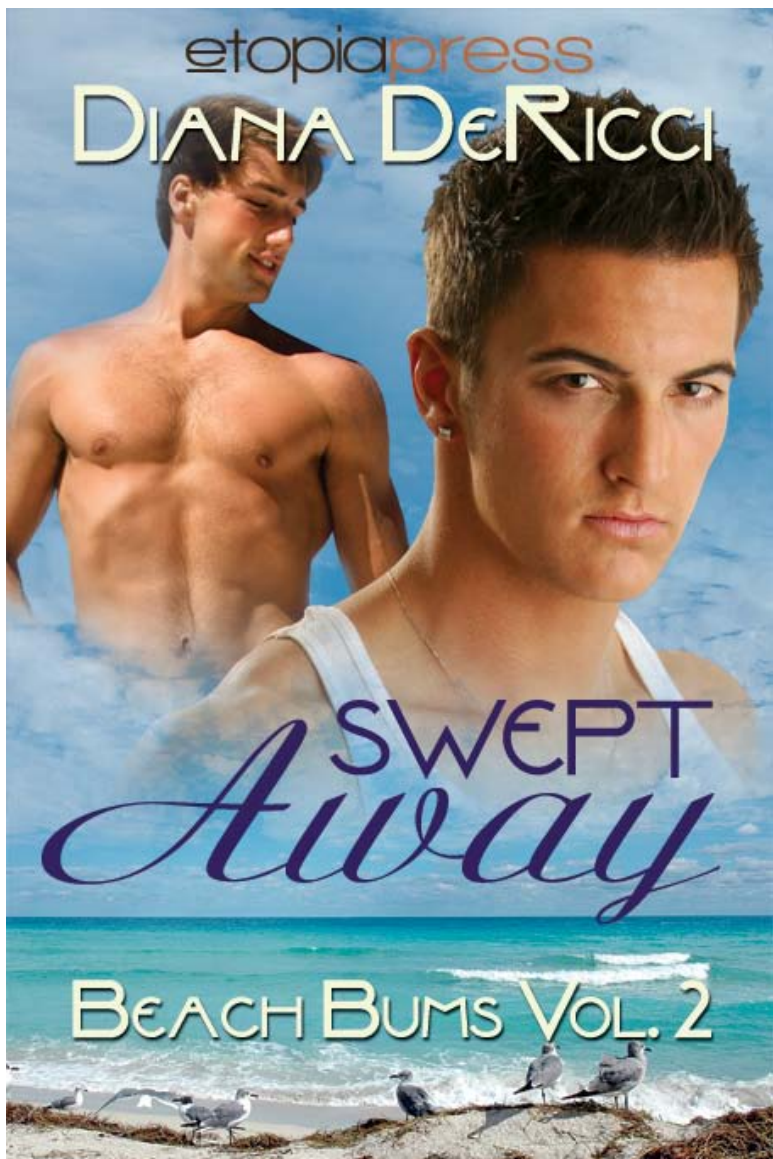


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~ Dedication ~

For my readers.

Chapter One

Moonlight flared across the low tide waves, a long sword of gossamer silver on an inky black canvas. Luke stood on his rear deck, able to hear the quiet shush of the rolling waves echoed by the sucking of the tide as they returned to the Gulf. With his hands braced around the railing, he tilted his chin upward, his eyes closed, breathing in the calm of the summer breeze, the scent of the sea and sand. These moments soothed him like very little could anymore.

His phone rang inside the house behind him, but he ignored the jarring interruption. He was sure it was only his mother. He was proven right when the answering machine picked up.

"Luke, it's your mom." She sounded agitated. Her normal state. "Please call home. Sandy misses you. We miss you."

He snorted. Sandy would be the last person to miss him. Obviously his mother was still clinging to the delusion that they were getting married.

"Not happening, Ma," he grouched coldly, gazing out to the beckoning sea. And for the record, he was home. Luke wasn't going back. Not to have his heart eviscerated by his ex-fiancée all over again. He

ignored the rest of his mother's pleading, or whatever it was she was saying. By the time she'd hung up, he'd lost himself in the swaying constant of the ocean.

* * *

Seth Rusko slid from his car to stand at the edge of the sidewalk, checked the address on the note in his hand against the numbers on the house and mailbox, then shrugged. Taylor wouldn't send him to the wrong house. He hefted the box from the back seat, then bumped the rear door with a hip. It was midafternoon on a Saturday. The guy might be home. If he wasn't, Seth would leave the box on the porch by the door. The stuff inside would likely explain who'd sent it.

Bracing his delivery between a hip and the wall, Seth rang the doorbell and waited.

"Whoa," Seth breathed when the door was yanked open abruptly. Startled to be greeted by a half-naked guy, he shook himself mentally. "Hi. Are you Luke Fletcher?" *Damn. Sandra had good taste.* If he was going to open the door naked, Seth wasn't above looking.

"On most days."

Seth cleared his throat. It was difficult to not ogle the man's damp chest. Considering he probably stood

a good three inches taller than Seth, he was at eye-level standing on the last step. Sculpted pectorals were lightly dusted with short brown hair. Luke was tight, on his way to a six-pack. Sandy had mentioned at some point that her ex-fiancée liked to work out. It showed, and the view made Seth's mouth water. Short swim trunks molded to his body. The scent of the ocean clung to him and his dark brown hair looked disheveled, like he'd toweled it dry.

"Can I help you?"

It wasn't exactly a bark, but it was a definite prod.

"Oh! Right. I'm a friend of Sandy's—"

Luke's eyes narrowed a fraction, his expression shutting down, becoming considerably less welcoming.

Seth swallowed. *Maybe not mentioning that would have been better.* He went with a different tack, their mutual friend. "Taylor asked me to deliver this to you. I think it's stuff from Sandy's place. I don't know," Seth finished with his voice wavering with uncertainty. Seth honestly didn't know, and the longer he stared, the harder it was becoming to speak at all. He raised the medium-sized box Sandy's brother had asked him to pony to the beach. Luke was clearly hesitant to take it.

With his hands finally grasping the box, Luke said, "Thanks." He set it on the floor by the door.

"It wasn't a problem. I moved here after high school but stayed in touch with Taylor *annnd* I'll just shut up now and leave you alone." He grinned a little bashfully, shoving one hand into a pocket. Seth wondered if he was blushing for as hot as it felt across his face.

Luke's curious brown eyes studied him. "You brought that from back home?"

Seth lifted a loose hand to catch himself in the act then dropped it again. He was trying to break himself of the nail biting when he was nervous. Usually it just made him look like he was giving hand signals to landing aircraft when he did manage to catch it. Better that than the mangle Seth was notorious for when it came to his fingers, he supposed.

Seth cleared his throat. "Yeah. I go up to see the family every couple of months and I heard about Sandy's... Shit." Seth took a step back, appalled at his mouth. "Okay. I'm leaving. Really." *What is with you? So he's hot. He's also straight.*

"Relax." Luke leaned on a shoulder and crossed summer-tanned arms over that bare chest. "Is your family in Abilene?"

Seth tried to stay focused on his eyes. Sultry eyes. *Shit. Focus!* "Brownwood now."

"And you moved to the coast because..."

"College in Houston." Seth managed to take another step away, smoothly. A miracle considering

the way his body wasn't listening to him at the moment. Seth felt like he was dancing on the edge of a precipice, tingles racing over his skin the longer he stayed close to Luke.

Luke hummed a noncommittal sound in his throat. He was probably trying to guess which asylum Seth had escaped from.

"Did they tell you why Sandy and I broke the engagement?"

Hating himself for wanting to know, he paused in his act of fleeing. Seth shook his head.

"Good." Luke straightened and stepped out of the doorway. "There's no rush to leave. A friend of Taylor's is welcome. Come on in."

Seth stammered. "Wha-what?" His heart pounded, then decided skidding across his ribs would be even more fun. The last thing he'd expected was to be invited inside.

"Just come in. I'm not going to explain shit through the front door."

Seth's brain rebooted. "Right." He lifted a foot then froze before taking that step. "You're sure?"

"What's your name?"

"Seth Rusko."

"Yes, Seth, I'm sure."

Luke turned away, bent, and lifted the box to saunter into the house, leaving Seth to either follow or stay and stare stupidly through the door.

Luke plopped the box on the floor none-too-gently, then sprawled on the couch. His legs were showcased within the gray swim trunks he wore, lean and muscled with dark hair the same shade as everywhere else. Unable not to, egged on by curiosity, Seth shut the door and trailed him, taking the opposite end to sit. The other man leaned back, staring at the ceiling with his hands clasped over his stomach.

"I don't even know why I want to tell you, to be honest," Luke said, subdued. "It's stupid. I know it."

"Why you guys broke the engagement?"

Luke laughed mirthlessly. "She broke it off. I agreed. It seemed like the right thing to do, considering."

From where Seth was sitting, Luke was in turmoil over the breakup. Sandy had given him zilch in details, and Taylor wasn't going to share.

"Do you love her?" Seth asked quietly.

"I did. I cared a shitload, more than I cared for any other woman I've ever known. I did ask her to marry me, but..." A deep draw of air raised his shoulders, and he shuddered. Waves of indecision and heartache clouded Luke's expression. "This is where it got fucked up."

Seth leaned on a hip, not judging or pushing. He was a good listener, told too many times "he had the face" for it. So Luke wanting to bare it all wasn't

uncommon. It was the source of this unexpected confession that was making his heart beat in crazy, erratic flips.

"The guys took me out, a bachelor party of sorts. An unofficial one."

Seth nodded.

Luke didn't look his way, continuing. "I was wasted. I mean, shit-faced, didn't-know-my-own-name gone."

"What happened? You weren't driving, were you?"

"God, no!" Luke twisted to give him a loathing grimace. "Drunk, not suicidal."

"Gotcha."

He ripped those glossy bottomless brown eyes away, and said, "I kissed a guy. Fucking laid one on him like I wanted to scrape his tonsils."

Seth shivered, mindful to control it, though Luke seemed lost now in the memory of what had happened. "You were drunk, Luke. I'm sure she would have forgiven you."

"Oh, she would have," he agreed with sharp intensity, growling low. "Until I told her I'd fucking loved it. I don't know what happened."

Hesitantly, Seth offered, "Curiosity, maybe?"

Luke rocked his head. Then, he breathed, "Yes. But it was... More." He scrubbed over his face viciously with flat palms. "It wasn't supposed to be

like that. It was just supposed to be a joke, a fucked-up joke on the man about to be tied down for the rest of his life.”

“They put you up to it?”

“Yeah. My best friends found this guy, and...it kind of went insane after that.”

Seth could imagine. He loved a good groping session himself. If Luke was experiencing real curiosity, it probably turned his world on its ear. If he wasn’t, he would have blown it off as the prank it was meant to be.

Seth sincerely doubted it was the latter. He’d witnessed this often enough to know the signs.

His gaze traveled over Luke’s frame, his pose now more dejected and confused than relaxed. Except for the sight of his dick prominently tenting his trunks. The man was definitely affected by what had happened that night.

Seth whipped his focus north, grateful Luke hadn’t caught onto his wandering attention. “So why tell me?”

“Because I’ve been going nuts, running in circles in my head for weeks. And after swimming for an hour solid, I still can’t shake the memory. I hoped talking about it would make it go away.” But by the haunted, melancholy sounds of his confession, that wasn’t happening.

Seth stood. He needed to get out of there before he jumped the poor man, willing to do anything to ease his confusion. Oh, hell yeah. Seth would take one for the team—and never punt him back onto the playing field. Men like Luke were few and far between.

As rich as fresh tilled earth, that gaze landed on him.

“I wouldn’t let it linger, Luke. Aberrations happen. Human curiosity is natural.”

Luke straightened from the couch with the grace of a trained athlete. “You’re right. Don’t know why I spilled my guts to you. I don’t even know you.”

Seth smirked with a hiked shoulder. “That is precisely why,” he replied with a kind inflection. “I don’t know you, can’t and won’t judge you.”

Luke shrugged. “Thanks for bringing the box.”

“No problem.” Seth knew a request to get out when he heard it. He aimed for the front door.

“Hey. This didn’t freak you out?” As if Luke just realized that little detail.

Seth shook his head to stop by the door. “No. Should it?”

“It freaked the shit out of my best friend.” Luke looked away. “Apparently I was all over this other guy.”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“It is when you’re straight.”

Seth's hand curled around the doorknob, ready to toss it open and run depending on how this conversation ended. He could fight to protect himself, he just didn't like to, and against Luke, he'd pay. The man was wide and strong. "Well, see, that's where I don't have a problem."

"Oh?"

