

# ANDY'S SONG



ANDY'S SONG

*BETH BURNETT*



SAPPHIRE BOOKS

SALINAS, CALIFORNIA

**Andy's Song**

Copyright © 2013 by **Beth Burnett**, All rights reserved.

ISBN -978-1-939062-14-7

This is a work of fiction - names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without written permission of the publisher.

**Sapphire Books**

Salinas, CA 93912

[www.sapphirebooks.com](http://www.sapphirebooks.com)

Printed in the United States of America

Second Edition – March 2013

## *Dedication*

Dedicated to my constant companion, Brutus. He is more than a mere dog; he is a super-dog. He's a patient traveler and an uncomplaining co-pilot. He doesn't question my music choices, and he never asks me if we are there yet.



## *Acknowledgements*

A lot of people helped to bring this baby into the world.

First and foremost, I want to thank Lucretia, who I lived with while writing this book. When finishing this book, I spent about a month doing nothing but eating the meals she put in front of me and drinking coffee in bed on Sundays. Thank you for stepping up while I fell into this book.

My dear friend and beta reader, Wen, was a life-saver in many ways.

Lee Fitzsimmons is an amazing editor. She did a thorough and professional job of fixing and polishing both “Man Enough” and “Andy’s Song.”

My wonderful publisher, Chris, was patient and supportive when I needed it and kicked me in the butt when I needed it.

My favorite professor and friend, Linda, who told me that giving birth to the baby is one thing, but raising it is quite another. I didn’t quite understand that until the second book.

And again, my friend and spiritual adviser, Jenny Ritter was the epitome of love and faith. She let me call her again and again to whine about how I was never going to finish and she always knew exactly the right thing to say... every time.



## *Chapter One*

I'm on the best date of my life. Well, it's not exactly a date. I'm escorting a group of women to a fancy dress ball. It's actually a charity benefit for The Care Center, a foundation that offers support to LGBT people, with a focus on children and teenagers. My best friend Davey has worked there for years. I had planned on coming to the benefit anyway, but I figured I would be bringing one of the women from my little black book. Davey recently broke up with her boyfriend though, so we're here together. I've also got our friends Lynne and Sarah, and Davey's mom, Leah. Glancing at the three of them in the rear view mirror, I catch Leah's eye and we grin at each other.

The ladies spent all afternoon primping. Lynne looks beautiful in a dress with cut outs on the side. Her wife, Sarah, is wearing a well-cut dark gray suit with a red power tie. Leah is wearing a one shoulder dress and her hair is all kind of crisscrossed in some elaborate braid thing that women like to do. I think it's the first time I've seen her out of hippie garb and she looks fantastic. But Davey...Davey looks like a vision. She's wearing the dress I bought her. It's low cut in the back and plunging in the front. It swirls all around her in a kind of silky, creamy dream. She says it's gathered in the front to cover her ginormous stomach, but those are her words, not mine, and they're completely off base. Davey is about five inches shorter than I am, with long slender legs, rounded hips, perfect breasts

and a beautiful face. Her tiny little nose is cute, and her huge brown eyes can turn dark in a second when she wants something from me. Yes, she has a bit of a belly, but it's adorable and I love putting my hand over it when we cuddle. Besides, I like my women soft. I'm all hard angles. I need curves to fit against.

I pull up to the valet station and hand off my keys to the porter. I come around to the passenger side and open the door for Davey. She swings one slender leg out of my SUV. I reach out my hand and she slips hers into mine. Even in her heels, she only comes up to my chin, and I resist the urge to kiss her forehead as I guide her out of the vehicle. I tuck her hand through my arm and then turn to Leah, taking her hand as well. Lynne and Sarah are already out and headed into the building.

Leah looks up at me, grinning, as we head toward the entrance. "What are the chances of me picking up a hot, wealthy man tonight?"

Smiling down at her, I give her arm a squeeze. "Knowing you, Leah, I'd say the chances are pretty good."

"If I had known this was going to be so posh, I would have shaved my legs."

Davey gives her mother a disapproving glance as I smile down at Leah.

"Both of your legs?"

Leah laughs. "Well...maybe one of them."

"Or maybe just an armpit."

"My hoo-haw."

I snort, as Davey hisses under her breath. "Seriously, you two! Try to behave in a civilized manner tonight."

"Civilized?" Leah puts her hand over her heart. "Civilized. Darling, sweetie, daughter of mine. I am

always civilized.”

Nodding in agreement, I give Davey's hand a tug. “This from the girl who once dropped her rum bottle in the bottom of my jeep and started screaming that she couldn't find it.”

“Davey did that?” Leah's eyebrow is raised.

“A few years ago. We were driving down a mountain path on St. Thomas. Davey started yelling about how she had dropped her rum. I was on my cell phone, so I tried to ignore her, but she just got louder until I finally hung up the phone and started looking on the floor for the rum.”

“She couldn't have looked for it herself?”

I shake my head. “She was driving.”

“Davey! Drunk driving is reckless behavior!”

“I wasn't drunk. I was the designated driver!”

Davey pokes me hard in the rib cage and glares at me. “My mother doesn't need to know everything I have ever done.”

Steve and Erik, Davey's coworkers, come screaming out of the building to accost the ladies. I step back to avoid getting plowed down. Steve is spinning Davey around to admire her dress. I glance at the smooth skin on her back as she hugs the man. Her dress is made of some kind of silky material and it hugs her amazing curves like a second skin. I'm lost for a minute, thinking about sliding my hands over the smooth material, until she turns to smile at me.

“Come on,” I smile, putting my hand in the small of her back.

Steve is in a fit. “Leah! You look fabulous. I want to eat you with a spoon.”

She laughs, tossing her braided head and looking coquettishly up at him. “Anytime, baby.”

Erik puts his arm around her. “I claimed you

first. I know I did. Total dibs!”

Leah is in Heaven. Capturing the fawning attention of gay men may be her favorite activity in the world.

Steve and Erik take off with Leah, so I escort Davey the rest of the way in.

“Your mom is glowing.”

Davey smiles over at Leah, as we walk into the ballroom. “She loves this sort of thing.”

“You’re glowing, too.”

She reaches up and adjusts my bow-tie. “Andy, you look amazing.”

I shrug. “Well, I do wear a tuxedo extraordinarily well.”

“You could have ditched the leather boots.”

I hold out one foot to admire my Doc Martins. “I needed lift. I didn’t want you to Amazon it over me in those killer heels.”

She laughs and shakes her head. “Well, you’re the best dressed butch this side of the Mississippi.”

“Both sides, I should think.”

Davey is accosted on all sides as we make our way to the table. We make our greetings and manage to make it to our table. I pick up some little glass bowl thing from the table.

“Ostentatious. Imagine how much more money could have gone to the charity if you didn’t have these.”

Davey slaps my hand. “The stuff here is donated.”

Lynne looks up and smiles at me affectionately.

“Andy, people who pay two-hundred fifty dollars for a dinner expect extravagance.”

I usher Davey into her seat and slide in beside her. Her long neck looks perfect with her short haircut and the low cut dress. I’m fighting an urge to press my

lips to the top of her spine.

