

## **Storm of Passion**

**a short story by Dustin Adrian Rhodes**

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*Within each of us lies a storm of passion.*

### **Tuesday Morning**

**C**limbing from the Greyhound bus, his combat boots made a thud, as they hit the severely crumbled pavement. He welcomed the sight, as he took in the view of the quaint town, surprised to see during the ten years he had served in the army, the quiet rural town had not changed. There was Grover's Drug and Gifts, The Palladium Theater, JC Penney's, Van Clive's Ladies Wear; Stocker's Shoe Store with the same faded Red Goose sign. On the opposite side of the street, the volunteer fire station, Fuch's Funeral Home (pronounced FOX, why they had not legally changed the family name was

beyond anyone's comprehension), the Piggly Wiggly Market, the Baptist Church, and of course, Morrison's Cafe. Down the center of town ran an unmarked, two lane asphalt street. Not much of a place to look at; there was a remote chance Norman Rockwell might have been inspired to capture the eccentric town on canvas, had he known of its existence.

There was no hero's ticker-tape parade, no marching band or anyone for that matter to welcome him. A sleepy little town where the greatest excitement came from guffawing at Beulah, old man Howard's milking cow; which frequently escaped the pasture to sashay down Main Street. The old saying "there's no place like home" was true, because honestly, there was no place like this town, but it was home, his home and he was glad to be back.

Strolling along the empty sidewalk, he sensed a bit of nostalgia as he caught the scent of bacon frying and baking hand rolled biscuits drifted in the air, luring his stomach to Morrison's Café.

A jingling sound greeted him as he pushed through the heavy glass door, at Morrison's.

Looking up, he spotted a small brass bell attached to the top of the door. He smiled to himself.

"I declare, as I live and breath, if it ain't little Jaime Duncan," exclaimed, a portly woman, as she charged toward him with outstretched pudgy arms, squeezing him in an enthusiastic bear hug. He swore his ribs were bruised. Madge had not changed one iota, with her white waitress uniform, silvery blue hair coiffed like a colossal cotton candy ball on top her chubby jovial face. Swirling in a fragrant bouquet of rose water and Aqua Net, which had him wrinkling his nose and detecting a recent addition to her repertoire, could it be Ben Gay? As she hugged him, he was certain her overly made-up lacquered face imprint would be permanently embedded on his shirt collar and there was no mistaking the huge false eyelashes tickling the side of his neck.

"Madge..." Pulling from her arms, he held her soft hands and scanned the woman from head to toe. "Just as lovely as always," planting a fond peck on her flushing cheek.

"Oh you," she playfully swatted him with a dish towel, "Still the charmer." Drawing him into her voluptuous bosom, she forced yet another strangulating embrace. "It's so good seeing you again boy, welcome home." Releasing him, she dabbed her leaking eyes with a towel, "Oh dear lord, where are my manners, let's get you settled. Hon, would you like a table or a booth?" Her contagious smile radiated with all the warmth and brilliance of a dazzling halogen bulb.

"How 'bout a booth?"

Jaime had forgotten how friendly and warm folks from a small town could be. Hazy memories of his childhood began to come into focus, growing sharper and more vivid in his mind. During the bus trip, he had needlessly worried, after all these years. Concerned he might not feel like he fit in, but all that was vanishing. Scanning the cafe, Madge dragged him by the hand to an available booth. In the flurry, he recognized smiling faces and honest to goodness genuine waves from folks he thought he had long forgotten. Resurfacing memories, sweet lovable Madge, being home, all of it was a tad overwhelming for this small town boy.

Madge parked Jaime in a center booth of the small cafe, making him feel like he was the floor show at the only diner in town. Tossing his cap on the empty space beside him, the camouflage fabric of green and brown reminded him that even though he donned army fatigues, he was no longer property of the US Army. Jaime looked forward to returning to civilian life. He knew the transition from years of military discipline would be awkward. After having proudly served his country, Jaime was ready to transform from GI-Joe to Regular-Joe. Lost in thought, Jaime spun around when a friendly hand clapped his shoulder. Paralyzed and stunned speechless, he gawked at the apparition lingering next to his table.

