

Hound

Cd in Dereham



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by
Colin Dereham
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For information contact:
Pink Flamingo Media
www.pinkflamingo.com
P.O. Box 632 Richland, MI 49083
USA

Email Comments: jennifer@pinkflamingomedia.com
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Chapter One

Friday, July 13

Brett's call comes through as I'm packing up after my painting tutorial. I hold the phone away from my ear, trying to cope with the aural assault till it reaches its predictable conclusion. "That was the most beautifully raucous 'Happy Birthday' I've ever endured, Brett."

"Well, I am a professional, Gary. People pay good money for this."

Technically, it's true. Brett is a singing drag queen and fashion designer in Sydney. He was my roommate at uni, back when we were studying art in Perth. After graduation, Brett took off to the east coast for his fabulous new life. I chose a safer option, moving back to my hometown down the west coast to become a college art teacher.

"So... how does my gorgeous boy feel now he's hit the big four-o today?"

I shudder. "Ugh. Can we not mention that number, please?"

Brett's cackle has me moving the phone away again. "I'm not far behind you, honey. Now spill. When's the party? Did you get any decent presents yet?"

"Well, the party's not till tomorrow night, much better to hold it on a Saturday. And so far, just two presents. Mum and dad brought me back a beautiful rose gold bracelet from Duty Free when they went home to Wales—"

"Oh, bless. They know what a jewellery whore their son is." Brett's Welsh accent is hilariously spot-on.

"Um... and TAFE Western Australia gave me the sack."

"What? They fired you after fifteen years?"

"Fifteen and a half. Bloody government education cutbacks. I've been given a reasonable redundancy, though." I let out a long sigh. "What the hell am I gonna do now, Bretty?"

Brett doesn't miss a beat. "Get the fuck out of there, darl."

I groan. "I can't just—"

"No, Gary. Come to Sydney. Why are you still holed up in Margaret River? You're an established artist, you can do that anywhere. You just need a shitty job on the side to help pay the rent." He goes silent for a second. "Hey! Graham and Adrian opened their bar in the CBD here. They'd give you casual work."

"Brett, I worked as a glassie at a pub while we were at uni. That's it. Nobody's gonna give me a job in a posh businessmen's bar."

"No! You don't understand! You're a tall, hot, redheaded bear. Graham and Adrian will absolutely cream their jeans over you. And don't give me any bullshit about being treated like a piece of meat. I've seen how you flaunt those buns, ho."

"Hmm. I dunno."

It sounds tempting. Other than my uni years spent three hours up the road in Perth, I've lived near Margaret River almost all my life. My hippie parents immigrated to Australia and settled in the sunny alternative-lifestyle paradise when I was four. Mum and dad were school teachers, both now retired, and to this day live in the same little country house, tending to their goats and chickens and organic vegetable garden.

I've been renting an old cottage in town for years, getting by mainly on my part-time college teaching salary. I've also developed my own career as an artist with a strong commercial edge—the kind that critics hate, but the kind that makes money. I have a small group of friends, a quiet lifestyle. Things are OK.

"Plus, Gary, maybe you'd finally find a boyfriend." Brett is punching below the belt, as usual. I'm immediately on the defensive.

"I'm fine, Brett. I get more than my fair share of dick." That's the easy part. The gay scene in my neck of the

woods pretty much consists of random men after anonymous sex.

“Come on, Gary. Have you ever actually *had* a boyfriend?” He waits for an answer, which I don’t give. “You haven’t, have you?”

“Eligible men are rare as hen’s teeth in Margaret River, Brett.” That’s the excuse I give anyone who dares bring up this topic. But there are darker reasons why I avoid relationships. My mind flashes straight back to my first year at uni.

I’m eighteen years old and I’ve just come out. I’m finally free of the denial and self-hatred that’s tortured me since puberty. But just as I’m embarking on my new gay life, gorging myself on the heavenly novelty of other men’s penises and arses, something else happens that right royally fucks things up.