"I would have donated two-hundred fifty bucks just to dance with Davey—regardless of the setting."

Davey grins, delighted. "Gram and Gramp's basement is still available."

*Gram and Gramp's basement. That was senior prom. Davey's boyfriend had broken up with her just a week before prom to go with some fluffy cheerleader. Davey was devastated and I was bewildered. All I wanted was to make my best friend feel better and all I could do was awkwardly pat her back as she cried her eyes out night after night. Finally, I came up with the idea that I would rent a tux and take her to prom myself.*

"You? But you're a girl," she had said, laughing. "We can't go to prom together."

"Why not? Other girls go with their girlfriends."

"But you're talking about going as my date."

"So what?"

*She looked thoughtful for a moment. I remember staring at her as she rolled the idea around in her head. She was so cute as a teenager. She hadn't grown into her curves yet, so she was kind of chubby, and her slender, oval face still had those cute, round cheeks. Her big brown eyes were framed with those long, thick lashes, and her tiny little nose was so cute I had to constantly remind myself not to lean over and kiss it.*

"Davey? What do you think?"

She looked up, grinning. "People will probably make fun of us."

"People already make fun of us. I'm a big old homo and you're my best friend. You should have stopped hanging out with me long before high school."

Davey shook her head. "Don't do that."

"I'm not doing anything."

*“You’re mocking yourself.”*

*“I am a big homo, Davey.”*

*“You don’t have to say it with scorn in your voice.”*

*“I’m a freak of nature.”*

*“Leah says that homosexuals are a part of nature and that you are obviously part of the goddesses’ plans because you are so beautiful inside and out.”*

*“Your mother just spent six months living in a Yurt in the desert, eating shrooms, and having sex with a man who reads people’s auras for a living and calls himself ‘Wise Wing’. I love Leah, but there is the smallest possibility that her freak meter is a little off.”*

*Davey laughed, shaking her head. “Well, I love you just the way you are and so do Gram and Gramps. As for Leah, just because she is outside of what most people call normal, doesn’t mean she isn’t wise. Besides, she is my mother and I love her. It’s nice to have her back.”*

*“Until the next adventure.”*

*“So, do you really want to take me to prom?”*

*“Yes.”*

*She started to grin. My heart lifted at the idea. I knew it wasn’t a real date. I mean, there was no chance of a hot make out session on the dance floor, but just the idea of holding her close, even if just for one dance was enough to make me crazy. I took her hand.*

*“Davey, come on. It will be a great way to spit in the faces of all of those snobby bitches who make fun of us all of the time.”*

*“All right. Let’s do it.”*

*She threw herself at me and hugged me tight. As she pulled away, I leaned my face against hers for a second, breathing in her scent. She pulled back and looked at me seriously.*

*“Andy, this doesn’t mean...”*

*“I know,” I said, cutting her off. I didn’t need to hear her say that she wasn’t gay one more time. I knew that. I lived it every day. I watched it as she dated these jackass teenage boys who had no idea of the true value and beauty of this girl.*

*The day of the prom, I was walking on air. I cruised into Lakewood looking for a barber shop. Somehow, I couldn’t see getting my haircut at the Bay Barber Shop. And going to Gram’s hairdresser wouldn’t work. I’d been wearing my hair long and in a ponytail for so many years, I wasn’t sure how to describe what I wanted, so I finally took a picture of Simon LeBon to the nearest barber shop.*

*“Girl,” the man said to me when I showed him what I wanted, “You’re going to look like a boy.”*

*I didn’t know how to explain, so I told him that it was for a school play.*

*He shrugged and cut my hair. It didn’t look exactly like Simon from the Hungry Like the Wolf video, but it was pretty close. I remember running my hands through it constantly as I drove back to Bay.*

*“Earth to Andy.” I shake my head and bring myself back to the present. Davey is looking at me expectantly. I stare at her for a second, trying to reconcile the beautiful woman with the adorable teenager of my youth. She looks pointedly at the dance floor, then back at me.*

*I smile. “Well?”*

*“Well? What?” She says archly, raising an eyebrow.*

*“Sorry. Let me be more of a gentlewoman.” I stand up and bow low, taking her hand gently. “My lady, would you like to dance?”*

*I lead her to the dance floor and guide her to the*

music. Her body is soft next to mine, and my hands fall naturally into place. I press a bit on her hip when it's time to turn, or move, and she responds instantly to every step I make. Dancing with Davey is a dream. We've been dancing together since we were kids. It's probably the only exercise she likes. I tried to teach her how to play softball once. She couldn't hit the ball with the bat, not even once. I tried to teach her how to pitch, but she somehow managed to knock the ball back into her own face instead of throwing it to me. She got pissed and refused to play any more after that. I know, I shouldn't have laughed as hard as I did, but it was so ridiculous and cute, I couldn't help myself.

Davey interrupts my thoughts. "Maybe we should take dance lessons."

"Davey, if you want me to take dance lessons with you, I will. But why don't you look for one that's a little sexier—like salsa or tango?"

She brings her face close to mine, breathing against my ear. "You might lose control of yourself if you have to tango with me."

I already have. I bring her down into a low dip and press my lips into the hollow of her neck. Bringing her back up, I swing her around to face me and press my mouth against hers. She opens her lips to me, letting me slide my tongue gently against hers. I groan against her mouth, gripping her against me. She kisses me for a minute before sliding her lips along my face and across my jaw. I can feel the pressure building, and suddenly, all I can think of is getting her out of here and back to my house.

"Andy," she whispers. "Maybe I should stay at your house tonight."

I've been waiting for this for thirty-three years. It's possibly a bit less than thirty-three years, since I

probably wasn't in love with her when we met at age seven, but it was pretty soon after that. I always tell people that I knew I was gay, or at least that I was different, when I was eight. I was at a pool party at a kid's house and his mom was wearing a black bikini with a see through cover-up over it. I remember having the most amazing stirrings that I could only attribute to love. That's a true story, but really, I first knew I had feelings for girls instead of boys when this bastard Jimmy DeMarco kissed Davey on the cheek during recess. I knocked him down, and he ran away crying to the teacher. Davey was so mad at me for hurting him, but all I knew was that I couldn't stand the idea of someone else kissing her.

"Davey." I look seriously into her eyes. It takes all of my will to say this, but I have to get it out. "Don't do this. This isn't what you want."

"It is what I want."

I pull her close to me and just let the music move my body. One of my hard rules is "Do not date anyone who is on the rebound." Granted, I would break just about any rule I have for Davey, but she is in a bad place right now. Dating me might seem like a great idea, but what happens when she comes to her senses and realizes that this is all wrong? There are a million reasons to be together, but one huge reason to be apart. She's straight. That's a pretty big obstacle in a lesbian relationship.