"I'm gay."

Luke slammed the door closed with a smacked flat hand before Seth had cracked it an inch. Luke's heart pounded for a split second as another reason for Seth's arrival became glaringly obvious, at least to him. The box was only the Trojan horse, and he'd let Seth in without a single thought to Taylor's conniving. Gazing down into startled green eyes, Luke's brain short-circuited. Seth stood frozen. Not ready to bolt, but wary. "And you're a friend of Taylor's?"

"Since high school. And yes, he knows. He finds it hilarious."

"This is too weird," Luke muttered.

"I'm leaving."

"No."

"No?" Seth jerked, then looked upward, his eyes wide. "Look, it's okay. I'm not going to tell anyone,

not even Taylor. It's none of his business what happened that night."

"Taylor was there."

Seth's mouth softened. Seconds passed with neither man moving. Then Seth sagged until a shoulder held him propped against the door. "Son of a bitch."

"You're playing connect the dots too?"

"But why would he do this? You were engaged to his sister."

Luke barked a laugh. "Do I look like I know the mind behind that evilness? What a prick."

Seth stiffened. "Look, I'm sorry. I'll just go—"

"Not you." Luke raked a hand through his salt-encrusted hair, ignoring the stiffness. "Him. He's probably laughing his ass off right now." *At both of us.*

Seth's dark blond brows crossed. "Why?"

"Because he's that kind of a sadistic jackass."

Staring into sparkling eyes made Luke feel as if he were standing on shifting sand. With those green eyes, his height—five nine or ten at the most—and the bed-head blond hair, Seth could have been kissy-face guy's brother. And though Seth couldn't know it, he was bringing that night back in brilliant color for Luke. *Every damned second of it.*

Even more than a month later, Luke could still remember the way it had all felt. The wicked heat, the swamping rush of desire and hunger that had

engulfed him then lingered long after it should have dissipated with the fog of a morning-after hangover. The man his friends had put up to the prank hadn't been shy in the least about getting up close and personal for that kiss. Pressed body to body, chest to chest. When he thought too hard on it, his lips tingled. *Like they were now.* He wanted to growl his frustration at it all because he didn't understand it, but he held it inside. Seth looked antsy enough without him roaring like a lion with a sore paw.

Luke still suffered hard-ons, hypererotic dreams that didn't end with a kiss, all with more frequency than he had with any woman. He'd tried to talk himself out of the obsessed merry-go-round he'd been on since that night. It wasn't working, which only frustrated him more.

So he'd kissed a guy. Luke had also carded his fingers into blond hair, clearly remembered warm hands molding to his ass through the jeans he'd worn that night and the jolt of rock-hard, throbbing cock pinned between them rubbing in need and longing.

Not the guy's he'd kissed, either.

His own.

Luke had relived that kiss more times than he could count, and here stood a damned clone of the one who had been haunting him. As strong as the riptide he'd just spent the last hour battling, he became very aware of the man in front of him, just

like he had with the guy he'd kissed that night. Up close, they were similar. Only Seth's eyes were flecked with specks of gray, making the green even more vibrant and deep than those of the guy they'd conned for the stunt that night. And he wore one of those puka-bead chokers in pale greens and teal blues. Kissy-guy hadn't worn any jewelry, but Luke remembered one thing in particular.

"Is your tongue pierced?"

"No." Seth frowned.

"Do you have a brother?"

"No," he repeated, sharper. "I'm leaving, Luke."

Luke straightened away from the door, unsure.

"Did I do the right thing?"

Seth's features softened. Impatient eyes lost their hardness. "I can't answer that, Luke. I can tell you're confused." He glanced away, lifting a hand to scrape his teeth over the nail tip. "You don't have any gay friends, do you?"

Luke shook his head. "Not against it, or homophobic, if that's what you mean."

"No."

Luke waited while Seth debated silently, those green eyes doing something weird and startling to his heart rate—make it pound.

"Do you have a pen and paper?"

Not what he'd expected to hear, Luke blinked.

"Uh, yeah. Hold on."

Retracing his steps to the coffee table, he picked up a little note pad, filching a pen out of a cup on the counter to return to a waiting Seth. He handed them over.

"This is my number." Seth wrote it out. "If you want someone to talk to, like you did, then call me. If what you're experiencing is more than curiosity, you're going to have questions. If you don't call, I'll know you figured it out and hope you find the right girl."

Luke's waiting fingers hovered over the offered pad.

He swished his tongue, feeling dry, feeling like he still battled that Gulf current and at any moment could be swept under. "And if I call?"

"One day at a time," Seth replied with a knowing, gentle smile.

Chapter Two

Luke adjusted his sunglasses one more time, then simply gave up, ripping them off with a jerk of fingers to flatten himself to the towel beneath him. Sun-heated sand warmed his chest and sunshine baked him from above. He'd spent the entire weekend on the sand, avoiding anyone who'd called unless he wanted to talk to them. It was a stroke of luck that Seth had caught him at all.

It wasn't hard to ignore the scream of seagulls or the squeal of kids racing back and forth on the expanse of sand that made up the public beach. The background cacophony was white noise to his turbulent thoughts. *This* felt and sounded normal.

Wanting to kiss a guy was not. Luke pressed his forehead deeper into the hollow of his bent arms, trying to hide, to escape. It wasn't just any guy, not even the man he had kissed floating in his thoughts. Not now. Green eyes flecked with gray. What had looked to Luke like soft lips when he'd smiled. God, that smile. *Seth*. A groan raked through his lungs, shuddering his frame as he fought against the confusion.

His phone vibrated, interrupting his whirling thoughts, thankfully. Peeking at the screen, he hit the button a little harder than he needed to. "You're a fucking prick, you know that? If you wanted to get even with me for breaking up with your sister, you didn't have to do that." Seth's face solidified in Luke's thoughts, causing him to shiver under the intense Texas sun. He swallowed to calm his voice.

"Whoa! Circle the wagons, here, pal," Taylor said through the phone. "What are you talking about?"

Luke rolled his eyes in disgust. One word was all it took. "Seth."

"Ahh. He brought the box by, I guess."

"Sonofabitch." He sucked a couple breaths to ease the rapid race of his heart. "You know he did."

"No, I didn't, but I'm glad he could find the time. That is one busy man there."

Luke gritted his teeth. *He's trying to make me ask.* Luke knew the ploy. Taylor knew just how to say things to make him *want* to ask. The sad thing was Taylor knew he'd bite. *Damn it!* He groaned, laying his cheek on a forearm, his phone jammed between A and B, ready to accept the coming moments like a grown man. "Okay, what does he do?" He refused to admit that actual curiosity was eating at him. Seth had left some two hours before, yet Luke couldn't kick him out of his circling thoughts.

"You know those two tourist holes on the south end of the beach?"

"The red ones on stilts?"

"That's them. They're his. He runs them, owns them. He doesn't get out often, so I wasn't sure how long it would take him to get that to you."

Luke perked up. "Seriously? He looks all of twenty-two. Said he was here for college." Right away, he knew that assumption was wrong. He'd said Taylor and Seth had been friends since high school.

"He was, finished a business degree with marketing and advertising. He's only a year younger than me."

"No shit?" *Seriously? He's twenty-eight? Oh man.* He jerked his thoughts to a standstill. *Why does it matter? Better yet, why am I still thinking about him?* Luke knew better than to try to answer that one.

"Yeah. He's a great guy. But why was asking him to do that for Sandy such a big deal? It was a one-way delivery. He was up here to visit his folks, and Sandy had given that to me a couple weeks ago, guessing I'd see you before she would."

Luke shut his yap. *Because Seth's gay* made him sound like an absolute ass and bringing up the fact that he resembled... That was asking for a smackdown. Or proving to anyone within a hundred-foot radius that Luke even remembered what that guy

had looked like after the fact. Like the morning after, and every day since. It was all too easy to replace the guy he'd kissed with Seth's blond good looks. Luke made himself sound like nothing was bothering him, determined to put it all behind him.

When he felt able, Luke said, "Nothing. Thanks, I guess. I don't even know what's in it."

"Hey, man. We're still cool, y'know?"

Luke relaxed, feeling as though a two-ton weight had lifted from his shoulders. "Thanks." For a while there, Luke hadn't been too sure right after his and Sandy's breakup. He'd known Taylor for longer than he'd dated Sandy. He'd really cared deeply about his sister too, until... He let his thoughts fade, refusing to let them continue to disturb him.

"You ready for this?" Taylor's words crackled through the phone.

"What?" Luke asked groggily. Sunshine, in small doses, was a wonderful thing.

"That guy, he recognized a bunch of us from that night we were all at the club. He asked for you."

Luke jerked up, practically wrenching his neck in surprise. "Say what?"

Taylor was chortling now, having way too much fun at Luke's expense. "That guy you deep throated tongues with. He's hot for you."

Luke plunked down, growling. "Shut up, dickwad."

"Hey," Taylor shot back. "It's funny. You have an admirer."

"Who is gay," Luke promptly pointed out.

"You know, I hadn't thought of it, but he could be Seth's twin brother."

Who is also gay. Luke squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to continue to imagine the blond's face but unable to stop it from happening now that Taylor had also made the connection. *Just bet you didn't think of that before,* Luke groused sarcastically to himself. Didn't matter. Fighting it was a lost cause. It was as though Seth had become ingrained into the inside of Luke's eyelids. Blood pooled below his waist and he had to twitch his hips to ease the press of sand against his throbbing dick.

Luke was getting a fucking hard-on thinking about Seth. Not even kissy-face, but *Seth*. He groaned. This couldn't keep happening. He wasn't *into* guys. "I have to go."

"Sure. Call me later in the week. I'll come down for the weekend. Sound good?"

"Yeah, sure. Whatever," Luke answered, only half aware of what he was agreeing to. Luke tossed the phone to the corner of his towel. He jerked himself to his feet and stomped out into the surf. No fucking way was he letting this shit keep happening. He wasn't gay. He was straight.

Diving head first into the oncoming waves, he swam with powerful strokes, determined to outdistance the whispered, *aren't I?* pounding like fists into his temples. Even in the engulfing surf, he trembled. Ever since that fucking kiss, he just hadn't been as sure anymore.

* * *

Seth pushed a cart down the cereal aisle. He wasn't a huge health freak, and while he had good memories of the sugar-filled boxes from when he was five, they weren't going to cut it now. Spotting the brand of granola he liked, he tossed a box into the basket and turned the corner.

And smacked right into Luke.

"I'm sorry!" His heart leaped for his throat. It had been a week since he'd dropped off the box, and while he hadn't expected to hear from the gorgeous man currently staring at him, Seth had secretly hoped he would. The longer the silence had stretched, the less confused he guessed Luke was.

Luke sidestepped out of his way, avoiding the basket. "No harm."

Seth could barely look away from the intensity of those brown eyes. He wondered what the other man saw through them.

Seth raised a hand but as soon as he realized where it was going, he forced himself to grip the bar in front of him. Luke grinned.

Knowing he was blushing, even beneath his tan, he inched around the island in the stream, wishing Luke would stop staring at him like that. Seth's skin felt warm all over and his heart hadn't slowed down yet. It wasn't unusual to find a man worth staring at, but it was something new to feel so intensely around him. Luke being straight didn't help Seth out in the least, either.

"Hey." Luke's rumbled voice froze him solid before he'd moved past him.

"Yeah?"

"Is that offer still on the table?" Luke gazed at him then swept away, dark eyes and darker lashes and completely unreadable.

Seth's fingers clenched around the cart push bar. "Sure. No matter what happens, I can be a friend, Luke," he offered privately.

Luke's shoulders loosened, relaxing. "Thanks." Lowering his focus to the bread and meat packages in his hand, he bent closer and asked, "Do you have time tonight?"

"Yeah, nothing but a hot date with quarterly ledgers."

Luke's mouth twitched, then he straightened. "Good." His voice was firmer, deeper, and it sang

through Seth like a perfectly tuned note. The man was as decadent as homemade cheesecake. "Give me a couple hours."

"Sure. See you," Seth said with unconcern, giving him an out. Luke nodded, letting him go. A deep gulp of oxygen almost burned, leaving him lightheaded for a minute.

Seth couldn't think of the last man he'd all out craved like this. Running his stores had pushed time for a relationship into a corner over the last two years. Sure, he went out, had a few friends that he could go to for a night out, or a little more, but this... Luke was a feast that he wanted to dine on for days.

He let out a very slow, controlled breath. The man was confused, that was all. He knew nothing else about him other than he'd been engaged to Taylor's sister. He didn't know if he worked, or at what, his age, if he lived there permanently. In short, nothing.