My energy becomes boundless. I start staying up all night. I paint furiously. My art lecturers are impressed at the ferocity and brilliance of my work. But I’m stuck in high gear *all the time*. I sleep little and talk fast, unable to get the words out quick enough. Ideas and concepts fly through my head so rapidly I can scarcely follow through with them. I’m driven by a sexual compulsion so fierce it’s constantly on my mind, leading me to seek out men on a daily basis: in bars, beats and dingy back rooms. I begin to shoplift: I’m poor, I *need* things and I *absolutely have to have them right now*. People start calling me “intense.” One girl with lived experience tells me that I remind her of “the sort of person who might kill himself.”

I don’t understand what’s going on with me. I just put it all down to some sort of fundamental flaw. I’m a *bad person*.

One day, triggered by something trivial, I phone mum to whinge. The words have barely come out of my mouth when I implode, weeping violently. I can’t stop; I can’t even catch my breath. The wild, unrestrained bawling spews out of me,

seemingly with no end in sight. Somehow my tirade burns itself out, leaving me absolutely exhausted—strangely calm but dead inside. Mum gently finishes the phone call and I curl up in bed, passing out straight away.

She's up in Perth at my house that evening. God knows how she's managed it, but I'm in with a shrink the next day, mum clutching my hand, trying to give me as much strength as she can.

I pour my guts out to the shrink, telling him how depressed I am. He listens thoughtfully, asking me probing questions. He believes me, puts me at ease, but wisely knows it isn't the whole story. Slowly over our next few sessions he picks it all apart, fully exposing the "up" phases I've been experiencing: those times I thought life was just *fucking awesome*; the times I assumed were pleasant payback for all the misery, agitation and hopelessness.

Things aren't all bad, though. Despite my bipolar diagnosis, I'm one of the lucky ones. The shrink puts me on lithium and it works a treat. On the outside, I'm the old Gary again: the same gentle soul that was around before the manic-depressive monster reared its ugly head. But I still *feel* things on the inside: happiness becomes passionate joy, anger becomes blinding fury, sadness becomes utter devastation. These things, I learn, are here to stay, and I come to embrace them.

There's no way in hell I'm going to share my secret with the guys I date, though. I'm fine, I'm stable, but I know it's not guaranteed. So, I decide to go the casual route—*always*. One-offs, fuckbuddies, the odd group encounter: they'll be my staple sexual diet. Long-term relationships are off the table. It's far easier—safer—to keep men at arm's length.

After promising Brett I'd think about his proposal, I gather my belongings and make my way out to my ute. It's all a little sad, really. It's my fortieth today and I have nothing on the agenda. The highlight of my actual birthday is going to

be a trip to the gym right now. Don't get me wrong—I really enjoy it. Exercise always helps alleviate any anxiety or depression I might be feeling. I've done martial arts and yoga since I was a kid, but these days vanity dictates I supplement them with weight training: being a bit of a bear, it always helps keep me more on the muscular side.

The gym seems reasonably quiet this evening. I guess most people are doing something a lot more social with their Friday night. I go straight into the change room, dump my stuff on the bench running between the two banks of lockers, and begin to strip off. I'm down to my underwear when a guy in a suit walks in and settles his bag on the bench to my right. Discreetly angling my body, I admire him from the corner of my eye. Not particularly tall, maybe five-nine. Clean-shaven. Glasses. Early forties. Bald in a very handsome way, with dark European features... maybe from a Greek background?

He catches my surreptitious glance and smiles. "Hey, how's it going?" His voice is deep, smooth, gentle. His facial expression is warm. It's a pleasant surprise—I love it when people aren't all guarded and standoffish. It's so nice to feel welcomed, to know someone has taken the risk and extended a hand.

"Great, thanks." I shoot him the most sparkling grin I have in my arsenal and extend my hand. "I'm Gary."

His grip is masculine and confident and it lingers just a beat too long. "I'm Nick. You're a regular here?"

"Yeah, a few times a week. I live pretty close by."

