

Chapter One

“Dad! I’m home.” David shut the front door, put down his briefcase and shrugged off his raincoat, thinking about the mound of paperwork he’d left on his desk at work because he’d left early. Again. He’d have to go in on Saturday to get caught up.

So much for having a life.

He walked through the living room to the kitchen. “Dad?” The large eat-in kitchen was empty and the back door stood open. “What the--” Going to the door, he stepped in a small puddle of rainwater, swore under his breath, then leaned out, doing a rapid scan of the small backyard.

Everything looked in order. The small brick patio held a round teak table and chairs, its folded umbrella wrapped tight against the recent days of solid rain they’d had. The stainless steel grill shimmered with millions of raindrops and the copper fire pit had filled with water. It’d been ages since he’d entertained out there.

Dave ducked back inside, closed the door, and turned the deadbolt. After wiping up the water from the hardwood floors, he headed to the back of the house where his father’s bedroom was located.

“Dad? Where are you?” It wasn’t like his dad to forget to shut the back door and since it was raining, David couldn’t figure out what he’d be doing outside anyway. David could barely afford to air condition the house all day through the hot extended Houston summers, much less the world, and his irritation level, already high, skyrocketed.

Man, when he got hold of his father, he’d give him a talking to.

David grimaced. Christ, he sounded just like his old man. When had that happened? The last thing he ever wanted to be was like his father.

Lately, his dad had been getting more and more forgetful, but the doctor had warned David to expect it as his father's condition worsened. He just hadn't expected it to happen so quickly.

He opened the door to his dad's room, once David's study, but it was empty. Fear began to replace aggravation, gnawing a tiny hole in David's gut. He shut the door and quickly went through the small Craftsman cottage, but his father wasn't in the house.

"Shit." Standing in the middle of the living room, David ran his hand through his hair and thought about what he should do. There'd been no note and no sign of anything out of place or missing, so he ruled out a robbery.

Facing the fact that his dad had left the house and could be anywhere, his mind leaped to visualize his old man wandering the streets of their Houston Heights neighborhood, disorientated and lost. Probably in his pajamas. Those ratty navy blue cotton ones his father insisted on wearing. Not to mention, the worn leather slippers. In the rain. *Shit.*

David jerked his raincoat back on, picked up his car keys, and went to search for David Delaney, Sr.

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"I've had it, Billy. This is it. No more," Travis whispered into the phone. Last month he'd stiffened his resolve and broken it off with his younger lover and he wasn't going to back down. Travis had forgiven Billy a lot of things, but cheating wasn't one of them.

"It's all your fault, you realize that, don't you?" Billy said, calm and cool. "I need someone who can give me *all* their attention."

“I’m a cop. You knew that going in.” Travis looked around the detective’s pit to see if anyone was listening. Heads down, most of the other dees seemed to be busy or at least had the good manners to appear occupied.

“And you knew I was high maintenance when you fucked me the first time. That hasn’t changed, but I need to have *my* needs met and I’ve found it takes more than you to do that.”

“Jesus, you’re such a twisted slut.”

“I thought you liked sluts.” Billy laughed into the phone. “At least, while I was bent over and taking it in the ass. Oh baby, I love fucking you,” he groaned as he imitated Travis’ voice.

“You cheated on me. Twice. Now you want me to give you money to make your rent? Have you lost your mind?”

“We can take it out in trade, lover.”

“Forget it. You’re not worth my time and definitely not my money.” Travis slammed the phone down and swore. One of the other detectives glanced up at him from across the room, eyebrows raised. Travis shrugged and went back to his computer.

If his ex-lover would stop jerking him around, maybe he could get on with his life, but every time Billy needed something, like money, he’d step back into Travis’s life and fuck with him.

Sure, the sex had been hot. Billy could do sex. He just couldn’t do commitment. Well, Billy had used him for the last time. No more fixing parking tickets. And absolutely no more money.

If he weren't such a sucker for Billy's blue eyes and pouty lips, he could find someone else to spend his time with, maybe forge an actual relationship.

Next time, Travis swore, it'd be different. If there were ever a next time, and on the shy side of forty it didn't look likely.

What had he expected trying to recapture his youth with a man fifteen years younger than himself?

But, Jesus, Billy was hot, with a capital H. And he knew how to use those pouty lips, how to twist Travis's dick in knots, how to leave Travis's mind so screwed up he'd done just about anything Billy had asked, including some things Travis thought he'd never do.

What was the gay version of pussy whipped? Prick whipped?

No more. Travis Hart wasn't going to be anyone's fool again.

