



SAMPLE

© 2016 by Mark Treble. All Rights Reserved

Chapter One

We came in from the patio, still nude. We had both said we loved each other, and Luke freaked out. I rose and held him in my arms. He tried to push me away, but I wouldn't let him. I just held him. No kissing, no petting, nothing but holding him. Then he started to sob. I did my best to comfort him, but he wasn't having any of it. "I love you, but we can't be in love because it will never work out. You're straight. The last straight man I gave my heart to shredded it."

I was pretty much at a loss here. "Luke, do you remember the day I looked at the house as a prospective tenant?" He did. "That day you told me all gay guys weren't the same. Why should straight guys all be the same?" He just shook his head.

He took my hand and led me inside to his bedroom. We had always used my bedroom for cuddling, sleeping and physical activities. Luke explained that it was because he wanted me to feel in control. I had to assume that Luke needed to feel some control, and I was more than happy to surrender. Maybe if he felt in charge he could reconsider.

We lay down on the bed together without bothering to get dressed. *I love him, and he loves me. I don't care if he thinks it won't work out, we'll make it work out. Somehow.* Eventually I fell into a troubled sleep. Emgee woke me at one point to go outside. Otherwise, my sleep was restless and dreamless.

In the morning I could smell Luke on his pillow and in the bed. I also knew he was nearby; I had come to know and love his scent. I started to stir and reached for Luke. I couldn't find him, so I let my hand search the bed as best I could. I opened my eyes when I heard a snap. Luke was sitting in a chair and had just closed his sketch book.

"Hi, boyfriend." I figured that was safe. We had agreed we were boyfriends, even exclusive boyfriends. I knew not to use the L word, and certainly not to ask to see what Luke was working on. He smiled. Dimples, just not very deep. And the sparkle was there but wasn't bright.

"Hi back, boyfriend." That was Luke, sort of smiling at me. He put his sketchbook away while I got dressed and we joined Marcus for breakfast. Cold Chinese takeout and beer. Well, I've had worse.

After breakfast Luke took me into his bedroom. I was afraid this was the break-up talk. I wasn't just nervous, I felt like a full-blown anxiety attack was on its way. Luke sat on his

bed and patted the area next to him, in an obvious invitation to sit next to him. I actually started to tremble. *Was this the end?*

“Mike, I’m sorry. I love you, I want to commit to you. Every time I think about that I get a stabbing pain in the head and hear a voice telling me *He’s going to leave you*. That thought chases itself around until I’ve convinced myself you *are* going to leave me. Then I feel a need to withdraw from you to protect myself from getting hurt. I don’t know what to do.” Luke sat silent, staring at his lap.

“Whatever I have to do to convince you I’m not leaving, I’ll do it. Luke, I love you. I completely understand going inside your head and finding a tornado in progress. Please give me a chance to prove to you I’m never going to leave.” The thought of reaching for him and holding him appeared briefly. *He’s going to have to come to me.*

He did. He held me and gave me a short kiss on the lips. “I’ve got to go visit a client. It’s a music group I’ve worked with in the past. Their lead singer is incredibly sexy.” He saw the troubled look on my face. “But, he’s married. And you’re the one I love.”

Boy, did I feel better.

When Luke left, I checked e-mail. A long-time client was organizing a series of symposia in Central America and was in a jam. A former Ambassador was supposed to speak on how to do business with the U.S. He was in traction after an accident involving a bad-tempered horse. Could I replace him, like, in three days?

Well, if taking our manufacturing jobs to your country is doing business, most countries are already experts. They’re also pretty practiced at stealing our work, and at dumping products below cost in our market. That’s not sustainable.

I told Sam I’d get back to him later today. I called Pam, my virtual assistant. I only had one deliverable due this week, otherwise everything was two weeks away. She reminded me that my teaching schedule with NOPD would resume in two weeks. In other words, I could go.

“Sam, I’m in. Countries that want to do business with us need to understand that treating the U.S. like a patsy can’t go on forever. Eventually the giant will awaken and elect a protectionist president. My presentation will focus on sustainable business with the U.S. Okay?”

“Not what I had in mind, but other countries need to look to the future. Shit, our country needs to look to the future. Let’s do it.” Sam agreed with me, something that happened about as often as a rutabaga being elected Pope.