Nick begins rapidly removing garments while I take my time, sitting there in my tight briefs and pretending to rummage through my bag for my gym gear. I stand up and look directly at him as I pull down my briefs. I have no reason to get naked. I could easily work out wearing briefs under my gym gear. But I really want to show this man my penis. It may be average in length, but it's very, very thick, even when it's flaccid. Set against my huge balls, it looks

damn good, and Nick's eyes immediately drop down to survey it.

"So, you're from out of town, Nick?"

Still ogling my penis, Nick swallows, then looks back up at me. "Just down from Perth for work for a couple of days."

He's standing there now in nothing but a baggy pair of boxer shorts. Nick has a gorgeous dad-bod: nicely toned with just a slight tummy and love handles, enough to make him earthy and accessible. The manly contours of his torso are highlighted with dustings of dark hair. He seems nervous, but to my delight, he holds my gaze and pulls down his boxers. Underneath is a full, hairy bush with a strapping, girthy penis. My suspicions as to his ethnic heritage are confirmed when I notice his manhood comes fully equipped with a luscious foreskin. I reach down to my own foreskin, tugging on it a bit, pleased that Nick and I have this in common. Nick's gaze flickers to my crotch once more, unable to keep himself from eyeballing my little performance. My heart beats faster. I love this game we're playing.

Taking my sweet time, I fish out an athletic jockstrap from my bag and slowly slip into it, carefully adjusting my package inside the pouch. Nick busies himself putting on some briefs, but I catch him checking me out on multiple occasions.

Once I'm dressed in shorts, singlet and trainers, I make the decision to be forthright—hit and run. "Well, Nick, I'm off to get hot and sweaty. Maybe we'll chat more after we're done?" I put a big, meaty hand on his shoulder, then start towards the door.

"Yeah... I'd love to," he calls after me.

Sure enough, as soon as I'm finished and back at my locker, I'm joined by my handsome friend. In no time we're completely naked. Nick wraps his towel around his waist, but I just carry mine at my side. I want him to look at my big, muscled arse as I walk ahead of him to the showers.

We're the only two in the row of five open shower heads. Nick stands at the one next to me and we talk as we soap ourselves. He's in town for a conference and heading back to Perth tomorrow night. He's recently separated from his wife and has a nine-year-old daughter. I take a long, pointed look at his semi-erect penis. *Well, he has to be at least a little bit bi.* Reaching down with both hands, I give my own gonads a luxurious pampering with body wash, working my foreskin back and forth, rubbing all around my balls.

Nick's eyes are fixed on this spectacle as he talks about his hetero life. Pretty soon we're both ragingly hard. He tears his gaze from my erect cock, looking up at me nervously. "I'd probably call myself... uh... bi-curious. I've never really been with a man before."

My heart aches with a sudden sense of empathy. Despite my overt display, he's still way out on a limb here. His fear is palpable and I want to reach out and bring him to me, hold him close until he feels calm. But not here. "Do you want to come back to my place, Nick?"

"Yes," he says very quickly, not even trying to cover up how eager he is. His face is one urgent mass of candid sincerity; he looks so exposed. Fuck it. I glance over his shoulder, checking the coast is clear, before pulling him into my arms. Our embrace is brief, but I imbue it with as much calming energy as I can. I need him to feel safe with me. I'm such a fucking softie.

We take my car. It's only a few minutes' drive and we're at my place. Inside, I gather him into my arms again, hugging him tight. "You call the shots, Nick." My voice is low and soft and I kiss him gently behind the ear. "This is your time to explore. Tell me what you want."

"This first." Nick moves back, slides his hand behind my neck and brings his lips to mine. They're soft, warm, keen to search out new sensations. Before he's even opened his mouth, he's rubbing against my moustache, my beard—

stroking his face with the kind of manly textures he's probably been dreaming about for a long time.

Eventually, his tongue makes an appearance and begins slowly, tenderly moving inside my mouth, twirling around my own tongue, tasting underneath where the flesh is warm and potent. Moans come through his nostrils, because his mouth is now glued to mine with full force. I grasp him more firmly. His earnest vulnerability tugs at my heart. God, I need him desperately.