“What's with you? You look as if you've just seen a god-dang ghost!” Jaime was blindsided by a familiar exhilarating laugh from his youth. “Don't you remember me, your best bud Parker?”

Shocked, Jaime ogled the man who had been his lifelong best friend. He was drop-dead gorgeous. Not to say his friend had not been good looking before, obviously time and working out had been more than generous to him. Jaime found it difficult to not gape at the tanned muscled man with buzzed auburn hair and deep set emerald eyes.

“Uh – sorry, but you've grown up since I last saw you.” Jaime blushed from rose to crimson, as a bound-and-determined boner bloomed in his pants.

“Hey, look at you, a military man, with your army hair cut.” Parker said while reaching out to rustle Jaime's short crop of sandy brown hair. “Muscles?” Parker squeezed Jaime's biceps with a teasing grin. “Where did these come from? You're not exactly the kid you were when you left after graduation. And what's this,” Parker brushed Jaime's stubbled cheek with the back of his hand, “A five o'clock shadow at 8:10 in the mornin'? Hell–fire, the last time I saw you, you'd barely begun to scrape your face.”

Enthusiastically Parker slipped into the opposite bench, refusing to take his eyes off Jaime, afraid to blink; fearful his good friend would disappear again.

“You home for good? Or, are you too cool for us simple folk now?” Parker asked.

“What?” Jaime questioned.

“Hell you've been to Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and who knows where the hell else.” Parker said. “You're a traveled man of the world. No one would hold it against you for not returning to boring rural life. We can't hold a candle to what you've seen.”

“You know, with such a convincing spiel, I'm appalled you're not heading up the local Chamber of Commerce.” Jaime laughed.

“Touché,” Parker snickered and nodded. “You're right. I'm sorry. Maybe I came on a little too strong. This is home for me, and once, it was yours as well.”

“Yeah, I know. I did a lot of soul searching on the bus ride.” Jaime said thoughtfully. “My tour is over and it's time to get on with my life. Honestly, I couldn't imagine anywhere I'd rather be than right here. I'm back home to stay.” Jaime smiled contentedly. Plagued earlier by serious doubts, simply saying the words out loud made all the difference in the world. There were no regrets, he was certain of that. He *was* home. The place he had grown up, surrounded by good decent folks and now being reunited with his best bud. Gazing across the table, Jaime wondered how many nights he had dreamt of Parker, never imagining he had grown up. *No. Transformed into a hot, sexy, hunk of man flesh.* Those gorgeous dancing emerald eyes which had always mesmerized him, a quick killer smile that curled devilishly in the corner. Parker had the most perfect lips he had ever seen. Jaime would give anything, to just once; feel Parker's alluring lips pressed tight to his. But, he knew that would never happen. Parker was as straight as they come. Even though he had come out to Parker when they were in their teens, it had never been an issue in their friendship, and Parker had certainly never shown the slightest sign of interest. All those years he had secretly yearned for Parker, telling himself their friendship was too valuable to risk losing. Jaime would rather die than tell Parker his true feelings.

“So, buddy, what're your plans, now that you're back?” Parker asked.

Eager Parker, just like old times, looking to Jaime for a plan, it might be a camping trip, fishing, hunting, anything. Growing up, Parker always turned to Jaime for what they would do next.

“Well, I plan to sleep in late.” Jaime chuckled. “That's my first adjustment to being a civie.”

Parker grinned. "I suppose you've got a lot to readjust to. Damn, it's just so good seein' you again. Just promise you won't ever leave again," Parker smiled and stared deep into Jaime's kind hazel eyes.

Jaime wondered what he meant, 'promise not to leave again'?

"It's just not been the same around here without you." Parker flashed his trademark Pepsodent smile.