When and where?” Sam gave me the itinerary and said he would arrange flights. I told him I’d arrange my own flights to and from the region and if it was more than what he had budgeted I’d only bill him for his budget amount. We agreed on a price. I’d get what the Ambassador was going to get.

“Mike, I know you took Luke to Europe, but please don’t bring him. El Salvador and several other countries are not hospitable to gays.” Sam knew that Luke and I were good friends, just not how good the friendship was. I told him I’d come alone.

Now, how do I break that to Luke without breaking our relationship? I don’t want to expose him to danger. And, how do I get him to talk about what we had said? I love him and he loves me. We have to make this work. I love him, and I’m going to have him or die trying.

I took the rest of the day to finish a charter for a Board of Advisors for a private company that was struggling to grow. I’d emphasized to the client the need for diversity on the Board, and he’d told me there was a black man he wanted to include.

“Great! Any blue Martian women, or left-handed Lutheran bisexual bowling team captains?” Lew was confused. “Diversity is about background and avoiding group think. And be sure to include somebody who’s going to disagree with you a lot.”

Anyway, he accepted the charter I had written and my recommendations for where to look for Board Members. He’d already promised a bunch of buddies they could have seats.

“So, un-promise. Unless they’re investors, and they’re not, it isn’t their company.” Lew had grumbled but agreed to un-promise his buddies.

I met Carly Thibedeaux for lunch at a café near her precinct. She spent most of lunch holding my hand. A pretty woman holding my hand is a predictable start to a wet dream. We held hands anyway.

I told her that Pam can contact me twenty-four seven if there are issues that need my attention. She didn’t seem real pleased that I would be gone for eight days, but finally had no argument. I wondered what that was all about.

Luke got back in mid-afternoon and was bubbling over with enthusiasm for the new album cover. I was interested and pretended to understand what he was saying. He was talking to me, and that was all that mattered.

In late afternoon I put on my board shorts and asked him to join me in a swim. He motioned at the board shorts. "Really, Mike? Are you punishing me?" I gave him a soft kiss on the lips.

"I just want you not to feel pressured. When I used that word, you freaked out. I don't want you thinking I'm trying to change your mind." Luke gave me a soft kiss, then retired to his bedroom. He emerged in his own board shorts, and the dimples were just barely noticeable. Fuck me.

I grabbed a couple of beers (note to self, ask Marcus to buy two cases at a time) and Luke joined me on the patio for a pre-swim drink.

"I don't feel like you're pressuring me, Mike." Luke paused. "I'm pressuring myself. I'm so fucking afraid of being hurt again that I don't want to put myself in harm's way. And I'm worried about hurting you."

I reassured him that whatever we could have together would be fine with me. "You're special, Luke. I can't lose you." We kissed, finished our drinks, and dove in for a lackluster swim. We stayed about twenty minutes in the pool, and when we got out we sat together on a lounge chair. We snuggled but didn't kiss. I felt like I was walking on very thin ice. And I never brought up his concern that he was worried about hurting me.

Emgee came over and wanted to join us. I was ready to shoo him away but Luke picked him up and held him. I guess he feels safe with Emgee; dogs aren't going to break your heart.

Chapter Two

The next morning I told Luke I was headed to Central America for eight days. I explained that I couldn't take him with me because several of the countries I would be visiting were highly prejudiced against gays. He was not only out, he was relatively well-known. I didn't want to put him in an awkward position.

"Are you trying to protect me or yourself?" Luke's penetrating glare ripped through my gut. "Is it just that you don't want people to know you have a boyfriend?"

"Where the fuck did that come from?" I was angry. I was angry at Luke. "I thought you knew me better." I dressed and went out to the kitchen for breakfast. Alone. Marcus was already at the table eating a hot dog. For breakfast. I made myself toast and coffee.

"Why the long face, Mike?" Marcus reached out and placed his hand on my arm. I knew he was trying to comfort me, but I didn't want to be comforted. I wanted to be mad.

"Drop it, please." I didn't like being curt with Marcus, he's a genuinely good guy. But my head was fucked up. First Luke tells me I can't love him, then he accuses me of punishing him and now he's telling me I'm not trying to protect him from homophobes, I'm trying to protect myself.

Marcus looked offended, but I didn't have the emotional capacity to care. I was angry and hurt and scared. I was going to lose the man I loved and there didn't seem to be anything I could do to stop the unraveling of the relationship.