"Oh fuck," I whimper, the only words I can manage to get out before clamping down on his lips again. Nick's right hand pushes at the back of my skull, drawing me as close to him as possible. His left hand grasps my shoulder, kneading the muscle hard and slow.

His lips abandon my mouth to kiss along my cheek, till he mashes the side of his face against mine, panting. "Well, that was fuckin' incredible, Gary." We both laugh, still clinging to each other.

"So what else is on your list, Nick?"

He doesn't need to ponder. "I really wanna suck your dick. But... um... I've never had more than a finger up my arse, so I don't really wanna be fucked." He looks at me, his face full of concern, like this might be a deal breaker for me.

I grin at him, barely suppressing a chuckle. *Dear, sweet man.* "I doubt you'd find many guys who'd consider that to be a problem, Nick. I'd be more than happy to take your dick instead."

Relief washes over his face, quickly morphing into a wide smile. "Awesome. Um... also, I kinda really want to be rimmed."

I'm salivating. "Well, you've definitely come to the right place, Nick. I'm an expert."

That's exactly what he needs to hear, judging by how desperately fast he sheds his clothes. I can barely keep up with him. Once we're naked, I pull him close. The warmth of his body against mine is electrifying. My skin feels like it's

on fire. I run my large hands down to his furry arse and knead his cheeks—beautifully muscled with a small layer of body fat for extra cheekiness. I can't wait to sink my face into that little piece of heaven back there.

However, Nick has other plans first. I'm a much bigger man, but he shoves my hulking frame down hard onto the bed and clamps his mouth straight onto my penis. If I'd had any doubt that Nick was telling me the truth when he said this was his first time with a man, then this is proof. He's clearly never sucked a dick before. But what he lacks in technique, he more than makes up for in enthusiasm. His eagerness is a massive turn-on: the way he sucks and licks and slurps with such genuine, unbridled hunger makes him one of the best cocksuckers I've ever encountered.

I lie back and enjoy the manic warmth of his mouth, groaning as I fondle my nipples. Nick looks up and notices. "Do yours work?"

I laugh. "Like a woman's, Nick."

Clearly aroused that there's a special skill he might bring to the table, Nick scuttles up and starts sucking on the most sensitive spots on my body, flicking his tongue as he nurses each teat. Back and forth he goes, sucking one, tickling the other. I'm so lost, I don't even monitor the amount I'm moaning. Other than being fucked hard by a big cock, this is the most intense stimulation my body can get. I grip my dick, shuffling my foreskin, but I don't dare touch my knob. Edging, for me, isn't just a sexual enhancement activity—right now it's a necessity. I'm not nearly ready to shoot the fountain of sperm I have waiting in the wings.

After wallowing in a swamp of near-orgasmic bliss, I know I have to get out. "You'd better stop, Nick, or I'll blow."

He looks up and smiles. "Really? I'm that good, eh?"

"Bloody amazing. Must be all that straight-boy practice with real tits."

Nick laughs and I shuffle around, rearranging him onto his stomach.

“Oh, fuck,” he mumbles breathlessly, as I knead one of his buttocks, pulling it outwards so I can get a glimpse inside. He knows what’s going to happen, and I’m only too keen to show him my own special skills. Scooting down between his legs, I lower my face to his furry cheeks. Nick groans in anticipation. His excitement is so fucking cute. My cock throbs, leaking its copious pre-come as I thrust it against the quilt underneath me.

His manscent is muted and subtle, following our shower at the gym. I nudge my face between his buttocks, breathing him in as the scent intensifies. I want to be gentle, I really do. It’s Nick’s first time, after all. But the piquant masculine aroma has me instantly ravenous. I’m a fucking animal. I start to growl and snarl as my tongue flails furiously. I need to consume him, to gorge myself on this rare delicacy. I rub my beard and moustache around his arse crack in a total frenzy. I try to keep my tongue as broad and well-behaved as possible, but it doesn’t work. Before long it’s poking into his hole, flicking hard against the inner edge of his sphincter. *Fuck, I’d better slow down.*

I pause, listening intently as Nick quietly whimpers away. He humps his hips, making his anus wiggle against my nose. “Don’t stop... please.”