Determined to keep his libido under control to not accost the unsuspecting, Seth pushed his cart down the next aisle to finish his shopping for the coming week, and try not to think about the hunk he would be visiting in just a few short hours.

* * *

Luke opened the door expecting Seth. "Taylor?" Expectation morphed to confusion, and a hint of disappointment. He couldn't move, trying to figure out why Taylor was there.

Taylor hefted his gym bag from his shoulder. It landed with a dull thump on the step. "You forgot."

Apparently. "What are you doing here?"

"Weekend. Us. Here."

"Shit." He did forget; he barely remembered talking about it. He widened the door. "Come on."

"My oh my, the graciousness," Taylor snarked.

"Bite me, ass wipe."

Taylor laughed, punching him in the shoulder as he walked in. "So what's doing? Clubs? Babes? Babes at clubs?"

Luke shuddered, actually *shuddered* at the thought. He dug in a hurry for a reason to avoid going, and for the reaction. "Man, I just ended a two year relationship with your sister."

Taylor flopped down on Luke's overstuffed couch. Leaner than Sandy's curves, with the same nutmeg brown hair, and blue eyes. "No, she ended it. And that's fine. Honestly, she'll never admit it, but she was doing it for the wrong reasons. You know how damn strict our dad is."

Luke shut the door more slowly than when he'd jerked it open. Yeah, he did know. "So she wanted out?" He hadn't thought of it from this perspective.

Taylor leaned forward to hold himself on an elbow, staring point blank at Luke. "Never admit you got it from me, or she'll nail me to the roof for the buzzards, but yeah."

Luke paced a few steps, his head whirling and feeling utterly off balance. Had all of it been *wrong*? "But...she loved me."

"She still does." Taylor's eyes, blue eyes so similar to his sister's met his unflinchingly, filled to the brim with brotherly kindness and understanding. "The same way you care for her, but she's not *in* love with you. I'm not saying this to piss you off, but I'm glad this happened. You two would have killed each other in a matter of a year."

"No way!" Luke was a better man than that.

Taylor shrugged, slouching back again. "Just telling it like I see it."

"So it wasn't the kiss?"

Taylor rolled a shoulder. "Who knows? Maybe, maybe not. That's for her to explain."

Luke shook his head. He didn't need to know. Didn't want to know. So maybe he wasn't as confused as he'd thought. If she'd pushed to end it, grabbing onto one drunken kiss as the reason, then he wasn't as guilty of fucking up that night as he'd feared. Maybe it wasn't all his fault after all. Maybe his obsession with the night at the club was an aftershock of the

breakup. Luke almost allowed himself to believe reasoning that simple.

Sandy had ripped his heart out. There was no denying that. Why had she been so cruel? To remove the chance of reconciliation? If she had because she didn't have the strength to end their relationship herself, then he could accept that. Sandy was a strong woman, but she had her weaknesses, and confrontation was one of them. He could be the stronger man and let it be, take the blame whether their split was because of one drunken kiss or not.

What Taylor said made sense. He'd spoken to Sandy earlier that week to tell her he got the box she'd sent, a few knick-knacks that she'd decorated with. It probably helped to not have her father constantly seeing them scattered around her room now that they weren't getting married.

Breaking the silence, Luke said, "It's okay, Taylor. It's done. I don't hate her, it just hurt like hell."

Taylor nodded. "There's babes everywhere, Luke. You'll find the right one."

What if I don't want a woman anymore?

He opened his mouth to immediately snap it shut. No way in *hell* was he asking *that* question out loud. Where the fuck had it come from? Hadn't he just told himself... Apparently that assurance was already drifting away like so much dust in the wind.

The kiss might not have been the end-all reason that crushed his relationship, but it had begun something. The *what* was leaving him tied in knots. Obsessed or not, the fact was he hadn't forgotten, couldn't forget it, and now there was... He stopped that train of thought.

Taylor stood, and clutching the shoulder strap to his bag, sauntered out of the room to the spare bedroom. He spoke over his shoulder before vanishing completely. "Oh, hey. I called Seth. Told him I was making the drive. Asked him if he could go out with us tonight. You cool with that?"

Denial wasn't cutting Luke any slack.

Luke nodded, his tongue suddenly growing thick. "Sure." He spun on a heel to hide in the kitchen until the erection he'd gained at the mention of the other man's name subsided.

Clutching at the counter, he rationalized, *and that is why the idea of clubs and women ring hollow*. Kiss or not, Luke found himself reacting like a crazed starved man to the blond with the wicked green eyes. If he wasn't confused, he didn't know what to call it.

Luke thought he'd found an escape, a way to confront this...craving, and make it disappear by doing some cruising on the internet. Get the initial curiosity out of his system and shove it out of his life. Having Seth's assurance was all he needed to convince himself to move past it. Now he wasn't so

sure he hadn't managed to dig himself into a deeper pit if just Seth's name broke him out in a sweat with a nagging hard-on the size of Florida in his jeans.

He gritted his teeth and breathed through his nose until the taut ache faded.

Chapter Three

Seth smiled in greeting when Taylor opened the door. "I'm here."

Taylor grabbed an arm and yanked him inside through Luke's front door.

"Hey! Easy on the goods, man," Seth joked, laughing, gaining his feet before he fell face first.

"Glad you could make it."

Seth shrugged. "Was coming over anyway."

"Oh?" Taylor eyeballed him, stepping back.

"Where's Luke?" Seth asked, avoiding the question and Taylor's too-observant gaze. If anyone busted him, Taylor would. Knew him too well. And also knew the kind of guys that did it for Seth. Luke was at the front of the line.

"Shower, then I hope clothes. They frown on streaking at clubs."

Seth chuckled, turning to hide the warmth flaring to life at the thought of Luke naked. He'd love to see it.

"He needs a night out," Taylor was saying, disrupting Seth's X-rated fantasy. "I've been a little rough on him over this whole kiss thing."

Not as much as he's been on himself. Not sure how much he should say, he didn't reply.

They strolled from the front room to the living room, sinking down to the couch in unison. "Hey, tell me something."

"If I can," Seth answered.

"Can a man not know he's gay?"

Seth startled, blinking wide eyed at his best friend. Had the bastard already figured out Seth's lusting over Luke? "Why?"

"I mean, is it normal for gay guys to...you know?" Taylor trailed off, avoiding Seth's stare.

"No, I don't know. Unless you fill in some blanks, I can't answer."

"Okay." Taylor looked over his shoulder, probably checking for movement from the bedrooms. Satisfied, he turned around and leaned closer. "Is it normal for a guy to stare at other men?"

Seth snorted loudly. "You stare at chicks. What do you think?"

Taylor's cheeks flooded with a bright red. "Seth. Tell me something. When was the last girl I dated?"

His mouth popped open. "Honestly, I don't know." Seth realized he didn't.

Taylor's head fell slack between his shoulder blades. "That kiss we put Luke up to... It was amazing to watch." His voice was a bare whisper and it cracked on the admission.

Christ, I should just go into counseling at this rate.

Seth purposely kept his voice even. "So because you liked watching two guys make out, you are worried you're gay?"

Taylor nodded, looking completely lost and out of his element.

Seth wanted to scream in frustration. The one man he wanted wasn't gay, and here was his best friend thinking he might be. Murphy's law at work. *Fucking jerk.*

Seth steadied himself with a firm hand, pulling his emotions and thoughts together. "Okay. Let's say for a minute you could be. What else has happened to make you think that? You've been as straight as any guy I've ever known, and I've known you since the ninth grade."

Taylor wrung his hands together before answering. "The guy he kissed was at the club the other night, and he asked for Luke. I was jealous. For fuck's sake!" He lurched from the couch, clawing a hand through his hair. Taylor was almost snarling. "I tried to play it off, but I was jealous that Sam wanted Luke."

"Sam?" Seth's eyes crossed, along with his thinking wires.

"Samuel. The guy he kissed."

"I don't want Sam."

Taylor whirled so fast, his hair outdistanced him and swayed to layer over his brow. Luke stood in the doorway to the living room with shower-damp espresso hair and killer eyes that made Seth's heart pound from ten feet away.

Seth reached his feet from where he sat on the couch. Luke was a dark god, standing tall in black jeans and a navy blue fitted T-shirt that hugged and molded. Seth swallowed his moan. God, he wanted to lick what was hidden under that wrapping.

"That was his name?" Luke broke the tense quiet that had descended.

Taylor nodded. "Yeah. He and Aaron started talking, then he asked me about you."

Seth heard Luke say, "And you were jealous."

Taylor sank to the edge of the couch, his head cradled in his hands. "I can't stop thinking about him. I'm fucking *dreaming* about him."

Seth's mouth rounded. Yeah, that was kind of important to know.

"I thought I was imagining things. Like when I see the guys at the gym. I try not to stare, but holy fucking hell." Taylor trembled. "I don't know when it began, when I started noticing," he croaked. "Three, maybe four years ago. Maybe longer." The last was a dry, hoarse whisper.

Seth sat beside him and wrapped an arm over his shoulders.

Luke came over and took up his other side, resting close in support. "That's when you joined the gym, wasn't it?"

Taylor nodded. "Man, the babes are hot, don't get me wrong, but the guys..." He groaned and flung himself into the rear of the couch with a growl, then pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes. He sounded like he was about to cry. "I'm fucking gay."

"Your father will kill you." Seth didn't make it a question.

Taylor nodded glumly. "You know it. He'll sell tickets for the whipping of a lifetime."

Seth stood and listening to his gut, took out his phone. "Call Sam. Tell him you want to see him tomorrow. He can crash at my place."

Taylor's jaw dropped. "You're serious? You don't even know him."

"As a heart attack. I know you have his number." He waggled the phone in open challenge waiting for him to *deny* having it. "Do you think he likes you?"

Taylor's face flushed a beet red again, avoiding any and all stares. Without explaining, he jerked his head. Seth didn't need details. Something had happened between the two men.

"Do it."

Taylor's trembling hand rose, hesitated, then grasped the phone in a fist. Shaking on unsteady legs,

he circled the room to the deck glass doors and went outside with the phone.

Seth hoped he just made the right decision.

"You're a good friend."

Seth spun around and caught Luke standing in front of him.

"I know what you're doing, and it isn't easy."

Seth swallowed, swimming in the fresh washed scent of skin and the bite of cologne. He forced his mouth to make sounds. Intelligible ones were the challenge. "I hope so. His father will kill him, but he can't keep hiding. He can, it's what the closet is for, but it's not healthy. He needs to create the rules for himself, you know?"

"So staring and dreaming, huh?"

Seth snagged on the pulse beat in Luke's throat. He couldn't look up again. The man would see everything in his own gaze if he did. His interest, his desire. Longing. Being this close to Luke was doing crazy things to Seth's heart rate, and other parts of him. Thankfully, no one seemed to notice the half boner he'd sprouted when Luke had made his entrance. Seth tried for nonchalant, playing it down. "Usually. Like any other attraction."

Luke's voice lowered, rumbled, sinking into Seth until he was melted like a spring thaw, surprised to find himself still standing at all. "What if I'm

dreaming of that damned kiss, but keep seeing your face when I do?"

Seth gulped, whipping up to search, forgetting he should have stayed hidden. "You're straight." Taylor jumping ship to change teams was bad enough on his nerves. Luke too? Seth was beginning to feel contagious.

"That damned kiss started this. For him. And for me," he tacked on quietly.

"You were drunk, Luke. People have done stupider when they're inebriated."

"Then, but not since, and that's where I've been having problems." Seth quaked when Luke's large palm cupped his chin. "How... Why does this feel so perfect?"

He didn't have an answer. He didn't have the air to make his voice work.

The rear door opening broke the spell, causing that caressing hand to fall away. Shivers rolled over his length from the single touch. Taylor strode into the room. "He's coming. Let's go get wasted. I can't deal with this."

Seth sucked in much needed air, though a sideways glance almost made him stumble at the amount of longing and desire swirling in a pair of heated brown eyes. Following out the front door, he remembered what Luke had said coming into the room.

If he didn't want Sam, then who did he want?

Seth drove since he was the last to get to Luke's and his car sat at the end of the line. He picked a local hangout. A place not too far in case they had to leave the car for safer transport home and somewhere he'd be able to find it the next day. While pulling into a spot, his phone jingled. Stopped, he reached for it, digging it out of his hip pocket, not recognizing the number when the screen glowed.

"Hello?"

"Um, hello." So soft and silky. No one Seth knew. "Is Taylor with you? He said to call him on this number if...well, if I needed to."

"Oh, yeah. Hold on." He stretched behind the seat over his head. "It's for you." Then he opened the car door like it was nothing unusual to take stranger-person phone calls for friends. Taylor was the last to follow, slow to join them outside the car.