Emgee had already had breakfast, so I only gave him half of my toast. Well, maybe three-quarters. He's a growing puppy.

Luke came out to breakfast and kissed me on top of the head. "Good morning, boyfriend." I shoved him away.

"Good morning yourself – *boyfriend*." I wanted to hurt Luke back. I wanted him to know how much he had made me feel unwanted. "Please don't kiss me in front of Marcus. I wouldn't want him to get the wrong idea." With that I got up and stormed into my office, slamming the door behind myself. *Shit, I'm an immature prick.*

I had a Skype conference with Sam and the rest of the speakers. I ran through thumbnail sketches of the countries we'd be visiting, then made a couple of notes on how to do business with the U.S. My computer chimed, and there was Sam in the main window with four others in smaller windows. I could see a thumbnail of myself. Thank God I'd remembered to get dressed.

One of the group was an attorney who used to work for the State Department in immigration. She declared that she would have to review and approve everyone's presentations for content before we could speak. I sent Sam a quick text: *Fuck this shit.*

Sam sent me back a smiley-face text. "Ah, Lorraine, I appreciate the offer, but I don't think that's going to be necessary." She argued with Sam, who sent me a text message: *Too late to get a replacement.*

Sam called a halt to it. "Lorraine, it's not going to happen." She said she wasn't going. "OK, that's fine. Your contract requires you or an acceptable substitute to go. Find me a substitute before the end of the day."

Lorraine huffed and puffed and grumbled, but finally agreed that she would go on the trip. Oh, joy. I think she forgot that Sam was a practicing attorney. I had no doubt he would remind her of that privately.

I decided to jump in. "Lorraine, you're welcome to read mine. Most of it is highly technical Spanish." She told me she didn't like me. "Oh, I like you just fine. If you try to correct a word I say I'll embarrass the shit out of you." She harrumphed in a failed attempt to regain her composure.

We sorted out the order. Sam wanted PowerPoint slides by the next day. No problem, I called Pam. I gave her the titles and she was a little pissed. Sure she could type the Spanish characters, but it was a chore and she preferred typing in English. I paid her enough for her time that she could type in Absurdian if that was needed.

Pam offered to send me an update on Luke's sketch print business. I told her to send it to Luke and to ask him to find an accountant. He needed to know whether he was making any money or not.

I broke for lunch and found Marcus gone. Luke was waiting for me in the kitchen. "I'm sorry. My remarks were uncalled for. And, yes, I do know you better than that." This situation was completely unacceptable because he wasn't showing his dimples. So I

fixed it. I put my arms around him and just hugged him. When I pulled back there was a hint of dimples.

“Luke, I’m getting some really mixed signals from you. You tell me I can’t love you, then you say it’s because you love me too. You get upset that I wore my suit to swim and accused me of trying to punish you. Then we spent the night in bed together. Today you asked if I was trying to protect you from homophobes or if I just didn’t want anybody to know I have a boyfriend.

“I am proud to have a boyfriend. I am proud to have *you* as my boyfriend. When I meet someone new the first words out of my mouth aren’t that I have a boyfriend. If it comes up in conversation, or if it’s appropriate to mention it, I do. I love holding hands with you in public. I’m comfortable with kissing you in public. I enjoy every single thing we do together.

“Can we please drop this until I get back from Central America?” I was hoping he would agree. He did, but didn’t look happy about it. Come to think of it, he didn’t look happy about a whole lot of things lately.

While we ate, we limited conversation to safe topics. I told him that Pam would send him my itinerary and keep him up to date on what was happening on the tour. She would also send him an update on the sketch print business. The dimples disappeared again. “Aren’t you going to call me?”

“Of course I’m going to call you. I want to call you every day, several times a day. I have to keep Pam up to date on what I’m doing when and where. That’s all. She’ll give you a synopsis right after I email or call her.” That seemed to mollify him.

“I’m going to miss you.” Wow. That shocked me. Luke had been bristling at getting close, then insulting me, and then yo-yoing back to normal, and now he’s going to miss me. I told him I’d miss him, too. “Don’t you find any young Latino ass to cuddle with.” He was smiling.