Oh, FUCK. That’s all I need to hear. I go to town, spearing my tongue as far into that butthole as it will reach, expanding it thickly once I’m buried deep. In and out I thrust, tongue-fucking him without mercy. My hands are gripped on his meaty buttocks, stretching them far apart to give me the best access possible. Nick sounds like he’s weeping.

I scramble up and pull him to me, kissing him with scorching heat before remembering I’ve just had my face submerged in his arse. The average dirty gay boy might love that, but Nick is a newbie. I needn’t have been concerned, however. The moment I ease off, Nick launches

himself back onto me, licking my lips, delving his tongue into my mouth, kissing me all over my face.

“I need your arse now, Gary,” he pants. “Have you got a condom?”

I hate those damn things, but I’ve never gotten around to trying PrEP, so I use them—especially when I bottom. I lay on my stomach, stretching out to reach into the drawer of the bedside table. I feel hands pull my buttocks apart, and a warm tongue wastes no time in searching my arsehole. My initial surprise gives way quickly as I realise how skilled Nick is: of course, he does this with women. And he is *so* much more elegant than I was. I’d been a hyena at a carcass. Nick, on the other hand, is refined, sensitive and methodical. I sigh, collapsing in a pool of pure pleasure. Nick shows no signs of slowing down, giving small grunts as he toils away at my arse. My penis flexes underneath me, my foreskin well and truly slipped back, allowing my knob to rub against the bed. *I could spend all night suspended in this kind of rapture.*

After a while, I notice Nick is no longer pulling my arse cheeks apart with both hands; one of them has moved down and I can hear it shuffling on his cock. Soon his magic tongue stops its delightful anal exploration. “I gotta fuck you now, Gary. I can’t wait any longer.”

I hand him the condom and he suits up behind me. A large gob of spit hits my pucker and I feel his finger rubbing it in. Slowly, he pushes his penis against my hole, enticing it to open. I counter the pressure, relaxing my sphincter, then buck my hips towards him so he can slip inside me in one painfully sublime movement. I’m moaning. It feels unbelievable.

Nick chuckles. “Wow... you’re good at that.”

“Experience, Nick. And the awesome rimming you just gave me.”

Nick chuckles again and starts to pump. I moan again, even louder. His penis is fucking perfect. Spurred on by my

positive feedback, Nick's thrusts become stronger and more rapid. He's driving right into me, making me move against the bed, my bare knob grinding into the sheets. His breath rushes against the back of my neck, causing the tiny hairs to stand on end. His furry chest slides up and down against my back—a warm, manly blanket massaging away my tension. My body gives in completely. I'm mired in a utopian state of sweet agony and utter bliss. I reach underneath myself, grabbing my penis. Big mistake. The battering my prostate is getting from Nick's schlong is painfully celestial. Giving my knob the benefit of my experienced hand makes me start to come straight away.

“Sorry Nick, I'm gonna blow...”

“Yeah? You're really gonna come for me? Fucking awesome!” Nick's excitement gathers momentum and he slams into me with even more force.

“God, fuck me hard, Nick! Jesus, your dick feels so good... oh, shit... Euh! *Euh!* *EUHHHHH!*” My asshole goes wild as my cock soundly saturates the bed underneath me. Nick doesn't let up and keeps flogging away, pounding into my rectum as I orgasm, only stopping when he's sure I've finished my last convulsion, shot my last jet of sperm. What a considerate lover. I'm already picking out china patterns in my head.

I'm fully expecting Nick to continue pounding me till he comes too. But he pulls out, moving round and ripping off the condom. “Can you lick my arse again... just like before... please, man!”

I oblige him with vigour, this time with him on his back and his legs pushed high. If this is how he wants to come, then I'm gonna make damn sure it's mind-blowing. My fingers reach up to stroke his hairy ballsack as I go to town on his virgin pucker, working my way back inside. My tongue has only just begun to thrust in hard again when Nick yells and his sphincter starts spasming. I bring out the

big guns, flexing my tongue hard, wiggling and licking deep inside him, poking him right through his climax.