He held the phone at his ear, but caught Seth and Luke with a pleading look. "Hold on. Hey guys. I'll be right in."

"Sure," Luke and Seth said together.

Luke was at Seth's side as they entered the bar. *A gay guy and his crush walk into a bar...* Seth almost cracked up with laughter. He must have made a sound or something though, because Luke arched an eyebrow at him.

"What's so funny? Did he say something?"

“Nah, bad comedy line.”

Luke didn't push. Probably the only grace Seth would get for the coming year.

They sat at a table and ordered a round and about fifteen minutes later, Taylor finally joined them.

“Everything okay?” Luke was the one to actually ask.

Taylor set the phone on the table. “Fuck if I know. Mine?” He grabbed the third beer waiting on the table and promptly made a dent in it. Suddenly he jerked up. “Shit. I never even thought about how you'd take this, Luke.”

Luke waved him off with a motion of his beer bottle. “We're still cool. If my breakup with Sandy didn't kill our friendship, isn't much that will.”

Seth sat on the outside of the bench seat, on the other side of a Luke sandwich. Taylor swiveled in Seth's direction. “Seth?”

“Taylor, we've been friends for over a decade now. I'm not going to dump you over something I can help you with. Hell, you might not even be gay. You might be bi.”

Taylor hung his head. “I've thought of that,” he muttered crossly. Sitting at a table along the wall, they were out of the way and easily forgotten by the crowd watching the basketball game on the big screens hung on wood-paneled walls. It was as private as it could get. “Shit, but this is embarrassing.

I couldn't get it up. I don't think being bi is a question any longer."

"But Sam..." Seth leaned on his elbows dropping his voice out of respect for the seriousness of their discussion.

Taylor shook his head, dumbfounded. "Sam. Damn, it's crazy. He could be your brother, but man, you don't do a freakin' thing for me."

Seth snorted, unsure if he should be hurt or relieved. He went with relieved. He caught it when Luke raised his hand and ordered another trio.

"Going for shit-faced again?" Seth asked with a meaningful grin.

Luke twisted to talk right into his ear. "Depends. How drunk do I have to be to kiss you?"

Seth's air left him in a whoosh and his world vacuumed into that one moment.

Chapter Four

Luke met Seth's wide gaping stare head on. Seth sucked down the last of his beer and suddenly Luke wanted to lick his full lips, taste the bitter brew on them. Wanted to delve between those lips and chase down the taste of what he knew would be an extraordinary find. The waitress making her delivery distracted him, which was good because the want was quickly escalating into becoming a necessary action.

Dropping his wallet on the table, Luke leaned back, one hand beneath the table, the other looped around his bottle.

"Luke."

He twisted to find Seth at his shoulder. *Shit. He's close.* That nearness registered, and within seconds his cock was straining. Just like it had last weekend on the sand. One thought, one craving. One was all it took. He swallowed the groan bubbling upward.

"Yeah?"

"Look. Taylor, I can understand, you... Don't do this. You're not gay. You're messed up because you drunkenly kissed some poor guy who was probably

paid for the joke. I didn't think you'd call, and I was right."

Luke noticed he was keeping his voice lowered so Taylor wouldn't likely catch much, if any, of what he was saying. The man appeared to be in deep enough thought not to have his decisions questioned or challenged the way Seth was with Luke's.

"Maybe I'm not. Maybe I am only curious," he returned. "But see, there's a problem."

"What?"

"If I'm not gay, then maybe like you said for him, I'm bi."

Seth tilted to study him. "Okay." He drew out the syllables with suffering patience. "Why?"

Luke leaned closer until his lips wisped over Seth's ear. "Because I've got a damned hard-on that you gave me. I asked you over tonight to see if you could help me understand, to try to help convince me I was obsessing and it would go away. This," he hissed, with a motion that could only be construed to mean his dick and the parts thereof, "proves it's more. I've been like this since I walked into the living room and laid my eyes on you."

Seth's lashes lowered, his lips parting on a subtle pant of breath.

Point. Set. Match. Luke had all week to bat this around between his ears and dissect it. If he wasn't gay, or at the least attracted to Seth, what the hell was

he doing? What the hell was going on with him? This was pulling at him harder than the tide he'd been swimming in all week. Whether it was right or not didn't seem to matter. It was happening. And damn if he didn't have the strongest proof of that screaming for attention in his jeans. For Seth's attention.

"And the longer I watch you, the more I want to kiss you, just like I did with Sam, more than him, and neither of us would have to be paid for it."

Seth warded him off with a stiff arm. "Stop. Just stop." He slid from the booth. "I'll be right back." Seth spun on a heel and Luke watched him go until he vanished down the hallway where the bathrooms were.

"We're insane, you know that?"

Luke faced Taylor when he could no longer see Seth. "Why?"

"I never thought this would happen, prayed that I was imagining it all. I was able to ignore it until Sam... Until that damn kiss... Shit." He growled, his hand balling into a fist on the table. Luke understood. "You're looking at Seth the same way I know I look at Sam. You better go find him. There's a dude at the bar who's been eyeballing him hard, and it's known he's gay and out."

Scanning the bar, he caught the guy Taylor meant. In his twenties, almost blindingly blond and weight-lifting buff. He was drilling holes through the

bar walls in the direction Seth had disappeared, ignoring them completely.

“But what if he’s right? What if it’s just curiosity? What if it’s a phase that’ll end?”

Taylor gripped his shoulder, staring at him man to man. He shook his head. “Something happened that night, and I can’t fight it anymore. Sam drives me wild. I was ready to deck you for kissing him, even though we put him up to it. I knew it was a mistake as soon as it was started. I’ve known you long enough to believe Seth does the same for you. Don’t jack this up.” He shook the shoulder he gripped, rocking him to get Luke moving.

Luke noticed when Blond-and-Built stood from the bar, glancing in their direction. There was carnal interest in his expression, and one thing Luke did know—it wasn’t meant for him.

Luke pushed off the curved leather bench seat and as nonchalantly as he could, outpaced the other guy to clear the bar first. Whether Luke was ready for this or not, he wasn’t going to let someone else get to Seth until he knew for sure. The wave of possessiveness didn’t even make him stumble as he made that trek.

Once Luke stood outside the men’s room, he paused, his heart thundering, beating like a spring storm against his ears. He pushed in the heavy door and walked through. There was a guy washing his

hands, so he took up a place at a sink and waited. He knew Seth was in there. He could wait him out.

It didn't take long. The lone guy left and seconds later Seth appeared, his face flushed and his eyes glittering with something that pulled at Luke.

Luke leaned on the bathroom door and crossed his arms, blocking him from escaping. Keeping himself, shockingly, from grabbing onto Seth and doing...something. The door didn't lock, so hopefully no one would have to interrupt in the next few minutes.

"I'm not wrong," Luke stated, obliterating the stillness.

Seth's head fell forward marginally. "Luke. Just let it go. I'll go home tonight and you'll never have to think about this again. Go find a girl, get laid."

"You don't want that," he challenged.

Seth faced away, swallowing hard. "What I want isn't part of the equation."

"What do you want?" Luke dropped his voice to a silken, seductive purr. The shiver that rode over Seth heightened the heated rush of Luke's blood. He'd be kicking his own ass if this had been a one-sided attraction, but now he knew for a fact it wasn't. And he wasn't scared to admit it either. Step by step, it was clicking, and he was looking at the reason why. "Taylor is right. Something changed that night. No,

we didn't expect it, but neither of us are the type to run from life, either."

"What about family? Kids? Your parents?" Seth snorted and braced himself on the sink with clenched palms. "This isn't like test-driving a car. This is a huge decision."

"Was it a decision for you?"

Seth rolled on his neck to stare with bright green eyes at him. "No. I realized it in junior high. I knew I was different, and trust me, it sucked. I've never once been attracted to a woman."

Right there, Luke wished he'd been there to protect him, to have his back, to be his friend when he'd needed one the most. The pain in those few words told stories that probably still haunted the other man from his youth.

Seth ran a hand over his head. "Decision isn't even the right word. Do you think if I'd had the choice, I'd be straight? In a goddamned heartbeat. But I'm not. It's just the way I am. I don't regret it. I'm fine with myself now, then was a different story." He let out a whooshed breath. "I thought I could help you, but honestly, you don't need it. You'll go home tonight and in a few days, a week, you'll laugh and be grateful that you didn't kiss me." Seth laughed but it held a cruel, self-mocking edge. He stood straight, and across the small space, Luke saw into him in a

way he'd never been able to see into another person before.

"What? You were going to add something."

Seth pinched his lips together and refused to explain more. Luke launched off the door and caught Seth in uncompromising hands on his biceps, backing him up until he flattened to the wall with a muted thud. "You keep forgetting something, Seth." Luke hovered over those lips, the same ones he'd been dreaming about. Not Sam's. Seth's. "*I want to kiss you, not because of a kiss I had over a month ago, but because of a smile you gave me the day I met you.*"

Seth's mouth softened. Luke groaned. Without realizing he was going to do it, he canted his hips forward and ground into the man pinned beneath him. Seth's eyes slammed shut, followed by a throaty whimper. Not fighting him. Desire hit so hard and deep Luke was grateful he was wearing black jeans. Damp wouldn't show as easily, because there was no doubt the man captured between him and the wall was getting to Luke. Throbbing pain was keeping rhythm with the thundering pace of his heart. The intensity of the moment was surreal, unlike anything he'd ever known with a woman.

Luke jerked to a stop, awareness filtering in slowly. Differences. Big ones. It shocked him enough to slow down, but he doubted he'd ever want to stop again. He stood straight, but left a hand on Seth,

reluctant to free him. "Tell me you'll let me have one when we get back to my place. Just one. To make sure."

Panting, Seth nodded with a hesitant hitch. His chest rocked, his fingers clenching at his side. Sweeping down his frame with an encompassing gaze, Luke stopped, stunned by the obvious and telling ridge in Seth's pants. Raising his eyes to meet Seth's burning green depths, Luke knew it even if Seth didn't. One kiss wasn't going to be the end of it, but rather the beginning. Which was why he didn't press for it now. Luke didn't want to take that step only to stop if—when—he was proven right.

More meaningful yet, since that crazy night when his life had been so drastically and unequivocally changed, he sincerely wished Seth had been the man he'd kissed that night. His first.

"Ready?" Luke asked a few minutes later when neither were panting so raggedly. He stepped away to give Seth room to move around him.

"Yeah."

Approaching the table, Luke spotted Taylor on the phone again. Shrugging in answer to Taylor's stares, he slid into his place, welcoming the warmth of Seth at his side. Another set of fresh beers had arrived while he and Seth had been MIA. The basketball game had ended, and it looked like the crowd had found another to cheer on.

"He's nervous," Taylor informed them, ending the call.

"About you?" Seth grabbed a beer and only cast a single, questioning glance when Luke's hand, which had been lingering under the table earlier, now found a home on Seth's taut thigh. Seth didn't make him remove it, either, which thrilled Luke.

"That, and the whole situation, what with me, him and Luke. A fucked up triangle."

Luke chuckled. "Relax."

Taylor studied them. "Can we finish this set and go home? I'm not sure I can handle a hangover anymore."

Luke took pity on his friend. He'd never once seen him this at odds over anyone. "Leave it. We'll go now. If you want, we'll stop and get some for the house."

"Yeah, sure," Taylor answered, sounding as if he was doing so as an afterthought.

Luke stuffed his wallet into his pocket and the three beat a path out of the bar.

"You want me to drive?" Luke asked Seth.

He shook his head. "I'm fine."

Tumbling into the car, Seth got them safely home to Luke's. Almost as soon as they were all inside, Taylor snatched the closest phone and disappeared into the spare bedroom, shutting the door clearly.

“No chaperone,” Luke teased, circling to face the man standing behind his shoulder.

Seth tried to grin. It was lopsided and unsure.

“You agreed. One.” Luke nearly held his breath, anticipation making him feel electric even as he tried to control the urge to slam Seth into a wall like he had at the bar. Only unlike what had transpired earlier when he’d held himself in check, Luke wanted to plunder Seth’s mouth mercilessly.

Seth didn’t fight when Luke slid his fingers through Seth’s short blond hair. If Luke had his way, there’d be one kiss that led to another, to another until there was no question what was happening to him. To them.

Or he’d hate it so much that he’d have to bow to Seth’s reasoning.

Somehow, after that little clutch in the men’s room, Luke just didn’t see that happening.