"So, Parker," Jaime inquired. "What are you doing these days?"

"Nothin' much really... just the Chief of Police."

"Get out!" Jaime exclaimed in jest.

"Yup, Park has moved up in the world." Parker said, puffing up his chest as he leaned back, casually extending his right arm across the back of the bench.

"For real?" Jaime challenged in a serious tone.

Parker nodded his head.

"You mean to tell me, there's actually a police department now? How many officers are on the force?"

"Just one," Parker's voice dropped. "So that makes me the Chief – and Sergeant, and Ticket Maid, and..."

"Parker, you slay me." Jaime laughed. "How long have you been a cop?"

"Going on six years now," Parker nodded. "Went to cop school and everything, even got a diploma to prove it."

"I don't doubt you one bit. I'm proud of you buddy." Jaime beamed.

"Don't let him kid ya, boy. He's the best darn cop we ever had." Madge interrupted as she presented Jaime with a platter of sliced ham, sausage, bacon, scrambled eggs, biscuits and a generous stack of buttermilk pancakes.

"What's all this?" a puzzled look crossed Jaime's face.

"Hon, in these parts, we don't often get the pleasure to serve our military boys, let alone a hero. Compliments of the house," Madge glowed like a proud momma sow, showing off her litter of newborn piglets. "Just think of this as our way of sayin' thank you. And son, we're so very proud of you – welcome home."

"A hero?" Parker's interest piqued.

Brandishing a dismissive wave, Jaime shook his head. "Hey, I'm no hero, alright? I just served my country in the best way I knew."

"Sweetie, that's a hero in my book." Smiling, Madge sniffled, combating a sudden onset of tears, fluttering heavily mascaraed false eyelashes like two Monarch butterflies preparing to take flight. Turning to Parker, she patted his shoulder. "Your usual, babe?"

Parker nodded to Madge, not taking his cross-examining eyes off Jaime, like he was wondering whether Jaime was being modest or really had turned out a freakin' hero.

Ducking his head, Jaime did not want his best bud to notice tears pooling in his eyes. *Damn it Madge, you're making me all teary in front of the only man I've ever loved and he's straight.*

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Leaving the pleasantly cooled air of Morrison's, Jaime and Parker stepped into an intense furnace as the broiling July sun beat down on the bleached, baking asphalt. Wavy lines of oppressive heat rose above the oily pavement reminding Jaime of the fiery fever generated from the parched desert sands overseas. Jaime had forgotten how quickly the Georgia summer mornings warmed. Glancing at his wrist watch, it was nearly 11 A.M. Had they reminisced for that long? Familiarity prevailed, even after all these years. It seemed their friendship had merely been held captive in a state of suspended animation, until today, when the clock resumed ticking once again.

“You need to be somewhere?” Parker noticed Jaime checking his watch.

“No not really,” Jaime suspected Parker had things to do. “I guess, I should be headin’ to the house,” giving Parker an excuse to leave, not that he actually wanted him to.

“Don’t tell me you planned to stay in your daddy’s old house tonight?” Parker furrowed his brow.

“Sure,” Jaime shrugged. “I expect it'll need some cleaning up and all. Hey, I've bunked in a hell of a lot worse places, trust me.”

The Duncan house had not been inhabited for over nine years. Parker had boarded up the old place after Jaime's parents had been killed in a tragic car accident just off South Interstate 75, just after Jaime had joined the military. Even today, no one knew what caused the Duncan car to veer off the highway, crashing into a utility pole. Jaime had recently joined the military, Parker tried contacting him, unable to connect till several days after Mr. and Mrs. Duncan had been put to rest. Jaime had been devastated when he learned the news. There was little he could do. Parker had stepped up and taken care of the arrangements in his absence. He owed a lot to Parker for doing that for him. Not having been home since joining the army, Jaime was not entirely sure he was ready to deal with the estate, having sat dormant for nearly a decade.