When he's done, drained of all manly essence, I plant a soft kiss on his spent anus. God, it's a handsome little hole. Perfect, firm lips, uniform micro-puckers all around. To think such a beautiful thing has existed all these years and nobody has ever thought to give it pleasure.

Shuffling up, I lick every skerrick of Nick's sweet load off his stomach. In amongst all the fur and musk, his penis lays quietly, still engorged and partially unsheathed. I haven't even had the chance to taste it yet. Extending my tongue, I gingerly lick the slit at the end of his knob, gathering the final vestiges of his succulent sperm. I know his knob will be hypersensitive now since he's just blown, but my rampant desire to feel his penis cradled between my tongue and the roof of my mouth is just too strong. As a compromise, I roll his foreskin up over his knob and slide the delicious seven inches into my mouth. I can't help but whimper. What I wouldn't have given for a chance to properly fellate such a divine dick.

With great reluctance, I abandon Nick's penis and come up to lie beside him, watching the rise and fall of his chest as he catches his breath. "Wow, Nick. Was that really your first time with a man?"

He chuckles. "Pretty much. I fooled around a bit with another boy when I was in high school. But I've only been with women ever since."

"Well, you have amazing talent, that's for sure." I almost make a move to kiss him, but think better of it. He might not want my gushing appreciation. He might really want to go now. After all, he's basically a straight man who's just experimenting a bit. Maybe I should ask him if he wants a lift home.

"Gary, can I sleep here with you, please?"

Oh, wow. Fuck. I'm overjoyed. "I'd really like that, Nick."

He immediately turns and launches into a tender kiss—his hand gently stroking the side of my face, his soft lips and curious tongue moving in a sensual dance with mine. *Oh God, this is wonderful.*

Over and over that night, I'm woken from a deep sleep by those moist lips and that probing tongue. Nick is an insatiably generous kisser and he just can't seem to get enough. Every time our mouths join, he caresses my cheek and beard, treating me with such reverence and delicacy I could just about cry. I find myself wondering about his impending divorce. Why would anyone want to give this up?

The next morning I'm woken by those moist lips on my nipple, which transfer to my mouth as soon as I moan.

"Morning Gary. We slept in." He kisses me again, a little longer this time. "I'd really love to have more sex, but we're not gonna have time."

I pull him on top of me, wrap my arms around him, then slide my hand down into his hairy crack where my finger rubs his puckered anus. For a brief moment I fantasise about being the first man ever to sink my cock in there. *God, if only.* "That's a shame, Nick. I could have done it a hundred more times."

Nick smiles again, that same warm, open smile that stole my heart yesterday. Fuck, life is cruel. The proverbial carrot has been dangled in front of me, only to be snatched away again.

Once we're showered and dressed, I drive Nick back to his hotel. When we pull up outside, he leans forward and kisses me one last time, making full use of his lips and tongue, wanting the complete experience as a final memento. Afterwards, he meets my eyes for a moment. "Can I look you up if I ever come down this way again?"

I smile. "Sure. I'd love that." I give him my phone to swap numbers. We both know it will never happen, but going through this charade makes it easier for us to part. After one final peck, he's off. As I watch him disappear into the hotel,

it strikes me that I've never felt so empty. Or so incredibly alone.

Brett calls me back later that day. "You're in, Gary."

"Sorry?"

"I showed Graham and Adrian your photos and they both thought you were really hot. Adrian said you were the woofiest ranga he's ever seen."

"So... they'll give me an interview?"

Brett lets out an exasperated sigh. "No, they're gonna give you a trial. *You're in*. So pack your shit up and get your sorry arse over to Sydney."

I know better than to argue with Brett, so I do as I'm told. I give my landlord notice, finish the short holiday courses I'm teaching and tie up a few loose ends. I sell what furniture I can and donate the rest. I even sell my beloved old Harley Davidson. It's a heartbreaking decision, but I could do with the money, and it's going to be hard enough finding parking for one vehicle in inner Sydney, let alone two.

