vampire in Melbourne by Isabella Rowan

After too long alone, Dominic enters a tattoo parlor, desperate to find a way to reconnect to life. He meets Michael, an artist who evokes feelings and needs Dominic knows are dangerous. But those emotions and the allure of the handsome human intoxicate Dominic as much as the blood that keeps him alive, and he finds that he – usually the hunter – just can't resist giving in to his prey.

After the Storm by Chrissy Munder

Angry and frustrated with his chronic illness, Vincent Poulsen moves into an old lighthouse to live out the few days he has left. After a dangerous collapse, he meets the ghostly Captain Cason, who shares stories of his distant past. In the process, Vincent stumbles over the tragedy that binds the captain to the lighthouse and his haunted memories. Then fate offers them both a chance to change the future... for better or for worse.



Revenant by Connie Bailey

When Bo Andressen and his salvage crew contract a job in a crumbling castle, they walk into a mystery of murder, intrigue, hidden treasure and greed that has its roots in the far past. Ghosts are only the first suspected danger – the crew, local constable Gavin Gilroy, castle owner Sir Rhys Turcotte and psychic Tristan Andrews have to find out who of a more earthly nature is involved, before more people fall victim to an ancient spectre who seeks to rejoin and conquer the mortal world.

Seeing is Believing by Abigail Roux

Scott Cunningham has a ghost problem, a problem that requires a specialized touch. Enter Zacharias, Leo, and Andy – professionals, if you will – in solving said problems. But solutions don't always come easy, and if Zacharias and his crew can't get the job done, someone innocent might get hurt.

Bittersweet by Madeleine Urban

His business failing and his marriage floundering, Harrison Holden is falling apart. To make things worse, he wakes one morning to see Piers Claybrook, a man he rescued after a car crash the night before, standing in front of him – the same Piers he'd seen dead in the hospital. Now a ghost, Piers believes he's with Harrison to make a difference in the other man's life, and it's up to the two of them to find the key to living – and dying – and how to walk the line in between without being separated by it.