“You’re the one into the Latinos if I recall. Roberto, Pablo, Joachim, and isn’t Homo a Hispanic name?” Dimples and a laugh. Things were sort of back to normal. Whatever normal is, or was, or, *fuck you, Allison, get out of your head.*

Luke showed me his concept sketches for the album cover. He was showing me his sketches, and some included people? Then I remembered this was commercial work for

public consumption. It was only Luke's own art that he did not like to share and in which there were no people.

I have few visual skills so I told him the client is likely to have trouble picking a winner. I asked him which he liked best.

"I really don't have a preference. This stuff is commercial, and the only preference that matters is the client's. If he wants me to do something I think the public won't like, or something I think might evoke a negative reaction from his customers, I'll tell him. And my contract allows me to forbid use of my name for cover credit so, if he really wants a piece of shit I'll give it to him and prohibit him from identifying me as the artist." Wow. Something new to put into my own contracts.

I asked Luke who owned the rights to the sketches the client didn't use. It turned out Luke owned the rights. I asked about showing the sketches to the public, and he didn't have any objections.

How about the sketches he did in Mexico? No. Just the commercial work. OK.

For our afternoon swim I left the suit in my bedroom. We drank a beer, swam, and then cuddled for a while on one of the lounge chairs. Maybe things are going to be OK. I let Emgee jump up and join us. After a minute he did his wiggle-wiggle pee dance. I knew he just wanted to do more training (of me) to give him treats whenever he went dribble-dribble. He'd go every fifteen or twenty minutes until I put a stop to it, so I refused to get up and let him use the micro-yard we'd installed on the back patio.

He peed on my leg. Luke laughed.

Before dinner I went into my office and called Cathy. "Thanks for your advice. I don't think about what I'm actually doing, just the purpose of it. Yes, I've now given Luke several blow jobs."

Cathy's intake of breath was hard to hide. "You did? I wasn't sure you would, or could. I mean, even if you're not gay, that's pretty firmly on the gay side of things."

"You're right." I paused briefly. "It just seemed like the right thing to do at the time. And, if I don't think about what I'm doing, but focus only on showing Luke my love, it's OK. Sometimes I think about it afterwards and it bothers me. Then I think about you telling me to follow my heart, so I do."

“So, you really love him?” Cathy sounded more curious than incredulous.

“Yes. I told him I loved him, and that’s where it got too complicated. He told me I can’t love him because he loves me, too. And he’s afraid of getting hurt and of hurting me. He’s been like Jekyll and Hyde ever since then. I never know if I’m going to wake up to a kiss or a good-bye note. It’s frustrating as hell.” Just thinking about it started sending me back into my head.

Cathy let it lie for a full minute. “Mike, get out of your head. The signs are unmistakable. I believe that you love him, even though I don’t understand it. And the thought of you sucking another guy’s dick is just something that I can’t think about. Please don’t tell me any more details, I don’t want to know them.

“Luke is bouncing back and forth between pulling you toward him and pushing you away. He said he loves you, too. Just focus on that, OK?”

“OK.” I tried focusing on that – Luke loves me, too – but it was still hard to put up with the constant push and pull. I just hoped that Luke wouldn’t push me away completely.

After dinner Luke, Marcus and I went downtown to DaLounge. There was a new jazz group performing and they were good. Dana had left the house to Ethan, but the club belonged to Alex. He tried to show up at least once a day to work as a waiter or busboy. Abdul, the manager, was in charge until Alex turned twenty-one. The young heir hadn’t been all that happy with the idea, but there was little he could do about it.

A really cute young woman was waiting tables. She stopped and talked with me for a while, introduced herself as Elaine. She offered me her phone number, and eventually I figured out she was flirting. I told her I was taken, and she asked if it was serious. “Yes, it’s serious.” She finally got the idea and left me alone.

We returned home and Luke was quiet for a while. “Mike, that girl at the lounge was seriously flirting with you. Were you attracted to her?”

I didn’t have to think for even a second. “She was really cute so, yes, I was attracted to her. Why do you ask?”

“You’re straight and I’m afraid I’m going to lose you to a woman.” Luke was looking a bit morose. I reassured him that I was straight, I was sexually attracted to women and not men, but he was different. It wasn’t sex, it was Luke and I couldn’t explain it.

“But she offered you her phone number, and you didn’t take it. If I hadn’t been there, would you have taken it?” Luke looked worried, and I sought to allay his fears.