One cold morning in early August, I pack my ute and spend the best part of a week driving across Australia, camping along the way. I spend another week or so staying with Brett and his partner Michael at their apartment at Bondi Beach. I'm a model house guest—I cook, I clean and I buy them alcohol. We have a ball, but I don't want to wear out the welcome mat, so I take a short-term lease on a tiny bachelor apartment nearby. It's expensive, but it comes with parking and it's not too far from the beach. I join a gym that runs martial arts classes. I go out with Brett and his mates on a regular basis. I work three or four afternoons a week at the bar, leaving my weekends free and loads of time to paint. Life is good.

One aspect that isn't so good, however, is my love life. I've always viewed my twenty-two year run of casual

encounters as a rite of passage, a necessity for my rampant masculine libido, a valid substitute for the loving relationships I can't bring myself to pursue. But since I turned forty, since that incredible night with Nick, an insidious feeling of discontent has been working its way throughout my subconscious. I'm starting to see my sexual glut for what it truly is—a damaging counterfeit, gnawing away at my heart and soul.

Case in point: a sweet, muscly ginger bear named Angus. Angus and I get chatting at a bar one night late in August. I'm upfront with him, giving my usual spiel. "I'm not in the right place emotionally to be dating at the moment," I tell him. "But I'd love to take you home tonight, if you're keen."

He doesn't even flinch, just smiles the same gentle smile he's been giving me all evening. "I'd love that too, Gary."

I've never met a man so unabashedly turned on by scent as I am. We binge on the taste and smell of every inch of each other. We flip-fuck in every conceivable position. After the most earth-shattering orgasm I've had in ages, I hold him tight. He's so kind, so tender, so vulnerable.

Angus sleeps soundly in my embrace, waking here and there to give me his sweet smile. As with Nick, these little bouts of consciousness are littered with kisses, caresses and softly-spoken words.

I am utterly captivated by him, and I hate myself. I hate that I'm so completely fucking incapable of giving a man the love he may deserve—even a man as sweet as Angus. I regret opening my big mouth and spinning that same tired story about not dating. But it's too late. Plus, deep down I'm terrified I can't break the habits of a lifetime. Better to bail now and move on.

Saying goodbye to Angus the next morning is soul-destroying in a way that will haunt me forever. His gentle smile has been all but overwritten by a palpable sadness.

After a final kiss, I stand there and watch him walk away, reeling from the angst and confusion torturing my brain.

I can't do it anymore. This is the end of casual sex for me. For the first time in twenty-two years, I'm going to refocus all my efforts on becoming the world's biggest wanker.

Chapter Two

Friday, October 19

On a sunny Friday afternoon in spring, I'm out in the beer garden at work. I've been here at the bar a couple of months now. It's hard slog, but I don't mind it. As I tidy up and collect empties, I check out the crowd, all laughter and merriment—it's Friday arvo after all. Scanning the sea of faces, my eyes clap on one man and refuse to budge. Sure, he's handsome. That in itself is nothing new—the bar is full of well-groomed, well-heeled guys—but I am instantly enthralled by this one.

I study him closely, trying to figure out why. He's not tall, but that can be nice for a big bloke like me: a shortish, cute little bugger to wrap myself around. His hair is an overgrown thicket of chocolate-brown curls and his five o'clock shadow is so heavy it looks like designer stubble. Yet he isn't a messy hipster, he's immaculate. Sharply-dressed. I watch as he shimmies out of his suit jacket, revealing a lean, trim figure. His trousers hug an arse so taut, so shapely, so *mouthwatering*, that I feel my cock throb to full mast.

But all that isn't the crux of his beauty. I ogle him as he stands there with a schooner and a smoke, laughing with his mates. His face lights up and his brown eyes dance as he moves them from one friend to the next. He just seems so incredibly *nice*.

As I stare at him he turns suddenly, catching me red-handed. I'm so transfixed that I don't have a plan B to snap to: some ashtray to empty, some glass to pick up. I don't even have the presence of mind to avert my eyes. *I just fucking can't*. But it doesn't matter, my instinct is spot on. He's so goddamn lovely, so friendly, that his face breaks into a huge smile. He glances at his cigarette and quickly grinds it out, looking embarrassed, as if he's committed a social faux pas.