On the other hand, I have spent the past thirty-three years protecting Davey and trying to do what's best for her. And frankly, I think what would be best for her would be to settle down with me. I'm a good catch. I have money and a decent house. I've had plenty of sex so I know what I'm doing, but I'm more than willing to give up one night stands with random

women in order to be committed to Davey. I open car doors for her. I care about her feelings. I'm physically fit. I'm tall and muscular and I have a nicely shaped head. I'm an old school butch, and I need a beautiful femme like Davey to make me complete. I lean my face against the top of her head and she snuggles in closer to me. My arms tighten around her.

"You have such strong arms."

"I'll have to keep working out."

"You can always do P90X with Gramps."

Davey's grandparents are the best. We have fundamental disagreements on many subjects, but to their credit, they took me in when my parents kicked me out. But they were good to me long before then. They were Davey's surrogate parents since Leah was gone so often and they were my surrogate parents since my parents didn't really want to be parents.

I'm an only kid. I'm pretty sure I was a mistake. My mother wouldn't have considered abortion, but I never understood why she didn't put me up for adoption. I grew up in a posh house around the corner from Davey's grandparent's posh house. The difference was that while we were kids, Davey's house always had toys and books and bicycles and the regular detritus of childhood, while my house looked like a mausoleum which a child would only approach on tiptoe, whispering and trying to not touch anything. That describes my relationship with my parents as well. I had a few different nannies, but none that made a lasting impact on me. I have a vague memory of the hint of a scandal with one of the nannies and my father, but it is only a faint impression and I could be wrong. All of the good memories of my childhood started with Davey.

*Picture this. I was walking down the street when*

*I was accosted by two huge seven-year-old girls. I was a pretty big kid, but these girls were huge and scary. They positioned themselves on either side of me and glared at me.*

*“Are you a boy or a girl?”*

*“I’m a girl.”*

*“You look like a boy.”*

*“I can’t help the way I look.” In my seven-year-old world, that made perfect logical sense. Even then, I had a pretty Zen outlook on life.*

*One of the behemoths sneered at me. “We don’t like you.”*

*“I don’t like you, either.” Again, perfect logic. We didn’t have to like each other. I was used to kids not liking me. I was good at sports and I liked to play outside. I was generally dirty and my clothes, though hand-picked by my mother’s personal shopper and probably ridiculously expensive, were often ripped or stained. Boys liked me way better than girls at that age. They hadn’t yet realized that we were supposed to be different, so they played games with me. All that mattered to them was that I played to win.*

*Girl Two spoke up. “My mom says your parents let you run wild.”*

*I shrugged.*

*Girl One sneered again. “You have ugly hair.”*

*I shrugged again. She was right on that one. For some reason, I had decided to take the scissors to my own head a couple of days before and left my hair in a kind of scraggly half bowl-cut, half mullet style. My mother, who barely noticed my existence most days, went into a screaming panic when she saw me. She immediately rushed me to her hairdresser, who tried her best to even it out. As a result, it looked kind of like a strange, lopsided page boy. I didn’t much care. I*

*tended to throw on a baseball cap as soon as I got out of my parent's house anyway.*

*Girl One picked up a clump of grass and dirt from the treed lawn and tossed it at me. "Get out of our yard."*

*I leaned casually back against a tree. At age seven, I had already learned the crucial art of not showing fear or concern. "Not in your yard."*

*Girl Two started gathering acorns and branches and throwing them in my direction. I was debating whether to charge one of them or take off running when a wild-eyed, chubby little girl came screeching up on her little pink bike. She jumped off it, looked around for something to throw and not finding anything, grabbed her bike and threw it at my tormentors.*

*Girl One shrieked, grabbed Girl Two's hand, and the two of them took off toward the backyard, screaming about the crazy girl. I checked out the new arrival with interest.*

*"I'm Davey," she said, smoothing back her huge mane of hair with one hand.*

*I walked over and picked up her bike, automatically checking it for dents.*

*"I'm Andrea." I paused. "I'm usually called Andy."*

*That was a lie. I had wanted to be called Andy for years, but my mother refused to comply. My father didn't speak to me enough for it to matter. And without any friends, I was sadly short of people to give me a nickname. Davey seemed to take me at face value, though.*

*"Okay, Andy. Do you want to be friends?"*

*"I guess."*

*She grabbed my hand. "Let's go to my house. You can meet my grandparents."*

*"Do you live with your grandparents?"*

*"Yep, and sometimes my mom."*

*"Do you have a dad?"*

*"No. Just Gram and Gramps. My mom is in Georgia right now, learning to play the guitar."*

*"She can't play guitar here?"*

*"I don't think so. Maybe Gram doesn't like too much noise."*

*It made sense to me. My parents got irritated if I made so much as a peep. I nodded.*

*"Sure. We can go to your house."*

*Davey smiled and I felt a sense of coming home. I had finally found a friend.*

"You're awfully quiet," Davey is whispering in my ear.

"I was thinking about when we met."

She laughs, leaning back in my arms to smile up at me. "You had no choice but to be my friend."

"I didn't want anything else."

"We've always been together, Andy."

We're interrupted by Leah and Erik.

"You two have been monopolizing each other all night," Leah chirps. "Share your gorgeousness with other people for a while."

Leah takes my arm as Davey dances off with Erik. I look down at her as we start to dance. She's about the same height as Davey—and about thirty pounds heavier. She's beautiful at fifty-six. If this is what Davey is going to look like in sixteen years, I won't be disappointed. Leah is staring at me intently.

"Well?"

"Andy, you know I love you like my own child."

"Leah," I grin. "Is this the same talk we had when I was in college?"

She nods, smiling. "You're a lot older now, but I don't know about wiser."

I laugh. "Leah, I am older and wiser, but I have never stopped loving Davey."

"And she loves you. With all of her heart. But not, I fear, the way you want."

"Leah, does that matter?"

"It might not matter at this moment, but it will."

"Leah, we're forty. We've both been through the relationship game. We're done dating. We just want to settle down."

"Andy, you're speaking for yourself. You want to settle down with Davey because you almost lost her and you don't want to risk it happening again."

"Leah, she wants to be with me."

"Davey is in love with Danny."

I look away, disturbed. Leah sings along with the music for a while, and we dance without talking. It's true. She is in love with him. But she has made a choice to not be with him. That is her choice. She is choosing to be with me. I glance down at Leah.

"She's making a choice."

"She's choosing to be gay?"

"I don't know. I guess."

"Andy, just stop and think. Yes, you have been in love with Davey forever, and yes, you would be an amazing partner for her. But do you really think that it would be the best thing for both of you?"

"Leah, you've always wished for a lesbian daughter." I'm trying to lighten the mood.

"I already have one," she replies. "You. I admit there were times that I wished you and Davey would just fall in love and be together, but in my heart, I know that it isn't possible."

"Leah, we love each other. The only difference

between best friend love and romantic love is behavior. If we decide we are partners or lovers or wives or whatever, we are."

Leah looks at me doubtfully. "Well, I love you both. I just want you to stop and think about this. Think about Danny."

"Think about how many times I have fallen," I sing.

"Crosby, Stills & Nash can't help you now," Leah laughs.

Coming back to Leah's question, I shake my head. "I have thought about Danny. He has nothing to do with this."

Leah stands on her tiptoes to kiss me on the cheek. "Danny has everything to do with this."