Chapter Five

Luke replayed the night he'd kissed Sam, not even knowing his name then, just going along with the drunken dare from his friends. He remembered the shock of the way Sam's smaller, lighter frame bowed, the sensation of muscle and firmness, completely opposite of the softness he'd known his entire life. He also remembered the way Sam had teased him, plied him into a deeper kiss until there'd been no thought to whom he was drowning in, only how good it had felt, how encompassing. And how much he wanted more of it.

Sam was an inch or so taller than Seth, a little leaner maybe. Seth had broad shoulders, defined arms. The urge to see more, to touch more with him standing there waiting, stole Luke's breath away. His thumb drifted south, running over the choker at Seth's throat. It stood out against his skin.

Luke was beginning to see things that even two months before he'd been oblivious to. The chiseled corner of a jaw. The unique strength where throat met shoulder. There wasn't anything exciting in comparing another male form. He had one. He knew all there was to know.

Or so he'd thought.

Touching Seth was an entirely new experience. Tremors rippled out from beneath his fingers. Luke lingered, his stroke one of discovery as he followed that choker around to the front. A throat that worked hard when Seth swallowed. There *were* similarities, but there were enough differences that Luke knew he wasn't fooling anyone, least of all himself. Seth wasn't anything like Sam, other than the blond hair and already knowing what he was just discovering about himself.

If Sam or Taylor had worries about that, they were laid to waste in that instant for Luke.

Grasping him at the hip, Luke commanded him backward until Seth's spine lay flushed against the front door. He'd discovered in the few seconds in the restroom that he *liked* the feeling of Seth under him, the press of their bodies challenging each other. Seth moaned, already shivering with expectation. Green eyes were deep eddies of need, hunger. Desire. Luke's blood thickened, sinking fast to fill his already aching cock.

Luke lowered his head, liking the fact that Seth was just a little shorter. Pausing above parted lips, feeling the whorls of panted breath on his own mouth, Luke said, "You know this isn't it."

Hazy eyes sought Luke's. "It has to be."

“No. You want it to be. I’m not doing this to wake up tomorrow with my mind changed.”

Doubts darkened Seth’s watching gaze. “All because of a kiss?” he asked with a muffled note of doubt-filled derision.

“Because it’s finally the right time.” Before Seth could gather steam to continue the debate, he covered warm lips, watching those gray-flecked green eyes shoot wide with heat and surprise, to disappear behind dirty-blond lashes. Luke massaged Seth’s scalp with firm fingers, then gasped lightly when the press of fingers dug for purchase at his own waist. One thing he noted right away: Seth’s touch was decisive, not fluttering. Capable, not requesting permission. Shudders rolled over his body when Seth urged him closer, body to body. There was no apology in Seth’s desire. He knew how to ask for what he wanted, knew how to get it.

Luke discovered he liked giving Seth anything he wanted. When he’d kissed Sam, he’d been drunk, no doubt, the kiss a little sloppy, hot and playful, yet the overwhelming sense of rightness had thrown him for a loop for weeks after. With Seth’s giving mouth willingly answering his demands for more, Luke realized even Sam’s kiss hadn’t been perfect. It had simply been enough of the right elements to turn Luke’s world upside down.

That kiss had opened him up to what he was beginning to feel around and for Seth. Working his tongue over Seth's strong stroke, he moaned. Seth did a slow grind in answer, groin to groin.

Luke shuddered at the playful tap against his lips, then the teasing of Seth's tongue as though learning the terrain within. Seth certainly was making sure he did a thorough job. Then he sucked on Luke's bottom lip, drew on it, and nipped just hard enough to sting. Luke gasped, sunk.

"How far did you want to take this tonight?" Seth's raw voice stroked Luke's nerves with an intensity that shocked him.

Luke straightened to peer into his searching gaze. "For what? To find out if I was losing my mind, or just losing it over you?"

Seth's face flared a deep red. He twisted his face to the side, refusing Luke his mouth for the next kiss. Luke didn't feel rejected; he didn't need lips for what he had in mind.

Luke bent and licked beneath Seth's ear. Knowing what felt good for him, he tried a few tricks on Seth and wasn't disappointed when sharp gasps and hungry whimpers slipped from the other man.

"I think this proves my point." Luke sucked, laving on the spot with his tongue when he released the tasty skin.

“Attraction,” Seth said, though it was a hoarse whimper. “It doesn’t make you gay.”

Luke yanked Seth around by the chin to face him. “Maybe it doesn’t, but I do like you. Do you think I’m playing? That you’re some kind of an experiment for me?”

A flash of hurt was quickly buried by a steely, cold stare.

Luke immediately relaxed his grip though he didn’t set Seth free. “Someone did, didn’t they? You’ve been through this already? Another friend?” he guessed. Luke soothed him, petting a hip where he still pinned Seth to the door. Seth didn’t answer, not that Luke expected him to. “Why did you offer to help me, then?”

Lashes hid his gaze, dropping to stare beneath Luke’s chin. “So long as you weren’t interested in me, it didn’t matter. I could help you figure it out.”

“And now?” Luke couldn’t stop running his thumb over the pulse in Seth’s neck. The erratic pounding was telling Luke more than Seth ever would. Seth raised a hand and bit at the nail. Luke gently slapped it out of the way. “Quit that. Bad habit.”

Seth grinned sheepishly. “Nerves.”

“So, let me see if I can figure this out. Just say yes or no, okay?” Seth nodded, easing backward until his

head rested on the door behind him, waiting for Luke. "You like me?"

"Yes." It was a thin, aching whisper.

"And I can't stop touching you, now that I've realized I want to."

Seth shrugged, even as his eyes burned with a pleased heat.

"So, I guess in all fairness, I'm coming out."

"I..." Seth drew a breath of air. "I guess so."

"Are there rules to this? Am I doing it wrong? Am I too old?"

Seth laughed low in his chest. "No, not from my point of view, and age doesn't really matter. How old are you?"

"Thirty."

Seth's fingers kneaded Luke's side where he still held on. "Okay."

"Then let's take tonight slow. I've been dreaming about this shit for weeks. And every night since you showed up, you've been the damned star. A very naked star."

Whether Seth knew it or not, Luke had been close to cracking, ready to call him when they'd bumped earlier that day in the grocery store. He couldn't get the other man out of his mind, and the fear and confusion of the kiss he'd shared with Sam had grown to a curiosity and need to do the exact same

thing with Seth. And then see where it would take him.

Luke blanketed him again when there wasn't another forthcoming argument, purposely straddling Seth's hips and legs, subliminally marking him as captured. As his.

"*Ahh,*" Seth groaned, a vicious shudder chasing the sound.

The rumble shot like liquor into Luke's blood, exciting him and making him feel things that were new yet the same on an escalated tier of feeling.

Seth was drowning. The heat rolling off Luke's body was scorching in its intensity. There was a scent, primal, intoxicating, weaving around him. He couldn't lie to himself. He feared this was just a lapse. A way to take the memory of the kiss and banish it forever, convince himself that it had all been a mistake, then and now. For Luke to prove once and for all that the kiss he'd shared had been a mistake by pushing things with Seth. If Luke continued to only throw up his hands at any second and laugh it off, it would be no less than Seth was expecting.

The problem was, the longer Luke touched him, the more the conclusion to this euphoric dream was going to hurt like a bitch. He'd been drawn to the sun-hued wall of muscle since that first meeting a

week ago. Now that he'd actually tasted Luke's kiss, felt his body and the contours along his own, Seth craved Luke, longed to have his hands sculpt and mold to every dip and hollow, and repay the delicious torture two fold.

"So how does this work?"

Seth licked a sensitive bottom lip. "Excuse me?"

"Well, this is pretty hot, and believe me, I want more."

The first sign of uncertainty clouded the dark orbs peering at him expectantly. Seth touched Luke's jaw, trailing over the defined shape. "What comes next?" he asked, knowing that question was likely at the forefront of Luke's turbulent thoughts.

Luke dipped and caught Seth's upper lip between his, light teases, just a snag, and repeated it.

Seth shivered. "That depends on you." At the questions staring back at him, Seth explained, "You can go as far as you're comfortable with, or stop."

"I won't use you like that."

Seth stilled with surprise. "You're not." *Can't use the willing.* Sadly, he was very willing, even knowing the hurt that he was laying himself bare for.

Luke adjusted to put a little space between their mashed bodies, then circled Seth's wrists with light fingers to bring Seth's flat palms to his own chest. Seth sucked in hard, his fingers tightening on their own to catch and hold the heat beneath them.

"I can go pretty damned far," Luke warned with a throaty rumble. "Show me what this is all about."

"Luke." The feel of Luke's name on Seth's lips was erotic as hell. He knew as soon as he gave in, he would be truly sunk. He wanted the man too much, in any way he could have him. "I won't be upset if you can't."

"I know, but right now all I want is more, not to stop."

Seth applied enough pressure with his hands for Luke to give him breathing space, and to actually unpeel himself from the door. "Then you decide. Here, and we take it slow, knowing it'll stop, or the bedroom."

"Where all bets are off."

Oh, man. The smoldering look Luke slid over Seth sent his heart pounding, ricocheting wildly through his chest. He knew perfectly well what Seth was getting at.

"Just how much have you thought about this?" Seth asked, quivering, his voice shaking and unable to completely hide it. Fear battled with hungry anticipation.

Luke leaned close, his breath warm and seductive flowing over Seth's ear. "Enough. The Internet is an incredible educational tool. For all subjects."

“Oh, shit,” Seth moaned, his lashes lowering as shocks knifed through him. Luke had been researching this on the Internet?

“What’s the code word? Supplies?”

Seth broke, right there. “I won’t stop if we go there.” Not the way Luke was spiking his needs with so damned little. The level of confidence Luke was exuding was weakening Seth’s misgivings, burrowing through his barriers to hold himself at arm’s length.

“Seth, I’ve been thinking about this for too long to want you to.”

Trying for one last moment of sanity, he stated, “There’s no going back. You can stop, never do it again, but you can’t make it disappear, or take it away.”

Luke paused, no sexy comeback on his lips. “I know. I’ve thought of that too. It’s what kept me from calling, but my time was coming.”

Seth glided the hand on Luke’s jaw upward, into the thick furl of his hair and relinquishing the battle, tugged him close. “Then let’s make it good.”

Luke’s panting breath was hot on Seth’s lips, right before consuming them in a kiss that curled his toes.

Chapter Six

Luke couldn't see beyond the man in front of him. Green eyes held him, no less than captive. A desire he couldn't have ever guessed or controlled, riddled him. He never thought he'd see the day when he'd be making the moves on another male, but...

That's where he was. And from the potent heat in Seth's eyes, he was winning the war.

The discoveries online that morning had been...enlightening, to say the least. He'd tested his tolerance, his interest, first. The way he'd blown his load watching one guy being sucked off by another made it clear he wasn't disgusted by what he'd been watching. The pure heat between the two men was scorching, the moans, the pleas for more. Imagining Seth doing the same thing to him had sent Luke's pulse skyrocketing, his body quivering with an unsurpassed level of lust and desire.

Just as little as a few hours before, he'd hoped that this was something he could convince himself wasn't real, wasn't happening. All he needed was a single escape from Seth telling him it would all fade away, that he was wallowing in a conundrum of his own making, regardless of what he'd felt while

engrossed in his internet discoveries. Seth had said it himself. Curiosity was imbedded in human nature. Then he'd walked into the living room, and like a magnet, he'd settled on Seth and Taylor talking in *close*, quiet discussion. He'd wanted to shove Taylor across the room, far away from Seth. A splash of possessiveness Luke hadn't anticipated engulfed him. Any delusions wilted and died with that beating at him. Somewhere between that morning and now, he'd stopped fighting the wanting.

The day he'd met Seth standing on his porch with that box of knickknacks and junk from Sandy's, he'd felt something. A level of trust that had spurred his confession, forged the beginnings of a friendship. He'd had no idea what it was leading him to.

Luke still trusted Seth.

Framing Seth's jaw with his hands, Luke caressed him, discovering the differences he'd never thought of before. The square definition of his face, the scrape of stubble against his palm. He shivered, thinking about how that would feel on skin elsewhere.

Seth had wrapped an arm around Luke's waist, his other still trapped deep in Luke's hair, holding on. Body to body, sensations were popping and exploding in their newness. The driving invasion of Seth's tongue was that of a man taking no prisoners. Luke had never conceived of the idea, of being on the receiving end of such a passionate man.

He broke free, gasping, his lips tingling. "I don't care what we do, Seth, but please, do something." Luke was holding on by a thread, and without a clue how to really proceed, he was at Seth's mercy.

"Positive?" He met Luke's gaze, giving him a chance to back out, no condemnation to be found.