He was the sole heir to his parent’s estate. His baby brother had passed when Jaime was only nine, drowning in a flash flood. Jaime tried to save his brother but the current was too strong, sweeping the toddler from his arms. His brother’s body was never found. That memorable flood changed his parents forever. Their devastating loss made them become overly protective of their remaining child and devoting their lives to the Southern Baptist church. Jaime grew to despise the protective bubble he had been thrust into, causing a rift in the family he had once cherished. Joining the army had been his escape from the parent’s he had secretly grown to resent.

“That old place needs a whole heck of a lot of work before it’s inhabitable. You're bunkin' with me, soldier. That's an order,” Parker poorly imitated a drill sergeant.

Jaime cracked up laughing. He had forgotten how easily Parker could make him laugh; he had an uncanny knack of cheering him up when Jaime needed it most. The Duncan homestead was most likely in worse condition than Jaime had imagined. Parker was probably right. Besides, the old house was not where he wanted to be anyway. Secretly, he ached to be alone with Parker.

“Let's get your things, buddy,” Parker insisted. Clapping his arm over Jaime's shoulder, spinning an about-face they headed for the bus station to retrieve Jaime's duffel bag.

## Tuesday Evening

As he shredded lettuce, Jaime observed Parker's confidence in the kitchen. It was difficult to keep his eyes off the magnificent male specimen, not helped by the fact that each wore only scanty workout shorts. It made his dick throb. Of course, Parker's choice was practical, not some kind of invitation. Considering the heat and humidity, the less clothing worn, the more bearable the heat. Parker did not have A/C, not unlike most folks in the minuscule town; he was accustomed to the heat.

Parker still resided in the very house in which he grew up, an old two-story farm house, built by his granddaddy. He had never known his mother; she had abandoned him at the hospital, after he was born. No one knew who the babydaddy was, there were rumors of course, but without his mother around to confirm, it left the identity of his father to speculation. He was reared by aging grandparents, who passed shortly after Jaime's parents. Parker's childhood was not an easy one, but he turned out to be quite the self-made man. Jaime admired him. Never made excuses or allowed his shortcomings to hold him back. Parker took life by the balls. Jaime might be respected for serving an extended tour in the army, but it did not make him any better of a man than Parker, who was loved and admired by the community. You might say, the town folk actually raised Parker, he *was* their hometown boy. Jaime angled his body to scan the man, from head to toe, his eyes lingered on the bulge protruding from Parker's crotch. Squirming, Jaime adjusted the expanding excitement within his groin. Jaime was is awe as he eyed the sexy hunk lazily stirring a pot of fresh snapped green beans and smoked ham simmering on the stove. Impressive that Parker had not only made a reputable life for himself, but also dinner as well, all from scratch. Parker was remarkable; he had even baked sour-dough bread and a Georgia peach pie.

“Where in the hell did you learn to cook like this, from watchin’ Julia Child’s?” Jaime asked.

Snickering, Parker moved to the opposite counter, “I learned from Meemaw, as I did my homework when I was younger. She’d prepare dinner and I’d watch from the dining table...” Parker’s voice trailed as he ground fresh peppercorns, the course shards showering the shark steaks before he massaged the thick slabs of pink flesh with his agile fingers. “I suppose, I learned to cook out of necessity, mostly to ward off starvation.” He added with a short laugh. “Honestly though, if I ate all my meals at Morrison's I'd be the size of a frickin' house. Can you imagine the calories and cholesterol they serve with each order? Jeez it's scary. I've gotta watch my waist line, ya know?”

Jaime could not help but snicker to himself, *for a straight dude, Park sure sounds gay.*

“What’re you smiling about?” Parker wrapped his muscular arm around Jaime's thick neck in a mock choke hold, just like when they were boys, but, back then, Parker’s arm was not covered in auburn fur. Tiny chills chased over Jaime’s skin at the contact. He enjoyed Parker’s muscled arm controlling him, and so did his dick, even though he knew Parker was only horsing around.