I don't fucking care if you smoke, mate. I just need to know you.

Before I'm even fully aware what's happening, he's walked straight up to me and thrust out his hand. "Jeff Garrett."

I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. Where the fuck is my tongue? Why won't it work?

"It's real nice to meet you..." He pauses, eyebrows raised expectantly.

"Uh... I'm Gary. Sorry." I give myself a mental slap on the head. *Pull yourself together, idiot.*

"Can I say, Gary, I love your hair."

Hay-ur. He catches me off guard again, bowling me over with the most beautiful American accent I've ever heard. It's something you only ever come across on TV here—a rich, deep-Southern drawl.

My hand instinctively runs over the thick red shag-pile on my head. "Thanks, Jeff. I love you, too." *Shit!* "No. Sorry. *Yours*—I mean I love *yours*, too." Cringing, I gesture weakly at his dark brown curls.

Jeff laughs and flashes his gorgeous grin at me again. "I kinda liked the way that sounded the first time."

And so it all begins.

Jeff hangs around after his friends take off and I join him in the beer garden on my half-hour break. It isn't long enough by any means, but I know straight away—he's exactly the kind of man I've always dreamed of. Warm, affable, open, charming, happy, sincere: my gushing list of adjectives grows with every minute I spend in his presence. Between his accent and his effervescent nature, he has me hanging on his every word. He leaves me with a firm promise he'll be back at the bar again next week.

I would have preferred a phone number, a kiss, a bloody *engagement ring*. But I've been around the block a few times. Cock has always come easily to me. This is an entirely different kettle of fish, though. If I want something better, something special, something *fucking colossal like*

this, I'm gonna have to bide my time and play my cards right.

After work, I take the bus straight home and Google Jeff's name. I strike gold instantly, finding a number of glossy, corporate-style headshots. Combining these photos with the image, personality and magnetism I experienced this afternoon, I have enough to work with. It's the weekend, so I stay up well into the small hours, recreating the wonderful impression I've been given. I draw with utter concentration, spewing out my thoughts and ideas as quickly as I can lest they escape into the ether.

After many hours hunched over, I finally sit back and take it all in. My work is done; nothing else is needed. It's raw and it's unfinished, but so is the budding friendship I'm gonna have with this American. In perfect representation, there is the stunning man I met yesterday, grinning at me from the easel.

Chapter Three

Monday, December 3

"I think I'm in love, Brett," I announce, as we lounge in the courtyard of one of our favourite cafes opposite Bondi Beach. I haven't seen him in weeks; he's just finished giving me the gory details of his month-long stint doing shows in Melbourne.

"What?" Brett nearly chokes on his cappuccino. "Get the fuck out of here. Man-whore Gary is actually *dating*?"

I shoot him a wistful smile. "I wish I was. But it hasn't happened yet, much to my frustration." October through November have been spent in a state of constant longing, painfully waiting for the irregular appearances Jeff makes to the bar. To say I've had a one-track mind would be an understatement. It's a foreign feeling for me, a man whose sex life to date has almost invariably stemmed from the instant gratification of hookups.

"What do you mean? Why hasn't it happened?" Brett waves his hand dramatically as he drains his coffee cup. "Wait. Back up a bit. Who is this mystery man?"

"Jeff." I close my eyes and hum for a second as his image flashes into my consciousness. "He's a gorgeous little American who comes into the bar sometimes."

"Little?"

"Well, maybe five-six or seven. Next to my six-foot-four frame, he's little. But he's fucking beautiful. Such a lovely person." I'm on a roll, gushing like a teenage girl. "He's definitely single, the same age as me and he's been in Australia for four years. And he has the sexiest Southern accent."

"Hmm." Brett leans his elbows on the table, propping his chin on his hands and giving me a raised eyebrow. "And does this gorgeous little American know you exist?"

I chortle at the suggestion. "Of course he does. He flirts with me every time I see him. And I hang on his every word."