Luke groaned, pressing his forehead to Seth's. "Not letting you go. Not now, not ever," he whispered. Seth's eyelids drifted shut. Silence hung heavily in the air between them for seconds. Once out there, Luke realized just what he'd said. An unconscious Freudian slip of the tongue. He waited for the fallout, but it seemed the knowledge that no one believed anything said in the heat of passion was true. Seth didn't react to it, not in any way Luke may have expected.

Seth's tongue peeked out to lick at his bottom lip, followed by a sigh of surrender. "Take me to bed, Luke."

"Oh, God." He shuddered in response to the husky order.

Then he did as Seth asked. Finding Seth's hand with his own, he led Seth to his bedroom, shutting the door securely behind him.

Facing Luke, Seth moved slowly, but confidently, easing Luke's T-shirt out of his waist to tug it over his head.

A sound of appreciation echoed between them. "I've loved your chest, your body, since the first minute you opened that door." Seth ran learning hands over Luke's pectorals, his nails scraping lightly to tease and torture with the single move.

Seth snapped up from his exploring to focus when Luke gasped, mired in sensation.

"You can tell me to stop, Luke. Any time. I promise you that."

Luke's heart lodged between his ribs. He swallowed until he found his voice. "If I need to, I will."

Seth studied him a moment, and then he continued, running questing palms from Luke's shoulders over his chest, stopping to rub teasing fingertips over the points of his nipples.

"These are incredible." Seth leaned forward, warm breath swirling over one, his gaze seeking upward to lightly flick the bead with the tip of his tongue.

Luke's fingers clenched so as not to grasp and grab uncontrollably. Following through with the next expected move, Seth covered Luke's flesh with his mouth and sucked. A raw growl rolled in Luke's throat at the sensation roaring through him. When Seth moved to taste the other side, Luke's knees shook.

"I want to see you." Luke raised a hand to fist into the material of Seth's shirt. "Can I?"

Seth helped him pluck the shirt over his shoulders, leaving him bared from the waist up as well. It fell to the floor to accompany Luke's like a wind-tossed leaf. Luke's pulse beat in a new rhythm as he stared at Seth's body—a *man's* body—unashamedly in pleasure for the first time.

"Still okay?" Seth asked gently.

Sweeping his gaze up from his investigation, he locked on Seth's penetrating eyes.

"Better than."

Seth blushed at the compliment. Luke liked that about him. He held a certain innocence, carried a youthfulness that belied his age.

Holding Seth's face in tender hands, he brought them closer, melding them lip to lip. Seth melted.

I'm really doing this, Luke's brain told him. With flashes of memory, he tried to put the puzzle together the hints, anything that would lead him to this moment, but he couldn't do it. Not while kissing the sweetest lips he'd ever encountered. Letting the thought go, he promised himself he would figure it out. Later.

With the pressures of why and how gone, he relaxed. Seth's hands wove over Luke's head, digging into his hair and holding on. Learning hands began to move on their own, craving touch, needing more.

Luke worked loose the lightweight belt in Seth's Dockers, running the backs of his hands over Seth's stomach and pelvis. Shivers were his reward.

He didn't hesitate until he opened Seth's pants, the first stumble of unknown body geography causing him to falter.

"Shh," Seth soothed. "Touch me." He roamed from Luke's mouth, beneath his chin. "Feels so good, you touching me." The words were pants of breath, of blatant desire. Luke tilted, allowing him easier access to touch and kiss all the points Seth wanted—which were many. Luke's hands started moving again, forming to the shape of Seth's hips within his clothing. From there it ceased to matter, discovering the hard curves and taut flex of muscular ass.

Seth began a path downward over Luke's chest, licking at the smooth skin of a nipple with swirls of tongue that shook Luke. Without really being aware, his hands slipped away from their learning hold as Seth's mouth continued its foray lower, tasting and kissing. Lost in the euphoria of sensation Luke realized after the fact that his jeans had been loosened and brought down together with his briefs to his thighs.

A quiet whine of hunger dragged his attention to Seth, on his knees, gazing at Luke's throbbing member. Looking upward, he said, "Remember, I will stop."

God, Luke hoped not. The desire-laden darkness of Seth's eyes said he hoped Luke wouldn't ask him to. Luke shook his head. Sensing what was needed, he threaded his fingers through Seth's soft blond hair and guided him forward. He wanted to see that lush mouth take his cock, wanted to feel that wicked tongue flick and roll over the end. The fulfillment of his secret fantasy.

Luke's wish was granted. With a light tug from Luke showing it was okay — wanted — Seth opened his kissed-to-perfection lips to taste the head of Luke's dick with a languid swipe of his scorching tongue.

"Fuck." Luke gasped, almost bending double. Feelings and heat roared through him. Then his world vanished. Seth opened his mouth and passionately sucked on the head.

Luke's first lesson in male-to-male fellatio.

Oh, God. Fuckfuckfuckfuck... His mind was in a perpetual loop. Seth's weight was feather light on his thighs, bracing himself as he sucked Luke's balls. Fisting Luke's cock at the base, he pumped in rhythm, mewls and growls echoing through flesh and blood. The vibrations sliced up Luke's length, forcing him to grow harder, fuller, and so much more sensitive than he could ever remember being.

"Oh, shit! Stop!"

Seth pulled off and lurched back in a panicked rush. Luke collapsed to his knees, yanking him

forward to slam his mouth into Seth's. Tension kept Seth unmoving for several seconds. Luke gentled his kiss when Seth began to relax once more beneath the driving force of Luke's lips.

"It's...okay. Don't want to come yet," he managed, panting like a freight train.

Relief was a tangible reaction, sweeping over the other man's features in a wave.

"Awesome, Seth. Would love to let you, but not this time," he managed, hoarse and still gasping for breath after the kiss. He clutched Seth's shoulders, supporting his trembling body against Seth's steadier frame as he cooled down, as if he could.

"I want it, sexy," Seth whispered against Luke's lips.

Luke groaned. Pushing Seth back to lie on the floor for a moment, he shimmied down Seth's length to tug any remaining clothing off. Once Seth was naked, Luke stood and kicked his own clothes off and out of the way. "Come here." He offered a hand and pulled Seth to his feet.

The bump and grind of thick, heated flesh was making it hard for Luke to catch his breath. He wasn't going to last much longer, no matter what they did. "Bed. Now."

Seth spun and fell to his back, taking Luke with him to sprawl over his frame.

"So who's gonna..." Luke faltered. The moment of truth.

Seth's smile was warm and understanding.

"Who's going to get fucked?"

Luke cleared his throat, then nodded.

"Call it whatever you want, but I was hoping you'd let me be your first. I'll show you what makes it so incredible."

He'd seen a few videos online and while it had looked foreign, the guy getting rammed had been moaning and begging his head off for more. There had to be something to it if sex felt that good, right? "Pop my cherry?" Luke chuckled, though it was more than rough.

Seth nodded.

"And it's really worth it?"

"Best sex you'll ever have," Seth murmured, rubbing a thumb patiently over Luke's chin.

"I can't argue against that kind of determined confidence."

Seth grinned. "You'll know how to make it feel good for me next time," he said with an endearing little nip of teeth on Luke's jutted jaw. "Because I want to feel that monster so bad, it hurts. I want you to fuck me until I scream."

Luke's eyes shut and rolled into his head with that declaration. Shaking from head to foot with anticipation, he nodded.

Seth moved them both on the bed until he hung over Luke. Not quite groin to groin, but it didn't matter. The throbbing pulse of Seth's dick caught between their bodies was driving Luke mad.

"Just relax, babe. I won't lead you wrong."

The earnestness in Seth's tone and gaze eased Luke's apprehensions. He trusted this man. Luke suspected he was beginning to care for him too. Accepting, he sank boneless into the covers.

"So, where are you hiding the code word?"

Luke's husky laughter rumbled at Seth's arched eyebrow and leering smirk. "Nightstand drawer."

"Ah. A prepared man. Love that."

Relaxed, he followed with anticipation as Seth stretched to tug the drawer out and swish around for a moment or two before pulling his hand out like a claw machine, bearing that sought-after and rarely-won prize.

Chapter Seven

“Let me take care of you for tonight,” Seth said, the words a caress that washed over the heated skin beneath Luke’s ear.

“I don’t usually let who I’m with do all the work,” Luke admitted through a trembling sigh, arching to offer more room to Seth’s wandering lips.

“I can see that,” Seth crooned encouragingly. “It’s called being a top, and it’s my perfect wet dream.” He nuzzled in close to Luke’s shoulder, licking and suckling little bites as hands Luke had never known mapped his body, to both their delights.

“Top and bottom.” Luke groaned when Seth evilly ground down, the cream leaking from the tips of their cocks creating a wave of “More!” to echo through him as they glided against one another with enough friction to arch his spine in pleasure.

“So long as we’re both okay with the meeting in the middle, the graphs for illustration” —Seth nipped, then sucked hard on a peaked nipple — “aren’t necessary.”

Luke laughed throatily through his groan. “Bastard.” But he appreciated the playful efforts to keep him from concentrating too hard and panicking.

The swipe of a slick tongue over the groove of his hip sent a swarm of goose bumps across his chest. He hissed when Seth buried his nose in the V of his legs, widening his straddle automatically. The reward was Seth's hot mouth delivering adoration to his nuts.

Luke closed his eyes, gripping the bed sheets. This was insane. He'd loved Sandy, and she hadn't been shy about sex, but Seth was thoroughly blowing his mind. Nothing was off-limits, *nothing*. "Oh God," he gasped, twitching at the flicked tease of Seth's tongue dancing beneath his ball sac. The little space between and not. Then he was *there*.

"Give me some room, Luke, and relax."

Luke did as Seth asked, broadening the stretch of his legs. Unsure, but unable to physically stop him, he panted, waiting.

He bit his lip in the next instant to hold back a scream. Not with shock, or even fear, but with unadulterated, volcanic orgasmic pleasure.

"Easy, babe," Seth crooned, peering into Luke's face from between his legs. A light stroke petted his thigh, grounding him. "Wow, I'm lucky. You are sensitive."

"Lucky?" Luke croaked.

"You have no idea."

Luke was pretty sure he was about to find out.

Seth watched and waited for Luke to calm a little. Keeping him at that edge would see him going off before Seth had shown him a fraction of what he hoped to. Staring at his flushed face, with his lips reddened and full from their kisses and his own biting, turned Seth on, made him want to prowl up Luke's naked frame to lick, kiss, and suck anything he could get his lips and mouth on.

"Better?"

With a jerked movement of his head, Luke answered.

Dipping down again, Seth kissed at quivering skin, licking Luke's pulsing hole. Blowing a breath to sensitive skin had Luke keening deeply. Grasping the lube, he popped the top, grinning at his "virgin." The man had bought lube and condoms. Seth was humbled and ecstatic to be his first. *Maybe his only?* He pushed the hope away. This was sex. He didn't want to pin his hopes on after.

Warming the thin liquid on his fingers, he rimmed Luke's pucker. "That's it, baby."

Luke was groaning unintelligibly.

His first finger entered Luke's channel. He drew it out, and repeated the slow glide. "Tell me if anything is too much," Seth warned again.

A gulped, hoarse "Yes" reached him. "Promise."

With patience, he added the next finger and tension ricocheted across Luke. Seth pressed caring

lips to Luke's thigh, palming the sizeable cock in front of him to stroke lightly as he repeated the motions, turning and scissoring his fingers to widen him. Luke had a gorgeous cock. The stretched-tight head was bright red, drips of cum leaking profusely from the slit, proof he was in overload. Not as deep in skin-tone as the rest of him, cut, and a good eight inches of deliciousness. Seth craved feeling that slide into him.

When he added a slicked third finger, he also licked at Luke's sac, keeping him off balance between the pleasure/pain of being invaded, stretched, and sucked. Seth took his time waiting for the shock of the burn to pass until Luke began to press down, seeking more.

"Ready for me, sexy?"

"God, yes!" Luke hissed, clawing into the sheets, rumpling them as casualties of his passion.

"Turn over. It'll make your first time more comfortable."

Dark, glassy eyes tried to open, and finally did, focusing on him. With a twitch of his shoulders, Luke rolled to his belly, his legs on either side of Seth's body with his face cushioned on crossed arms.

"Hand me a pillow, sweetheart."

Luke stiffly aimed one behind him for Seth.

With one in hand, Seth positioned it beneath Luke's waiting hips. He reached for a condom and covered himself, adding more slick to it and a few

more drips to Luke's ass. The sight of his body pulsing as if hungry for what they were about to share stole his breath for an instant.