"I liked it better when you were giving me the safe sex talk."

"Lesbians need to practice safe sex, too."

Pulling her in for a tight hug, I kiss the top of her head. "Leah, how did you get so wise?"

"I'm not so wise. I'm just at peace with myself. That seems like wisdom to other people."

"It seems like wisdom to me."

"Maybe you should come to a meditation class with me."

"I'm not into that new age crap."

"Meditation is not new age, and at any rate, it isn't crap. You have often asked me why I seem so peaceful and that's one of the reasons. Don't ask the question if you're only going to scoff at the answer."

"I'm not scoffing. It's just not my thing."

"Well, maybe you should take a yoga class. Or deep breathing exercises. Or a cleanse." She looks at me archly. "Or celibacy."

She leaves me on the dance floor, and I randomly

dance with other people, lost in thought. Leah pushes my buttons. She's so strange in so many ways, but she does seem to have an inner glow. And she's right about Danny, too. Danny does have everything to do with this, regardless of what I told Leah. I have spent years watching Davey date jackass men, and I never said a word about it. I'm not some simpering idiot who has sat around pining for my best friend throughout my entire life. I've dated many women—more than I can count. I play softball. I run. I work part time in a bookstore mainly for the love of the books, but also because it is a great place to pick up intelligent women. Not that I'm opposed to picking up a dumb but hot bar chick every once in a while, but I do enjoy a woman who can have an actual conversation. It isn't as if I have been a lonely old dyke sitting alone in my little house. I do love Davey, but it hasn't been to the exclusion of all others. I consider her my best friend and I consider myself her protector. I would kill for her. I would give just about anything I have to keep her happy and safe. We have always had a comfortable, warm, and loving relationship. It seems as if we have been married since we were teenagers, with the small exception that we have sex with other people and not each other. And that worked fine for me until Danny came along.

Danny isn't a jackass. He's actually a cool, intelligent, charming man who treated Davey like gold while they were together. When Davey started dating him, I got the first stirrings of fear that things were going to change between us. If she fell in love with this guy and got married, we wouldn't be having late night ice cream parties at my house. She wouldn't be calling me whenever something broke in her apartment. I wouldn't be able to randomly show up at her house at

six in the morning and drag her out for a hike in the Metroparks.

It doesn't matter. Danny is no longer in the picture, but I am. Looking across the room, I smile at her. I start back toward our table, but detour over to the buffet table to fill up on appetizers. I stock up on chocolate and bring it to Davey.

"My hero," she says, fluttering her eyelashes at me.

I grin and rub my hand across the back of her neck. Her hair is short and smoothed down tonight. I let my fingers play against the fine hairs behind her ears. Davey is chatting with Sarah and Lynne, but I'm not really paying attention. I pull Davey closer and she leans her head against my shoulder. I'm hyper-aware of the feel of her hair against my cheek. I'm making a conscious effort to control my breathing, but all I can think about now is getting her out of here and back to my house. Leah comes back to the table, and I offer to get some more hors d'oeuvres. Sarah and Lynne dance. We toast and drink champagne. My entire body is straining toward Davey. Every time she turns her head up to look at me, I can feel the pull in my gut. I want her more than I think I have ever wanted anyone. I can just see the curve of her breasts above the neckline of her dress and, in my mind, my lips are already tracing a path over them, tugging at the material to get more. My hands are already on her hips, crushing her against me.

Davey presses her hand against my thigh. "Are you all right?"

"Better than all right."

She laughs and rubs her hand over my shaved head. I lean into her hand. I'm barely aware of the people stopping at our table, until Davey stands up

and embraces an older woman with dark hair. I stand up and Davey introduces her to the group. It's Nancy Astor, the mother of the transgendered boy who killed himself a couple of months ago. Leah asks her to join our table, but she declines as she is about to make a speech.

Davey's boss, Ron, takes the stage and outlines the programs funded by the Care Center. Leah leans over me and stage whispers to Davey.

"Maybe I should join a bisexual support group."

Davey shakes her head. "You aren't bisexual."

"Just because I was bad at it the first time doesn't mean I won't try it again."

I'm trying to pay attention to Ron's speech, but Leah kills me. Davey pokes me in the ribs as I let a small snort escape my clenched lips.

"Leah," I whisper. "Go for it. It might be a good place to meet women."

She grins back at me. "And men."

I put my arm around Davey and she leans against me as Nancy Astor takes the stage. Nancy is talking about how hard it was at first when her four-year-old daughter kept insisting that she was really a boy.

I look over at Davey. She looks sad.

"Are you all right?"

She nods.

Now Nancy is talking about how love has nothing to do with gender and everything to do with the qualities of the person you love. Shit. Davey looks stricken. She's staring at Nancy with intensity, and I can see the wheels turning in her head. She's thinking about Danny and how she left him when she found out that he had been born female, and now I can see the guilt and the agony as she wonders whether she was an idiot to let go of the man she loves just because

he isn't biologically male. My stomach has clenched into a hard knot of fear.

Nancy is talking about all of the reasons that her daughter was a kind and loving person and why that meant that her son was now a kind and loving person, too. The audience is engrossed. Davey has tears in her eyes, and I want to throw something at the stage or fake a seizure or anything to prevent Nancy from continuing to speak, but it's too late anyway. Davey turns to look at me and her face is full of pain.

"Andy," she whispers. "I don't know what to do."

Danny's face is in my mind. I'm thinking about the joy on his face when she walks into a room. I'm thinking about the way Davey sobbed after she broke up with him. It has suddenly occurred to me that I can't hold her. I love her and I need her, but I can't hold her. I don't think I can speak, so I give her hand a squeeze and mouth "go." She takes off running out of the ballroom. I stare down at the table, my heart crushed.

Leah reaches over and takes my hand. It's over just like that. And the stupid thing is that I know Davey is in love with Danny, but somehow I got it in my head that they would be better off apart. I mean, it's been almost a month. I've never pined for someone for more than a month. If you break up with someone and a month goes by, it is so far beyond over, it's like it never happened.

Sarah pats me once on the shoulder, and then she and Lynne carefully look away, giving me space. I can feel eyes on me, as all of our friends and acquaintances talk among themselves about what just happened.

"Andy, do you want to go?" Leah looks stricken, her face full of love and sympathy.

“No. I’m fine. The speeches are almost over. I don’t want to leave before dinner.”

I’m not giving anyone the satisfaction of watching me walk out of here in pain. I applaud politely after each speech, and I manage to somehow contribute to the conversation during dinner. Steve and Erik stop by our table as we eat, but Leah gives them both warning looks so they content themselves with patting me on the shoulder and making small talk about the food.

After dinner, the dancing starts up again, and I cast my eyes around the crowd, looking for a likely partner. There’s a tall, thin redhead dancing right across from our table. She’s dancing with a big butch, but her eyes keep meeting mine. She’s swinging her hips and giving me a little half smile. I imagine running my hands through her long, straight hair, then tangling my fingers in it and kissing her hard. I can feel faint stirrings of arousal. The best way to get over someone is to get under someone. Leah squeezes my hand as I stand up.