David stood in the doorway of the detective's bureau, unsure of what to do. The police officer at the front desk had sent him back here with instructions to "talk to one of the dees."

Which one? Four men and one woman sat at small desks, heads down, or on the phone. Several other desks were empty. David had never been in a police station, much less among detectives and had only talked to a cop a few times in his life during traffic stops.

He cleared his throat. "Excuse me." No one looked up. He tried again, this time louder. "Could someone help me?"

A harried looking man about his age glanced up at David long enough for David to catch his eye. “Excuse me, can you help me?”

The man sighed and motioned him over to his desk. David sat on the folding metal chair next to it.

“What’s up?” The man’s tone was brisk and a touch irritated as if David had interrupted work far more important than finding a lost old man.

“My dad. He’s disappeared. He was sup--”

“How long ago?”

“Sometime today, I suppose.”

“Sorry. Forty-eight hours for missing persons, unless it’s a kid.” He shrugged broad shoulders and went back to work on the computer.

David stared at the holster the man wore under his armpit. Its black nylon straps were jarring against the detective’s white cotton button down shirt and tasteful gray tie. The gun was black and menacing and *huge*. David couldn’t imagine a job where he’d have to be armed. Or shoot someone.

Clutching the edge of the desk with his hands, David struggled not to bang his fists on the cheap metal to get the detective’s attention. “You don’t understand, he’s got Alzheimer’s.”

The man glanced up. Ice blue eyes stared back at David in an unofficial game of “who’ll blink first,” but David had no intention of losing.

The cop blinked and pulled out a pad of paper. “Name.”

“Mine or his?”

“His.” The pen hovered over the paper.

“David Delaney, Sr.” The pen scribbled.

“That makes you Junior?” The detective grinned, as if it were a joke.

“No, that makes me David,” David bit out, on the verge of losing it. His foot tap-danced on the linoleum floor. “Look. Officer.”

“Detective. Travis Hart.”

“Detective Hart.” David nodded and began again. “My father has wandered off. I’ve searched our neighborhood and can’t find him and I have no idea when he left. He could be halfway to Dallas for all I know.” He scraped his hand over his jaw and the bristles of his five o’clock shadow prickled.

Hart’s thin lips twisted. “I doubt he got that far. Maybe he’s at a neighbor’s?”

“He doesn’t know any of the neighbors.” He’d thought of that, but his father had let David know many times that he didn’t approve of David’s lifestyle or his neighbors.

“You sure?”

“I’m sure. Most of my neighbors are gay. Dad wouldn’t spit on them if they were on fire.” Shit. He didn’t mean to say that, but he was just so out of it.

Hart chuckled and rolled his eyes. “One of those, huh? Old and set in his ways?”

“Yeah. He barely tolerates me.” David didn’t know why he’d just hinted to the cop he was gay, but sometimes it saved a lot of trouble and kept feet from being stuck in mouths.

“Then he’d hate me.” The detective glanced up at David and a small, soft smile curved those thin lips upward, creating small dimples in his cheeks, and changing Hart from a hardnosed cop to a very nice looking man.

“Oh.” David didn’t know what to say. He cleared his throat. “Dad’s been difficult.” He shrugged. “What can you do for me?”

“Let me issue the Silver Alert, get his description out to the patrol cars. Do you have a recent photo of him?”

David shook his head. “No. And I have no idea what he’s wearing. I’m sorry I don’t have more info for you.”

“Never mind. Let’s just go with a physical description.”

“He’s seventy years old, shorter than me, about five foot ten, maybe one hundred and sixty pounds. Gray hair, green eyes.”

“Did he have reddish hair, like you?” The cop’s gaze flicked to David’s hair.

David ran a self-conscious hand through his unruly curls. “Yeah. But his was redder when he was my age.”

They stared at each other. David dropped his eyes, unsure of what was happening.

“Now it’s gray, right?” Hart said, ending the odd moment.

“Yes. Still full, though,” David added.

“So he’s a looker, like you?”

David gulped. Was Hart coming on to him? He didn’t know what to do or say, so he ignored the comment. “I’ve been all over the area. Do you think the patrols will spot him?”

“Maybe.”

“How long before I should start panicking?” David bit his bottom lip.

Hart sat back, tapped his pen on the pad as if deciding what to say. “Come with me. I’ll get this out on the wire. We’ll take my car, do another search.”

David stood with Hart and stuck out his hand. “Thanks. I appreciate it.”

“No problem. If it were my dad, I’d want someone to do the same.” Hart slid his hand into David’s, held it without shaking, then let it drop. “Follow me.”