"Slow and easy," Seth soothed, rubbing a flat palm up and down Luke's spine as he scooted in closer.

"Please, Seth," Luke moaned. He ground down into the pillow, then lifted his pelvis, arching his body. "Fuck me."

He would have stopped if Luke had made one sound, one cry or whimper of pain or change of mind. He didn't.

Seth settled at the cusp and carefully breached him for the first time. They both groaned.

With agonizing slowness, Seth invaded to retreat, gaining inches as Luke's body accepted him, tightening to relax, to almost devour him on the return until Seth was sunk as far as he could go.

"Holy fucking..." Luke muttered, his body shaking. A shudder rocked his body and he rolled his spine, putting more pressure on Seth. Luke tossed his head and cried out. "Seth!"

"I don't want to hurt you," Seth replied, gasping in ragged spurts as Luke's body enveloped him in a swirl of heat unlike any before.

"Too...good. Please," he whimpered. "Move. Fuck me! Something." The last was pure animalistic growl.

"Up." He slapped Luke's hip, helping him until he'd staggered to his hands and knees. "Still okay?"

A *mmphed* sound was his answer, the visible length of Luke's throat stretched taut, convulsing as he gulped for breath.

Seth eased his hips away to claim him again, filling him, stretching his channel with each thrust. Within seconds, a rhythm filled the room with the sound of skin meeting skin. The intense jolt of his sac smacking into Luke's body drove Seth wild. There was nothing in the room, nothing in the world, but this moment, and this man.

"Want you to come, baby." Seth's fingers dug into Luke's hips, pinning him as he continued to ride that fisting channel. Luke had managed to hold on, somehow.

Putting his weight on a forearm, Luke snaked a hand beneath his chest and Seth felt the reaction as Luke caught his own dick.

Luke quivered and groaned, shoving his face into the bed to cover the volume. Luke was a screamer. Seth slammed into him again, lost. Luke was everything he could have ever asked for.

Luke was jacking himself off, his hips meeting Seth to pump into his own hand. Within seconds, nirvana hit. "*Shit!*" Luke exploded, arching and jerking as he shot onto the bed. Luke's ass clenched down and Seth cried out, pulsing explosively to fill

the condom. Lights danced over his vision. His heart raced to bounce off his ribs. His body thrust and twitched until he was sucked dry. Catching himself on a bracing hand beside Luke's hip, he pressed a light kiss to the damp heat of Luke's shoulder in front of him. Luke shivered in answer, a mewl of a moan reaching Seth.

Oh, hell. Seth sucked in deeper draughts of air, aware of the sweat chilling on his skin. He was so screwed. Now that he'd experienced the wildest of his dreams, able to taste, touch, and *feel* everything about Luke, Seth had no idea how he was ever going to be able to walk away.

* * *

Luke flexed and trembled. Oh, man. The things he was feeling. The *places* he was feeling them.

"Easy, babe. I got you."

A soft, dampened, and warmed cloth was tenderly cleaning his body. Luke didn't even remember changing positions, but he was on his back with his eyes closed. There was even a pillow under his head.

He reached a shaky hand up, his fingers scraping over the pillowcase's corner as he tried to lift his head. "Not..."

Seth chuckled. "No. Not that one."

He managed a tired smile. Opening his eyes, his gaze landed on Seth's concentrating expression. Ripples of remembered passionate sensation rolled over him when Seth tenderly swept the cloth over his cock and ass. Luke's eyes closed and a pleased, low moan slipped from him before he could stop it.

Seth finished, and after gliding from the bed, carried the cloth to the hamper, turning out the light that had been on to let him see.

"Never anything, *ever* in my life, like that."

Seth grinned playfully, a twinkle in his eyes that made them sparkle in the scattered moonbeams as he stretched out with Luke, dragging the covers up with him as he did. "Not to scare you, but that was with the training wheels on."

Luke blinked, gaping.

"Next time, I'll show you what the sweet spot is."

"There's more?"

Seth's lips warmed the side of his mouth, where he made himself comfortable on Luke's shoulder, not answering. Just smiling. With a looping arm over Luke's middle, and one of Luke's own circling Seth's torso to rest on a hip, sleep took them both under in a matter of minutes.

Chapter Eight

"Taylor was right."

Seth *hmmmed* groggily. "About what, babe?"

Luke sighed, stretching his calves to get blood flowing again. He hadn't paid any attention to the clock. The sun was up, that was all he needed to know at the moment. "I've been thinking, remembering. Sandy and I wouldn't have lasted."

Seth curled closer and rested his cheek on the back of his hand, snuggling into Luke's length. "Why do you think that? You were together for two years, weren't you?"

"We were." Luke rubbed a hand down his face, stiffly scraping fingertips over his now obvious growth. "We had dated for about ten months when I asked her to marry me. Part of the reasoning was I wanted to get her away from her dad. Probably as much as she wanted out."

"He is a bit of a jerk," Seth whispered.

Luke snorted. "He doesn't know you're gay, I bet."

Seth shook his head.

Luke threaded fingers through smooshed blond hair, playing with it. Spikes and peaks dared to defy

the tangle of the rest. "It's okay. He doesn't matter to us."

"What about Taylor?"

"If he needs us, we'll help him. No questions asked."

The tension that had begun to fill Seth with the mention of their friend vanished. "Good."

"Anyway. Another reason I asked her to marry me was because of the stipulations of my inheritance. In order to get a certain percentage before Gram dies, not that I'm asking for her to, I had to be married by thirty."

"You were using her?" Seth shot to his elbow, green eyes wide as he gaped at Luke.

Stopping him from going further with a tight grip, he replied, "Hey, calm down. The inheritance isn't a secret. She knew I would get it. There would have been a prenup to protect that portion." Luke studied Seth's eyes for a drawn out moment. "You don't know who I am, do you?"

"Aside from Luke Fletcher, not really."

"Man, that's refreshing." Luke sighed. "Relax, baby. I'll tell you. My grandfather owns oil wells in west Texas. I'm the only heir."

"Wait." Luke saw him cross his eyebrows in thought. "Fletcher. From Abilene? As in F.L.T.X. Oil? I always thought that stood for Florida-Texas oil."

Luke chuckled. "No, but it does give us a little anonymity. It's Fletcher-Texas Oil."

Seth shook his head. "You don't dress, act, or even drive, for that matter, like you're an oil baron. Geez, you own a Dodge Charger!"

Luke's laughter grew considerably lighter. "I know. Drives my mother crazy. She's the tea-party, hat-wearing, sign-the-dotted-line person. I stay as far away from it all as possible. My father is still on the board, but he'll be retiring soon."

"I bet her daddy wanted you to marry too," Seth scoffed with a touch of scorn.

"Just a little." Luke continued to pet Seth's hair. "I had to call him and tell him to quit hounding my mother to try to convince me to come home and as they say, 'get on with it.' By that point, after Sam, then meeting you..." He shook his head. "I knew there wasn't a chance."

"Is Sandy okay?"

"I think so. When I spoke to her earlier this week to let her know I got the box, I told her if her father gets to be too much, to let me know. I can't marry her, but I can get her away from him. Send her to Europe for a couple months, or just to California for that matter. Give her a chance to get out and earn her wings. She'll never get them at home."

Seth nodded. "Yeah. I hated moving here and Taylor not coming. We had plans after high school. His father nixed them."

"Well, if this thing with Sam is..."

"Like us?" Seth breathed with understanding.

Luke didn't shy away, nodding in agreement.

"He's likely not going to have a home for long."

Seth stroked a light furrow through the hair on Luke's chest. "We'll figure it out."

"So long as he knows we're here for him, it'll work out," Luke agreed.

"I hope so." Seth rolled to his back, leaving Luke bare, taking away his body's heat. "So, what now?"

"Between us?"

Seth eyed him out of the corner of this eye. "You don't beat around the bush, do you?"

He grinned, tugging Seth's uncooperative body until he relented and his sexy length lay over Luke's chest more than before. "Why should I? Last night made it pretty clear where I stand."

Seth looked away.

"Babe? Don't do that."

"It was one night, Luke."

He bit his tongue not to berate him for thinking that. Luke had his hang-ups; Seth had fears.

"But I want to know more about this 'sweet spot' you mentioned."

Seth trembled in his arms, arousal clear in the flush on his cheeks. Good to know. He still wanted Luke.

“From me?”

Luke caught Seth’s chin, forcing him to meet his gaze. “*Only* from you. I meant what I said yesterday. You’re not an experiment.”

Luke didn’t know what the coming weeks or months would bring, but he did know he wanted more of Seth to share them with. “I think I’m falling for you,” he whispered, meaning every word.

Seth’s eyes burst open, glittering in the sunlight, the tiny gray flecks in the green seeming to sparkle even more than they had last night.

“You’re confused —”

A finger to Seth’s lips silenced him. Along with the very stern glare Luke wore. “Don’t. Just because I didn’t see it, didn’t discover it when I was a teenager, doesn’t make it not real.” He was still new to this, but he wasn’t imagining how he felt either. In fact, as of this morning, all the turmoil and indecision he’d suffered over the last week was gone. Even the “what the fuck” feeling of the kiss he’d shared with Sam — all gone. He knew without a doubt he was looking at the reason.

Seth slowly rose above Luke, refusing to meet eye to eye. “That wasn’t fair.” He turned to rest on a hip with a leg tucked at an angle, gazing across the room.

He plucked at the sheet absently, then spoke. "To answer you from last night, yes, it's happened before. A straight man *going gay*." He made quote motions in the air with his hands, dropping them to his lap after. "All for a night of fun. The night was closer to two months, and by then I had started to care about him. Then his girlfriend returns, wanting him back and suddenly, he's straight as a sobriety test and refusing to talk to me."

"Prick."

The sound that rumbled from Seth's chest was bitter. "Believe me, I called him far worse."

"Well, I have no girlfriend, and considering I've kissed more guys in the last two months than women," —he grinned when Seth snorted rudely— "I think I know what I'm talking about when I say I do want to spend more time with you."

"So—"

A brisk knock on the front door of the house interrupted them.

"So, I guess I better go see who that is," Luke joked. He caressed Seth's mouth with a lingering thumb. "I'll be right back. And we're not done."

Sliding out of bed, Luke hunted for his clothes, finding his jeans on the floor where he'd left them the night before. Stooping, he snatched them up to hop into them, not bothering with a shirt or shoes.

He was paces from the front when the knock repeated. Guessing it was anyone from his neighbor to someone looking to save his soul, he wasn't expecting Sam, not this early, anyway.

Sam stood on the front step, his hands clasped before him, a tentative smile on his lips. "Hi, Luke. Is Taylor still here?"

The resemblance to Seth was truly uncanny. Blond hair, green eyes, just a hair taller and a smidge lighter. Luke blinked, clearing his thoughts. "Yeah. I guess he's still asleep."

Sam bit at his lip, looking away. "We were on the phone late. Can I come in?"

"Oh, yeah, come on in." Luke stepped out of the way and shut the door once he was inside. "Let me go get him."

Luke turned and reaching the spare room's door, he knocked. "Taylor, you up, man?"

"Yeah."

Luke opened the door and leaned in, finding him laying on top of the covers with his earbuds in, rocking the foot propped over his knee. Air drums seemed to be the game of the hour. "Sam's here."

Taylor's eyes shot open. He ripped out the buds and bounced off the bed. "No shit?"

Luke jumped out of his way at the last second to not be trampled as he flew through the door. Luke chuckled at Taylor's eagerness.

Following at a slower pace, Luke halted just within the doorway to the living room. Taylor had Sam pinned to the door, doing a cavity check of Sam's teeth with his tongue.

"Now that is something," Seth murmured, his arms curling around Luke's middle from behind. "Should we tell them they're not alone?"

"Why? They're hot."

Seth snickered and batted at Luke's midsection. Luke caught some of their conversation when they came up for air.

"What time did you leave? Did you even sleep?"

"After five and yes, about two hours."

Taylor raked his hand into Sam's hair, his worry clear in the motions. "Don't take risks like that."

Sam tried for repentant. "I couldn't sleep. I tried." Sam cast a look over Taylor's shoulder and spotted Luke and Seth. "Oh!" He shoved at Taylor, his eyes wide. It looked like he was having as much progress as moving a brick wall.

Taylor shifted and brought Sam against his side. When Sam tried to inch away, he only held on tighter. "It's okay."

"But..." Sam avoided meeting Luke's gaze.

"It's okay, Sam," Luke agreed. He walked forward, Seth clearly still attached at the waist. "I've made a few changes too."

Sam's mouth dropped in horrified shock. "Holy shit! I've never made a man gay."