“Andy, are you sure you want to do this?”

“I’m just going to dance.”

“Don’t forget you are my ride home.”

“And ours,” Lynne chimes in.

I’m unable to control the irritation in my voice. “Have I ever let any of you down for any reason?”

Leah looks abashed. “Go dance then.”

I cruise across the floor and cut in on the redhead and her partner. The partner gives me a dirty look, but since redhead isn’t resisting, she walks away without any trouble.

“Is that your girlfriend?”

Redhead shakes her head. “No, just someone I met here.”

“Are you here with a date?”

“I came with a few friends.”

I swing her around and pull her in close. Her body is athletic and slender, but her breasts are nicely shaped and feel soft against mine. She's strong, but not hugely muscled. She has a nice smile and she smells good. I can feel her hair swinging against my arm as I spin her around the dance floor. I decide to take her home.

“I should introduce myself. I'm Andy.”

“I know who you are. We've met before.”

“We have?”

“We went rock climbing.”

“I've been a little distracted lately.”

“We had sex.”

“Ah.”

Damn. This has happened before, but not recently. In my twenties, I was slutting around so much, I could barely remember any of them. But then, we were all so drunk and horny all of the time, it didn't seem to matter. I pull redhead against me for a few minutes and dance without talking so I can try to get a handle on her. She does look familiar. I remember rock-climbing with her now. I think I remember that she was funny and smart. I've been so lost in this relationship with Davey and Danny that I haven't paid attention to much else. Still, I'm pretty sure the rock-climbing date didn't end with sex.

“Are you trying to remember who I am?” She sounds curious, but not angry.

“No, I remember us rock-climbing.”

“Then I guess I wasn't that memorable in bed.”

“I don't remember having sex after rock-climbing.”

“We didn't. You picked me up in a bar a few

weeks before that, and we went back to your place and had sex.”

It seems familiar. Not just getting drunk and going home with someone, but specifically, getting drunk and going home with this woman. I have almost placed her.

“It must have been a bourbon night.”

“There were many rounds of shots.”

She still doesn’t sound mad, so I decide to risk a joke.

“Maybe it would jar my memory if we did it again.”

She laughs. “At this point, any self-respecting woman would slap you in the face and storm off of the dance floor.”

“Are you self-respecting?”

“I am.”

“Well then.”

She reaches up and touches my face. “How soon before we can leave?”

## *Chapter Two*

I blink in the sunlight coming through my window. My arm is asleep. I go to straighten it and feel the warmth of a body next to mine. Davey. I spoon around her and press my lips against the back of her neck. I'm coming out of that state of half-sleep, and I have already realized it isn't Davey before my face encounters the long mane of strawberry blonde hair. Heather. That's the redhead's name. After we danced last night, I brought her back to our table to introduce her to the ladies.

She came with me to drive Leah, Lynne, and Sarah back to Davey's apartment. Davey wasn't there. I resisted the urge to drive past Danny's house when we left the party. Leah and Heather made polite small talk on the way home, but I could tell that Leah didn't approve of me going home with someone. Leah has never been one to disapprove of sex, so she was probably irritated because she thought I should come home with her, drink hot chamomile tea, and talk through my feelings. I, on the other hand, didn't have any interest in talking through my feelings or drinking tea. And, if there is one way to make sure I don't spend the night tossing and turning and thinking about Davey, it is to spend the night making love to a beautiful woman.

She is beautiful. I look at her face in the dappled sunlight. She has a bit of an upturn to her nose and a smattering of freckles. She is amazing in bed. She

didn't hold back anything. I can't believe I can't remember having sex with her before. I must have been really drunk. Yet another reason to not drink so much.

I jump in the shower, throw on shorts and a tank, and perch on the edge of the bed to lace my running shoes. Heather rolls over as I sit.

"Good morning," she says sleepily.

"Morning. Going for a run. Unless you want me to take you home first."

She sits up, letting the sheets and blanket fall away from her body. I contemplate taking her back to bed for a while, but decide against it. I need a run.

"I'll run with you," she says, swinging her legs out of bed.

"I doubt you can hang."

She arches an eyebrow at me. "I'll take my chances."

She rummages in my drawer for shorts and a tank. "Do you have any shoes I can borrow? I somehow don't see myself doing a serious run in those fuck-me shoes from last night."

I wear a men's nine. Her feet look a lot smaller than mine. "What size do you wear?"

"Seven."

"Men or women."

"Women, of course."

Of course. I go to my closet and pull out a pair of shoes. "These are Davey's. You can borrow them for today."

"Davey. That's your best friend, right?"

I nod and leave her to get dressed. Grab a bottle of water for me and an extra for Heather. I don't have long to wait before she comes out, ready to go. I glance at her feet. Looks like Davey's shoes fit her perfectly.

My clothes are a little big for her, but she looks cute. I lean in and kiss her on the mouth.

“Let’s go.”

We take a gentle pace on my block and head toward Lake Road. I figure I’ll run a couple of miles to Huntington Beach and then take the hills back over to Wolf. If she is still with me at that point, I’ll make it a nice easy pace back to my house. We make the turn onto Lake and pick up the speed. She’s pacing me easily and hasn’t even started breathing heavily yet. I pick it up a bit. She’s only a bit shorter than me and her long legs are having no trouble matching my pace.

“There’s a key hidden in the milk chute. If you get tired, you can turn around and wait for me at my house.”

She grins. “I think I’ll be fine.”

“We haven’t hit the hills yet.”

“I usually run at Rocky River reservation. Your Huntington hills don’t scare me.”

I laugh and put on a burst of speed. She catches up, and we race toward the hills. I make a sharp turn onto the walking path and slow down a little bit for the downhill into the little valley. Running uphill is one thing, but downhill is hard on the knees, and at forty, one of the sad realities of life is that I have to think about crap like knee pain. Heather pulls in front of me as we hit the bottom of the hill and pounds the pavement as we head up. I’m distracted for a second by the view of her butt muscles gliding sexily under my running shorts. She takes a lead on me by several feet, but I throw some extra wind into it and outpace her. She catches up. We’re both running up the hill full speed, breathing heavily. My calf muscles are screaming, but I am not giving her this hill. Finally, right at the top, I kick it in and pull ahead of her by

about three feet. We make the hill and easily run to the intersection at Wolf Road. I slow down to an easier pace, still running but trying to get my breath back. Heather is sweating. She looks hot with my shirt clinging to her. She grins at me.

“Nice job on the hill.”

I nod.

“You should come running with me at my usual spot,” she continues.

I nod again. “Maybe.”

“So what happened last night?”

“In what way?”

“I saw you dancing with your friend. You looked pretty cozy.”

“We’ve been dancing together for years. We always look cozy.”

“Do you always make out?”

“Not always.”

I take a detour down a side street and guide us over to Osborn.

“So what happened?”

She’s persistent. Why do women always want to know about stupid details?

“It doesn’t matter. It didn’t work out. Can we just run?”

“We are running. You should be able to carry on a conversation while you’re running. Otherwise, you might be over-extending yourself.”