“Oh, I kinda lost track of what I was saying.” Jaime put down the utility knife he had been using to slice a cucumber for the salad. Staring blankly ahead at the kitchen counter door, he felt Parker's furry chest pressed against his bare back. Secretly, Jaime wanted to spin around and nuzzle his face in the fuzz that covered Parker’s broad chest. Jaime cleared his throat. The growing excitement he felt made it difficult to speak. “I was just wondering why you never married, that's all.”

“Never met the right gal,” Parker released his hold on Jaime. Turning his back to Jaime, Parker returned to the opposite counter where he tossed the steaks into a hot cast iron skillet. “And you, you’re still gay I suppose?”

“Sure am, that’s one thing that’ll never change.”

“So, why aren't you partnered? Haven't found Mr. Right?” Parker’s teasing laugh melded with the sizzle of searing meat.

“And what makes you so certain I haven't?” Jaime turned to face Parker.

“I didn't see a gold band on your ring finger,” Parker flashed a grin at Jaime.

“Maybe I have and he doesn't know it yet.” A suggestive smirk leered across Jaime's face.

Parker's brilliant smile waned. He turned his back to Jaime, tending to the hissing steaks.

Jaime slapped his forehead, wishing he could retract the comment which had so carelessly spewed from his mouth. He could not confess his true feelings for his host. Jaime worried he had said too much and that Parker had picked up on his reckless slip of the tongue. *Damn it Jaime, think before you speak.*

“Do you remember,” Parker excitedly swiveled on his heels. “How we kicked West Hawthorne's ass?” Parker laughed, apparently unfazed by the momentary uneasiness which had passed between them.

Jaime was relieved. “What a pathetic excuse for a team. They sucked like no ones shit.” Jaime chuckled. “Do you remember the intimidation on their scrawny quarterback's face when he saw you step up to the line? Hell, ten bucks says he crapped in his pants. You're twice his size.”

“Who'd have expected a state championship football team to come out of a wide-spot-in-the-road town like ours?” Parker chortled. “Shit, we barely had enough guys to make a team.”

“With you quarterbacking, we kicked some sorry ass our senior year. Didn't we?”

“You ain't shittin',” Parker clapped Jaime’s back. “Ready to eat, buddy?”

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Closing his eyes, Jaime could almost sense the heat radiating from Parker's naked body lying in the room next to his. *Gawd, I'm so in love with the man, maybe more now than ever before.* Although the bedrooms were separated by a few 2x4 studs and panels of sheet rock, it did not prevent him from fantasizing. The thought of Parker in the next room made his heart throb. But, with a clear conscience, Jaime could not act on that love. Parker was straight and Jaime would never have the one man he wanted most. Jaime buried his face in the pillow and sighed.

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“SHIT!” Parker sprung up in bed, soaked in a flood of apprehensive sweat. *What the fuck kind of dream was that?* Climbing out of bed, shaken, Parker staggered to the adjoining bathroom, vigorously splashing his face with water. Bracing his hands on the counter, Parker stared into the vanity mirror and asked the reflection peering back, “What was that shit? I'm not a fag. Why the hell was I kissing Jaime in my dream?” The reflection did not reply, making him wonder if the wiring in his head had short circuited. *For Christ's sake, Jaime's my best friend. So he's gay, it's no big deal.* Had Jaime not told Parker years ago, Parker would have never known. Jaime had never made inappropriate advances toward Parker or even suggested anything of that nature. Thankfully for Parker, Jaime had no interest in him, at least not in that way. If he did, Parker did not know what he would do, probably freak-out. The thought of two guys *getting it on* creeped Parker’s shit. So, why had Parker have an erotic dream about

Jaime anyway? *What's going on? I'm straight. I love pussy.* Nausea roiled as the digesting shark from dinner nose-dived in his stomach. Stepping into the shower, Parker struggled to wash away the unacceptable nightmare with cold water.