“I love you and feel the same way about our relationship whether you’re there or not. No, I wouldn’t have taken it even if you weren’t there.”

Luke let it drop and we retired to his bedroom for the night. We undressed before climbing into bed together. Luke was quiet and it appeared he wanted to say something. After a few minutes he looked at me with a serious expression. “Mike, what do you think about when you’re sucking my dick?”

I froze. I never actually thought about anything except the pleasure I knew he was getting from my mouth. I also thought about showing him how much I loved him. And I also thought about how it seemed to bring us closer. I had absolutely no desire to give anybody a blowjob. I did have a desire to please Luke and show him how much he meant to me. Luke reached over to touch me and I moved away. For the first time in ages I was back deep inside in my head and didn’t like what I found there.

“I don’t want to talk about that. I don’t think of anything except you enjoying what I’m doing. I wish you hadn’t asked that question. I’m straight, but I have a boyfriend and I suck his dick.” I batted away Luke’s hand when he tried to touch me, then I got out of bed, picked up my clothes and turned to him.

“I’m not ready to examine all of that too closely quite yet. I need to sleep in my own bed tonight. Alone.” It was all I could get out before turning and walking out the door. I know I had hurt Luke, I had hurt the man I love, but I didn’t want to think about what I did to him, just about how I felt about him.

I tossed and turned for hours. I’m straight and I don’t kiss men. I’m straight and I don’t fondle, kiss and lick men’s bodies. I’m straight and I don’t give other men hand jobs. I’m straight and I don’t give other men blowjobs. But I do all those things with Luke. I love him, and I love letting him know how I feel about him, and giving him pleasure, and being with him, and ...

I’m straight and I don’t love men. But I love Luke. Am I really straight? I’m sure I’m not gay, it’s just that the person I love is another man. Did I choose him because he’s a man? No, and I don’t think I chose him at all. We just sort of came together and eventually chose each other. Because we’re in love.

Why are we in love? Nobody's ever been able to answer that question to my satisfaction.

Is it OK to love Luke without showing it physically? I'm not sure. The physical is as much a part of us as the emotional or spiritual. I love Luke, I love showing him how much I love him and how much I appreciate his love and affection. I enjoy giving him pleasure when showing him my love. Is there anything I won't do to show him my love? Yeah.

I draw the line at anal sex. Maybe it's weird to have a line at all given everything I've done with Luke. But I have a line and I won't cross it. The problem isn't that I think if I have anal sex that will make me gay. I just find the entire idea disgusting and, however much I love Luke and want to do things that give him pleasure and show him my love, I don't believe he would ever want me to do something that revolted me. At least I hope not. If he demands anal sex as a condition of our relationship, I'm done.

Chapter Three

The next morning I grabbed my bag and headed to the front door. I'd get breakfast at the airport. Luke was waiting for me in the kitchen.

"I'm sorry, Mike. I didn't mean to upset you, honest." No dimples, no sparkle, no smile. I hadn't slept well and I still wasn't ready to get into this with Luke.

"I'm sorry if I upset you too, Luke. We can talk about this when I get home, OK?" He looked like he needed to talk now, but I just wasn't ready. I told him that.

"If I'm not going to worry about losing you to a woman – say that waitress – I need to talk about this. The sooner the better." Luke seemed to be having real difficulty controlling his emotions. I couldn't leave things this way, but I had no time to talk about it, either.

I compromised by going to him and giving him a kiss on the top of his head. He pulled back and looked up at me. "Really kiss me, Mike." I did nothing. "Please?" He was begging.

I bent down and kissed him softly on his lips. He broke the kiss, then looked at me in sorrow. "You're not ready to talk about this, are you? Are you ready for the rest of this? The kissing? The cuddling? The petting and licking and sucking and everything else?"

My heart was breaking. This just might be the beginning of the end. Since we got back from the cruise every day seemed like the beginning of the end. "Luke, I'm ready to love you. That's all I'm sure of right now. Can we leave it at that until I get back? I have a client waiting. I'll call you tonight."

This did nothing to brighten Luke's mood. He said not a word and just looked at me in pain as I turned to leave. I don't know if he looked away, or went back to his breakfast, or simply disappeared. I walked out the front door and got in the waiting taxi.

[Buy on Amazon.com](#)