I ignore her and put on a little speed. She easily catches up again.

“It’s fine if you don’t want to talk about it. I just wanted to let you know I won’t judge if you do want to.”

“Davey and I have been best friends forever. Last night, I let myself forget about that fact that she

is straight.”

“Has that ever happened before?”

“Yes. We went to prom together in high school. Well, sort of.”

I was already living at Davey's grandparent's house by the time we went to prom. Gramps was a champ. I had to give credit to the grumpy, old republican. He was always more of a father to me than my own father was. In fact, he and Gram took me in long before my parents officially kicked me out when Davey first started bringing me around. Gram treated me the same way she treated Davey. She admonished us to do our homework, she fussed if we stayed out after the street lights came on, and she loved us unconditionally. Gramps was gruff and distant in some ways. He spent a lot of time in the office, but when he was home, he would often throw the softball for me, or teach me the rules of football. As I got older, he taught me how to play poker and sometimes let me sit in on games with the guys. He and Gram loved each other in a respectful, but obvious way that did not exist between my parents. They flirted with each other, and they made each other laugh. I think they were the first example of a love relationship that I ever experienced, and it was good. I didn't want to be my parents. I wanted to be like Gram and Gramps or I wanted to be alone, like Leah.

Heather interrupts my thoughts. “You sort of went to prom together.”

“Well, we tried.”

“What happened?”

“It wasn't meant to be.”

*I had dressed in my rental tux and went downstairs to wait for Davey to come down. Gramps sat with me and tried to give me advice.*

*"Don't drink and drive," he had warned.*

*"I won't drink at all."*

*"Don't stay out all night."*

*"I promise."*

*"Don't listen to anything Leah told you."*

*I had laughed. "Gramps, Leah is a good mother."*

*He shook his head. "I love Leah. She is the joy of my life. But she is not a good mother. She is a good friend to Davey, but she has not been around enough to be a good mother. Not that that's a bad thing. Davey had a chance to grow up in a stable environment. I certainly wouldn't have wanted Leah to take her off to some commune where the children run around naked and smoke pot all day."*

*"Gramps. Come on. Give Leah a break. She was sixteen when Davey was born. And she's a free spirit. She wants to experience everything there is to do in life. I get that. I want to experience everything, too. I'm just not particularly interested in the same experiences that Leah is."*

*We were interrupted by Leah coming down the stairs. "She's almost ready!"*

*I remember looking up and being awed into silence. Davey looked phenomenal. She was wearing some shiny dress with big sleeves. It was blue. I don't know if I truly remember her dress, but Davey still has the pictures and we look at them every once in a while. Now we laugh at how gangly I looked in my rented tux with the shiny blue cummerbund and bow tie that matched her dress, but back then, I thought I looked pretty sharp. And Davey's hair was huge and hair-sprayed into oblivion, but I thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world. In fact, she was. I watched her coming down the stairs and I was breathless.*

*Gram and Gramps took too many pictures, and*

*Leah fluttered around, laughing and joyous. Of course, Leah was happy that her daughter was going to prom with another girl. Leah believed in challenging the system in about any way possible. Being gay was a bonus in her book.*

*I escorted Davey into the car and went around to the driver's seat. She was smiling and glowing as we drove to the school.*

*"Davey." My voice cracked a bit. I cleared my throat. "I didn't get a chance to tell you this at your house, but you look beautiful."*

*"Really?" She looked up at me, her eyes shining. "Kevin Newton is an asshole. He did me a favor by breaking up with me."*

*"You deserve way better."*

*She looked doubtful. "Maybe."*

*I took her hand and kissed it. "Davey, you do. You deserve the very best."*

*We got out at the school, and Davey nervously straightened her dress.*

*I took her arm and escorted her into the gym. We walked past the snooty in-crowd types and wandered over toward the tables. I looked around at the dance floor. There were a few people dancing, but not many. I wasn't ready to get out there yet. Davey was holding my hand, so I knew she was nervous.*

*"Everyone is looking at us," she whispered.*

*"Not everyone."*

*"Most of them."*

*"Not even most of them. And even if they are, who cares?"*

*"It just makes me ..."* She was cut off by the principal, Mr. Hadley, approaching with one of the teachers.

*"Ladies," the principal said, "You are going to*

*have to leave.”*

*“Leave?” I was defiant. “We aren’t doing anything.”*

*“You’re causing an uproar by being here.”*

*“There doesn’t seem to be an uproar.”*

*Hadley glared at me. “Young lady, you will leave this prom, or I will have you both suspended.”*

*“That doesn’t make sense!” I was seriously pissed by now. “We aren’t even doing anything wrong.”*

*The teacher stepped forward. It was Mr. Jenkins, one of my favorites. “Andy, I’m sorry. It would be better for you both if you just leave.”*

*“I don’t understand.” I looked at Mr. Jenkins, my teacher and coach.*

*Hadley spoke from clenched teeth. “We do not allow girls to go to prom with other girls at this school.”*

*“That’s bullshit. There are a lot of girls here with other girls.”*

*Davey pulled at my hand. “Come on, Andy. Let’s just go.”*

*I looked down at her and saw tears shining in her eyes. I turned back to Hadley, but Mr. Jenkins was blocking my way. “Andy, I can’t do anything about this. Don’t get yourself into trouble. He won’t bend.”*

*I cast one more look at the principal and turned around. I held Davey’s hand tightly as I stalked out of the school. Back in the car, Davey cried the whole way home.*

*“Davey, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I don’t know what else to say. Please don’t cry.”*

*“It isn’t your fault.” She grabbed a tissue from her purse and blew her nose. “How horrible do I look?”*

*Her eyes were red and puffy from crying and there was some mascara smudged around them, but she still looked beautiful to me. “You look gorgeous.”*

*"Thank god Gram took all of those pictures before we left."*

*I pulled into the driveway and hesitated. "Maybe we should just go somewhere else."*

*Davey sighed. "No, let's just go in."*

*Leah met us at the doorway. "What happened?"*

*"We got kicked out," Davey said, tearing up again.*

*"What? Let's go right back to that school. Who kicked you out? I'll take care of them!"*

*Davey shook her head. "No, Leah. I don't want to fight."*

*I nodded agreement. "We really don't want to deal with it."*

*Leah looked steadily at both of us and then nodded. "All right. Go down to the basement. I'll meet you down there in a few minutes."*

*We went into the basement and sat on the couch. Gram and Gramps' basement was the coolest hangout in the world. It had this ugly remnant carpet that Gramps got cheap somewhere. Lots of big, ugly thrift store furniture pieces that were big and squishy and perfect for curling up to listen to records or read. Gramps had a weight set in the corner and a big stereo along one wall with more records than we had ever seen in one place. Davey and I kept our records here, too, and we had been known to spend hours down here listening to them. Davey actually got a CD player for her sixteenth birthday, but we hadn't amassed much of a CD collection yet.*

*The basement was the place to be anyway. This was Gramps' place. Gram didn't have anything to do with it. There was even an accordion door that separated it from the other side of the basement so Gram didn't have to look in when she was doing laundry.*

*“Here I am!” Leah was tramping down the stairs, carrying a huge tray full of food and drinks. She cleared some papers off a table in the corner and laid out soda, ice, candy, chips, and some dip.*

*“Mom, what are you doing?” Davey said.*

*“It’s Leah, not mom. And I’m throwing you a prom.”*

*“A prom?” Davey looked skeptical.*

*I remember being flooded with joy and love. Leave it to Leah.*

*Leah walked over to the record player and started rummaging around. “Let’s start with a little Duran Duran.”*

*She put on a record, and I stood up. “Come on, Davey. Let’s dance.”*

I come back to the present as Heather and I run around the corner and end up back on Oakmoor. I slow us down to a jog, and then a walk. “Let’s cool down before we get to my house.”