Seth snickered and Luke gave him a light elbow in the ribs. "Let's just say you gave me something serious to think about. Sam, this is Seth."

"Hello," Seth said from around Luke's side. "Huh. We do look alike."

"So? We share good taste," Luke remarked. Seth pressed his mouth to Luke's shoulder blade to stifle his laughter as Sam's cheeks glowed a fire engine red.

"Guys, lighten up. Remember, he doesn't know you two are dorks yet." Taylor glared at them.

"And you're the best friend of a dork," Seth shot over Luke's shoulder, though staying hidden behind Luke's larger frame.

Taylor flicked a hand in dismissal, tugging at Sam. "Let's go out back."

Luke and Seth broke into deep guffaws of laughter when Taylor gave them the finger right before closing the deck door on them with a sound snap.

Left alone, Seth shimmied around to stand in front of Luke. "So now what?" He linked his hands around Luke's waist. Questions flitted over his features.

"Do you need to check in on your stores?"

"Not on the weekends. I have on-duty managers for both stores. I take one weekend a month for each,

otherwise, they're responsible for getting shifts covered."

Luke wormed his hands around Seth, stroking his sides with slow sweeps of thumbs. "Can you stay?"

Seth slipped a hand from its position but Luke captured it before it reached his gnawing teeth. Luke sucked on it instead, drawing it into his mouth with lazy pulls and swirls of his tongue. Watching his green eyes grow hazy was utterly erotic and arousing to see.

"I'm going to break you of that habit. I'll find ways to distract you."

"That—that seems to be working." Seth cleared his throat.

"Still think I'm confused?" He sucked Seth's digit hard, feeling the growing thickness of flesh pressing into himself below the waist as a growl faded to a moan. He released Seth's finger with a long, languorous lick. "I'm serious, Seth."

"But—"

Luke covered his mouth with a hand. "Let me deal with how I got here, okay?" he asked gently. "I'm not going to suddenly realize I want pussy. Honestly, just saying that is a buzz kill now." Moving his hand away from Seth's delectable mouth, he coursed fingers upward into haphazard tufts of bed-head hair. Gripping firmly, he tilted Seth until his neck was stretched into a tight playground. "If what I

want to do right this minute makes me gay, then I am."

Seth licked his lips. "What do you want to do?"

Luke leaned close. "Start kissing you here." He touched his mouth to a tender spot of silky flesh beneath Seth's ear, letting his lips caress Seth as he spoke. A tremor rippled down Seth in answer. "And not stop until I've made you scream my name."

Seth swayed, his lashes swiftly falling to cover those incredible eyes.

"I can stay," he breathed.

Luke didn't say another word, instead walking them together to the bedroom where he kicked the door shut with a sharp smack of his heel.

Chapter Nine

"My turn," Luke warned with the bite of challenge.

"But—"

"They're big boys. And honestly, how long do you think it'll take them to be in the same position?"

"By the end of the weekend," Seth replied with a cheeky grin. "I've never seen Taylor act like that."

"Me neither." Luke threaded his fingers up into hair he couldn't stop feeling. "Love touching you." He ghosted kisses over Seth's face, his cheeks, his lips, arching him to burn a trail down his throat. "Is this okay?" He nibbled over the arch, licking before moving on.

Breathless gasps showed approval. Seth hadn't taken the time for more than his own pants, which meant it would take next to nothing to see him naked again.

Luke raised his head to peer at Seth. Green eyes had grown slumberous and sexy. The light of day wasn't a deterrent—it was a spotlight on a real gem. "Tell me if I ever do something wrong, or uncomfortable for you, baby. I'm new to this, but I'm not an animal."

A caring hand flitted over his jaw, caressing the hard edge. "I already knew that about you," Seth confided. "Now, carry on."

Gripping him in firm hands, Luke tipped Seth's chin and clamped to his shoulder, sucking to mark the toned skin shivering beneath his lips. He didn't let up until Seth's knees threatened to buckle. Fingers dug into Luke's jeans waist, gripping for all they were worth. Harsh heaves raked through his lungs.

"Careful what you ask for," he said. He kissed the rising bruise on Seth's body with gentle attention. Spinning them, he stopped with Seth's back to the bed. Luke brought him close and kissed him, ravaging him with desire. Seth's whines and whimpers were an aphrodisiac.

Luke slipped the button out of place on Seth's Dockers, gliding the zipper down. Burrowing his nose into Seth's neck, he took a whiff. "Smell so good." He groaned. "Never thought..." He lifted enough to look into Seth's hooded eyes. "Is this normal? It feels so strange but so perfect."

"Very normal." Seth's hands began a slow climb up Luke's bare sides, massaging and caressing ribs. "You have no idea how much you turn me on."

Dropping the Dockers under his hands, he grinned. Gazing down, he said, "I think I might."

Seth laughed silently, but that swiftly degenerated to a moan when Luke encircled the stiff

cock standing proudly, looking for attention. Pants fell to the floor and Seth stepped out of them.

"Oh God, yes," he breathed, weaving where he stood. "Want your hands on me."

"Just my hands?"

Seth groaned, shivering like he'd caught a chill. "More. Anything. God." He gritted his teeth, totally absorbed in the strokes of the pulsating length Luke held captive.

Luke leaned forward and licked at the tight skin of his nipple. "Here?"

Shaking hands rose from Luke's body to shoulders, keeping Seth upright.

"More?"

Seth gulped.

Coming closer, Luke scraped the stubble on his cheek over Seth's abdomen.

"Fuck!" An attack of shudders rocked Seth on his feet.

Luke sank to his knees. He'd been blown away the night before by Seth. The idea was daunting, but he wanted to please his lover. Wanted him to feel as good as he had.

Still holding Seth in his fist, Luke leaned in and found his scent, stronger, most definitely male. Shocks erupted and he gasped in wonder. *Damn*. He stuck out his tongue, and it was like the entire room held its breath. His first touch. His first taste. He

swept the glistening head and reeled. Almost as if he were disjointed from everything around him, he vaguely felt the strength of Seth's fingers tunnel into his hair. It wasn't important. Glancing up, the sight of Seth riding the wave of pleasure was humbling. Luke made him feel like that.

He knew the mechanics—hell, he couldn't count the blowjobs he'd received. "Hang on, baby," he warned. Luke narrowed the distance. Smooth skin skated between his lips. He widened to hold the tip on his tongue. Fluid drops leaked out and he swallowed automatically, moaning at the unique flavor. Bitter, tangy, and everything he could have wanted.

"Holy..." Seth clutched his fingers tighter.

Luke went for it, gliding the length of silk and steel over his tongue, closing his eyes as his heart thundered. He rode him slowly to the end, amazed at the texture, the pulsing, the weight. He unintentionally caught his teeth on the frenulum, beneath the crown and Seth jerked with a guttural growl. Luke froze, then licked in apology. Seth pressured Luke with the hand in his hair to move and he did. Good thing Seth wasn't put off by his unpracticed attempt, instead encouraging him to ride Seth's cock, which he did with fervor.

"Luke." Seth panted above him when his rhythm hit a satisfying pace. A stilted tug on his hair

registered at the same as Seth's cock thickened between his lips.

Luke wasn't stopping. Not for this. He knew what was coming—Seth.

Holding himself steady, he sucked harder, and within seconds was rewarded. With a shouted cry, Seth thrust forward, almost knocking Luke out of the way. Luke gulped the first spurt in shock, immediately craving more. When Seth moved, he lost his prize with a pop of sound to have his lips covered in cream.

"Gimme," he croaked, sticking out his tongue for more. Seth didn't disappoint.

"Shit! That is so fucking hot," Seth said, stroking himself through his orgasm. The last few streams dripped over Luke's chin, and he bent and twisted, lapping up the drops off Seth's cock from underneath.

Shaking and panting, Seth stumbled the foot or two to the bed's edge and plunked down. Luke followed, diving between his legs to finish cleaning.

When he was done, he stripped Seth and quickly shoved his own jeans off and away.

Facing the man who was now laying on his back with an arm tossed over his eyes catching his breath, he took in the sight of his pleased lover. He didn't try to stem the flair of pride at putting him in that condition.

"Damn, Luke." Seth's voice was raw. "You're perfect. Incredible."

Luke smiled, climbing on the bed to hang over Seth's face on his hands and knees, to look straight down at him. "I've just made a decision," he said.

Seth moved his arm enough to blink open one eye. "Am I going to like this decision?"

"Babe, I'm hoping you're going to love it."

An arched eyebrow was his cue to continue.

"I don't want to leave this bed all weekend."

Both eyes became visible, green and glowing, filled with affection and laughter. "Oh? All weekend, huh? What will we do?"

"Shake the rafters," Luke purred, lowering from the waist to kiss him.

* * *

Luke walked out of the bedroom around two, closing the door gently. Seth was still napping, but Luke's body was telling him if he didn't eat soon, he would be regretting it. Once in the living room, his gaze flicked to the back patio and snagged on the deck chairs. Taylor was sitting in one, alone, his leg up to his chest, staring out at the water. Dunes sat between the back of Luke's and the surf. A walking bridge of sun-bleached wood cleared the gap between

terra firma and sand, but once on the other side, it was beach as far as the eye could see in either direction.

Luke opened the door to lean against the frame. "Hey," he said. "What's doin'? Where's Sam?"

"Crashed." Taylor looked over his shoulder, a wistful lift on his lips. Luke couldn't remember seeing him so relaxed. "He was beat. I sent him to the spare."

Luke pulled up the chair's twin to sit. "You know if things get dicey at home, you're welcome here."

Taylor rubbed his chin on his shoulder, a thoughtful heaviness on his face. "Thanks. Yeah, Dad is going to go ballistic. I tried to believe I wasn't gay, and it worked for years. He never said a thing that I wasn't dating or partying." He picked at a loose thread on the shorts he wore. "Not much to do out there anyway. Gotta go all the way to Dallas for the good fun. Guess if I wasn't in trouble, then I wasn't trouble at all."

Luke knew what he meant. His dad was ex-military. Strict was being generous. "What about Sam?" he asked.

Taylor's head sank to the chair behind him. "Believe it or not, he admitted that whole asking about you thing was to make me notice him. The shit knew I was gay even before I'd really accepted it. I'm taking this a day at a time." He gestured toward the house with a nod of his head. "And Seth?"

"You sending him here was the biggest favor you ever did for me," he replied honestly.

"I'm glad. I'm also glad we're still good. Close moment here?" Luke nodded at his hesitant looks to go ahead. "I was more scared of losing you as a friend if you weren't cool with this, and Sam."

"Dude." Luke punched his shoulder lightly. "I don't judge people like that, you know that. Hell, you *know* who I am, and you treat me like every Joe Schmo on the street. That's priceless."

Taylor nodded, facing to watch the surf again. "I think I'll be moving down here, hopefully, with Sam."

"I'd like that, because I'm not going up there again. Not to live." Luke stood and stretched, feeling content in a way he'd never known. "How about we figure out some food for tonight? This is a good day for barbecue."

Taylor's stomach seconded the choice. Laughing, Luke opened the door and Taylor followed him inside.

"Going to check on Sam." Taylor sauntered down the hall and Luke hid his grin. He understood perfectly. He didn't like being away from Seth, but he knew the man could sleep without him hovering.

Waiting for Taylor to return, Luke began to gather things for dinner and snacks for now while his mind danced over the last twenty-four hours, the time spent with Seth, and wondered just what the future

would bring for him. No, it wasn't what he'd expected, even as recently as three months ago, to find himself not only sleeping with but beginning to have feelings for a guy. Nothing like this had even crossed his radar.

The quiet hum of voices warned Luke he wasn't about to be alone any longer, and when warm arms circled his waist, he knew whom they belonged to.

"Hi, babe," Seth whispered with a tender kiss to his cheek.

"Good nap?" He spun slowly and wrapped Seth into his arms, feeling content and happy in ways he wanted to take years to explore.

"Lonely, but I know you'll make up for it." Sparkling green eyes teased him while light lips danced over the curve of his jaw.

Luke chuckled. Yes, he would. Stealing a slow kiss before Taylor and Sam invaded the kitchen, Luke could envision that future with Seth. The idea didn't frighten Luke. He anticipated every moment.

~ End ~

~ About the Author ~

Diana DeRicci is the sexy, flirty pen name of Diana Castilleja. A romance author at heart, DeRicci's writing takes you into a saucier spectrum of sensuality and sexual adventure, where a happily-ever-after is still the key to any story. Diana lives in Central Texas with her husband, one son and a feisty little Chihuahua named Rascal. You can catch the latest news on all of Diana DeRicci's writing and books on her website. Feel free to drop Diana an email. She'd love to hear from you.

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