Heather nods. “You were lost there for a while.”

“I was thinking about the prom.”

“So what happened?”

“We were kicked out for being a same-sex prom couple.”

“Davey is straight?”

“Yes.”

Heather looks thoughtful. “I would have sued.”

“By the time you were in high school, it was probably a lot more acceptable to be a lesbian.”

“Not really. I’m only eight years younger than you.”

“We didn’t sue.”

“So what happened?”

“We went back to Davey’s house and her mother played records for us all night. At the end of the night,

she put on “Almost Paradise,” told us it was the last dance, and left us alone.”

“Sounds like a nice mom. Bad taste in music... but nice anyway.”

“It’s a sappy song, but Davey loved it.”

“So you slow danced.”

“We slow danced and when the song was over, she looked up at me and told me that it had been the best night of her life.”

“A sure invitation to a kiss if I’ve ever heard one.”

“I took it as such. I kissed her and she kissed me back. Then she went to bed.”

“And the next day?”

“She stuck her head into my room and asked if we were still best friends. I said that we were. She smiled and said, ‘Good.’ “The end.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah.”

We turn up my driveway and walk into the house. Heather faces me as we get into the kitchen and puts her arms around me. She looks up at me seriously, but with a small smile playing at the side of her mouth. “That was the best run of my life.”

I grin down at her. “That’s an invitation to a kiss if I’ve ever heard one.”

“Then shut up and kiss me.”

I lean in and kiss her, softly at first. She opens her mouth and I play my tongue lightly over her lips. I shift her slightly so I can reach my arms around her and press my hands against her hips. She groans lightly against my mouth. I pull back, smiling.

“I’m a sweaty wreck. I need a shower before this goes any farther.”

Heather smiles impishly. “I need one, too. Let’s

conserve water by taking one together.”

“I’ll race you.”

We soap each other up and kiss greedily in the shower. I step out first so Heather can wash and condition her hair. I grab a towel, dry off roughly, and walk naked into the bedroom. My cell phone is ringing somewhere. I dig in the pile of clothes on the floor and find my cell phone in my jacket pocket. I grimace at the caller ID.

“Hi, Davey.”

“Andy, hey.”

I’m silent, waiting for her to start.

“Andy, you still there?”

“I’m here.”

“Look, I want to apologize.”

“Davey, I don’t want you to apologize. I’m the asshole. I know that you’re straight, and I know that you’re in love with Danny. When you were coming on to me, I should have shut you down. It would have been better for both of us.”

I can hear her quietly crying, but I ignore it.

“Andy, I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“I know. It was just stupidity on my part.”

“It wasn’t stupidity. I do love you.”

“Yes, I know, you love me as a friend.”

“As the best friend I have ever had. We’ve loved each other so intensely and for so long that it’s easy to get confused sometimes.”

“I’ve never been confused, Davey. People love each other or they don’t.”

“I do love you. I love you more than my own life. I love Danny, too. I love him so much. Andy, I want to go back to being best friends again.”

I sigh. “Just give me a few days. I need to not talk to you for a while.”

She's crying in earnest now and my heart is breaking, but I am not willing to make things all right for her at this moment.

"Andy, whatever else happens, please don't ever doubt that you are the best friend I have ever had in my life. I can't imagine my life without you."

"I can't imagine my life without you, either."

"So, there's a chance we'll be friends again?"

"I'll call you in a few days."

She sniffs. "Don't let me lose you over this, Andy."

"Davey, we've been through worse."

She laughs. "Yeah; sophomore year of college."

"We came through that, didn't we?"

"Almost didn't," she deadpans.

"True."

"Okay, Andy, will you call me when you're ready?"

"I'll call you."

I hang up the phone and immediately dial Leah's number.

"Andy, I was just thinking about you."

"Leah, I just wanted to let you know that I'm fine. I don't need you to make a casserole and roll a joint. I don't want you to come over and try to force gallons of tea into me."

"Tea has amazing curative powers."

"I'm sure."

"So does pot."

"I'm already cured."

"I doubt that. But you will be."

"Leah, thanks for being a great surrogate mom to me all of these years."

"Oh, Andy, I love you like you're my own. Your parents are idiots."

“That’s true.”

“That woman still there.”

“Yep.”

I look up as Heather walks into the bedroom with her hair in a towel, another towel wrapped around her waist.

“Look, Leah, I have to go.”

“Andy, when can I expect to see you?”

“Soon. I’ll call you.”

“Did you call Davey?”

“She called me. We’re fine.”

“You will be.”

“Bye Leah.”

Heather takes the towel from around her head and hangs it across a chair. Her hair is still wet and dripping a bit from the ends.

“Who is Leah,” she asks.

“Davey’s mom.”

“Was that Davey on the phone before her?”

“Yep.”

“What did you talk about?”

“The only thing I want to talk about right now is you dropping that second towel and getting into my bed.”

She salutes. “Sir, yes sir.”

She takes the towel from around her waist and tosses it at me. I rush forward and grab her, growling as I throw her into my bed. She wraps her legs around my waist and I push hard against her, biting at the skin on her neck. She moves her hands to my head and pushes me down to her breasts. I suck on one nipple, while my fingers pinch the other one, pulling it, teasing it into a sharp point. She’s moaning and pushing me further down. I comply with ease, moving my mouth between her legs, letting my tongue slide over the

inside of her thighs, reaching my hands around her to pull her up closer to my mouth. She spreads her legs further apart, exposing her clit to me. I hover over it, breathing lightly, massaging her hips with one hand, making her legs open even more. She moans and tries to push my head down against her, but I resist. Instead, I slide one of my fingers inside of her and give her a little pressure. My tongue just barely flicks out and touches her clit. She groans again and thrusts her hips up to meet me but I withdraw my tongue again. She gasps and tries again to push my head down. I let her wait, exploring her with my fingers, just barely touching her clit now and then. I withdraw my finger and bring my fingertip to my mouth, tasting her. Finally, she begs me to take her, and I suddenly slide three fingers into her while plunging my tongue down. I move my tongue around in light circles, slowly and softly at first, then a little harder and a little faster until she is screaming and grabbing onto the back of my neck, slamming her hands down on the back of my head, and then she's there, ready. Her whole body tenses, and I give her one last lick as she screams my name and collapses.

She is stroking my head languidly. "Andy."

"Mmmm hmm," I mutter, still against her.

"You should grow your hair out."

"I like it shaved."

"I had nothing to grab onto."

"You seemed to do a pretty good job of making indentations on my skull."

She laughs. "It would be easier with hair."

I answer by nuzzling my tongue against her again.

"Andy, come up here."

"Yes, Ma'am."

She pulls me down on top of her and kisses my ear. “You’re amazing,” she whispers.

“Thank you.”

“Now, let me show you what I’ve got.”

I let her, then I use my fingers and hands on her again, a couple of times.

“Andy.”

I’m gently kissing her collarbone as she sleepily strokes my head.

“Yes.”

“You are phenomenal in bed.”

“You’re not bad yourself.”

“Not bad?”

I laugh. “Not bad.”

She slaps me on the back of the head, hard.

“Careful, I’m delicate.”

“Delicate, my ass.” She’s laughing. “Not bad. Hopefully you’ll remember me this time.”

I look up at her seriously. “I’ll remember.”

“Good.”

I glance at the clock. “For now, however, I have to take you home.”

She pouts. “I thought I could make you dinner.”

“You can make me dinner another time, I have a hot date this afternoon, and if I don’t get up now, I’ll be late.”

“With whom?”

“My racquetball partner.”

“What’s his or her name?”

“None of your business. Now up and out.”

I push off of her and run to the bathroom for another quick shower. I know I’ll need another one after a heavy game, but I can’t meet Nate looking and smelling like I’ve just been laid. He mocks me enough as it is.

Heather jumps in the shower as I'm toweling off my head and finishes as I'm making a smoothie. She stumbles into the kitchen barefoot, wearing my shorts and tank top, carrying her dress and heels. I offer her half of the smoothie.

"Are you wearing my clothes home?"

"Planned on it."

"I like that tank top."

"You'll get it back."

"Want some flip flops?"

"No, I'll put on my heels to get to the car."

"That will look sexy with those gym shorts."

I open the car door for her and see her into the passenger seat. My cell phone rings as I slide behind the wheel.

"I'm on my way, Nate."

"Just wanted to make sure you're coming."

"I'll be there."

"Heard last night was a little rough."

"I said I'll be there."

"See you in a few."

I hang up and look at Heather. "So, where do you live?"

She starts laughing. "North Olmsted. Off of Dover."

I head in that direction, turning up the radio a bit to prohibit conversation. She's quiet throughout the ride, only offering directions when I need to turn onto her street and into her apartment complex.

"Hang on." I get out of the car and come around to her side.

She smiles at me as I open the door and escort her out. I take her arm and walk her to the door.

"You're such a gentlewoman."

I nod.

“Andy, do you think you’re going to call me.”

“I’ll call you.”

“Don’t say it if you don’t mean it.”

“I said I’ll call you.”

She leans in and kisses me quickly on the mouth.

“Thank you for a great run this morning.”

I laugh. “It was one of the best runs of my life.”

She grins up at me and puts her hand on my hip. I hold her face in both of my hands and kiss her thoroughly, but softly.

“I’ll talk to you later.”

She breathes against my mouth. “Hope you win your racquetball game.”

“Always.”

I started to walk away, then turn back. “Heather.”

“Yes?”

“I don’t know your last name.”

“McBride.”

“See you later.”

I leave her at the door and stride back to my vehicle. I’m feeling pretty good. I look good, I’m strong, and I just had some pretty phenomenal sex. Life could be worse.

I slip behind the wheel and text Nate that I’m on my way. I drive off without glancing back

## *Chapter Three*

So then what happened?”  
“Forget it, Nate. Hit the ball.”

My racquetball buddy, Nate Courtney, is trying to dig out details of my night with Heather. I've already shut him down on talking about Davey, but he is really pushing me on Heather.

“Is she cute?”

“Gorgeous.”

“Sexy?”

“Delicious.”

Nate serves into a side wall, losing his serve.

“See? Pay attention to your game.” I slam the ball at the front wall and he misses the return.

We're in the third game. He beat me 15-14 in the first game, and I beat him 15-13 in the second. I'm already ahead enough in this game that we can call it, but he wants to play through. I serve again and he hits it back, but I hit a splat shot on the return and he can't get forward fast enough to hit it. He's on one knee, looking back at me.

“Bitch.”

“Always.”

He stands up and shakes my hand. “Can I buy you a drink?”

“Yeah, but I'm in the mood to go to a gay bar. You cool?”

He nods. I head to the locker room, stripping off my clothes at my locker and walking naked to the

showers. I got sick of women freaking out when I walked into the showers, so I got in the habit of taking my clothes off beforehand. Shaved head and muscles or not, if they're looking at my breasts and my snatch as I walk across the room, they can't help but get that I'm a woman. I notice a woman looking at me as I shower, but I decide to ignore it. She looks like one of those bored housewives who wants to experiment with a lesbian to find out if she's really that much better at oral than the old man. I glance at her hand. Sure enough, she's got a wedding ring. She smiles at me, but I turn away without acknowledging it. I am not opposed to bisexuals, but bi-curious housewives piss me off.

Nate and I leave my vehicle in the parking lot of the club and head over to Janie's in his car. Janie's is usually a nice low-key mixed crowd gay bar, but on Sunday nights they have an alternative punk lesbian band. The musicians are aging, but they can still rock and they draw a pretty good crowd of feminist girls too young for me to consider dating. It will be fun to window shop, though. The band is covering some old Tribe 8 song from the 80s.

We walk past the stage and fight through the crowd to the bar. The bartender, Susie, is not my regular Thursday night bartender, but she recognizes me anyway and heads right over. Nate and I order a couple of beers and go to a back table.

"Nice place," Nate says, checking out the girls.

"It's a bit weird on Sunday nights, but it's still a good bar. We usually come on Thursday."

"You and Davey?"

"And Lynne."

"Lynne's the one that was living with Davey?"

"Still is. She and her wife broke up for a while.

They're back together now, but kind of taking it slow."

"Gays of our lives."

"Lesbian drama. It's a soap opera."

"So, Lynne broke up with her wife."

"Yep, Sarah is an alcoholic and was pretty much an asshole to Lynne the past few years. Lynne finally got fed up and left. Started fucking a twenty-something UPS driver."

Nate perks up. "Really?"

"No, I'm not giving you any details."

"I don't need them; they're already in my head."

"Lynne moved in with Davey and a few days later, Leah showed up looking for a place to crash."

"Davey's mother?"

"The one and only."

"Strange."

"You have no idea. The apartment has been pretty crowded. Still, who knows...maybe Davey will move in with Danny now that they're back together."

"What about you?"

"I live by myself. In my own home. I don't share it with anyone."

"No cats?"

"I'm allergic."

"Dogs?"

"No time."

"Sounds lonely."

I shake my head. "Well, it isn't. I have a full life. I just prefer to keep things the way I like to keep them. Let someone move in and next thing you know, she's rearranging my collection of muscle shirts and making me get rid of my albums."

"What if Davey had decided to be with you?"

"Ah, now that would be different."

Nate grins.