### Wednesday Morning

After dropping Jaime off at the Duncan house, Parker returned home to putter around the house. Working the swing shift provided a free morning to run errands and get a head start on laundry. However, he was unable to concentrate. He was drowning in an unexplained pool of confusion; images of Jaime swam in his mind. Everything reminded him of Jaime and to his dismay each reminder seemed to make his wayward cock swell. Had he eaten something that had not agreed with him or was Jaime just on his mind because of his recent return home?

“I'm not some homo. So why're images of Jaime filling my every thought?”

No matter what he did, last night's dream haunted him, until he was unable to block the images and even the sensation of Jaime's lips pressed against his. It was driving Parker insane.

After work, Parker swung by the Duncan place to pick up Jaime. Parker's house was not a long walk by any means, the town was not that big, he just wanted to support his bud in any way he could. As Parker neared the porch steps, Jaime stepped out the open door.

“Well, ain't this special?” Jaime grinned, hands firmly planted on his hips, admiring an approaching sexy uniformed Parker strutting toward him. “Damn, don't you look fine in a uniform?” Using all of his wits to restrain himself, Jaime wanted to rip off Parker's uniform and ravage the man right there, in front of God and anyone else.

“Stop it,” Parker blushed but tried to cover it up with a chuckle. “I might have to arrest you for harassing a public servant.” Parker smiled to himself, enjoying the complement, knowing Jaime was only razzing him. Sensing his swelling cock pressed against the metal teeth of his uniform khakis, Parker wondered, why he had gone commando today. Demanding his stirring cock to rest, trying to pretend it wasn't even happening but it was not cooperating. Parker eyed Jaime for a moment before asking, “You 'bout ready to call it a day?”

“Yeah, it'll be dark soon and I haven't had the electricity turned on yet.” Jaime turned to close and lock the door.

Unable to divert his eyes off the nearly naked Jaime, clad in a pair of jersey work out shorts and a pair of Nike Cross Trainers. Parker hoped Jaime could not feel his gaze burning into his backside, eyeballing his ass.

*Why the fuck am I even looking at Jaime's ass?* Parker wished he could adjust himself. There seemed to be a definite lack of room in his pants all of a sudden.

*Okay, maybe it's been a long dry-spell since I've last tapped an easy chick. Yes, that's it. I just need to get laid. This has nothing, what-so-ever, to do with Jaime.*

Leaping off the porch, Jaime landed beside Parker, making him jump. Overly edgy already, Jaime's enthusiastic antics were not helping.

“You're a bundle of energy.” Parker nervously laughed.

“I was rejuvenated when I saw you,” Jaime exuberantly wrapped his arm over his best cop pal's shoulder.



Parker uneasily edged away from Jaime as they walked toward the car.

“What's up with you?” Jaime eyed him in confusion.

“Nothing. I'm just tired, I suppose.”

“Okay, just as long as you don't go all homophobic on me.” Jaime offhandedly snickered. “Hey, I got an idea. Why don't I make dinner for us tonight?” Resting his crossed arms on top the car roof, he looked at Parker on the opposite side of the car, patiently waiting for a reply.

“Honest? Why?”

“I owe you a lot,” Jaime shrugged. “You've been a terrific friend. Let's just say it's a start toward repaying my undying gratitude to my best bud.”

Spellbound, Parker was unable to tear his eyes from Jaime's captivating lips, tenderly shaping around each causally spoken syllable. What was the draw to Jaime's lips? They were not the soft supple lips of a woman, but those of a man, still, Parker thought they were the most beautiful lips he had ever seen. He loved to watch Jaime's mouth dance when he spoke, it was like poetry in motion. He recalled having read that somewhere and it described Jaime's lips to a tee.

“Ahem,” Jaime cleared his throat to capture Parker's attention. “Earth to Parker.”

Shaking his head, Parker blinked, emptying his head. Transitioning back to reality, faintly aware he had yet to answer the question still looming in the air. Managing a forced grin, he nodded. “Sounds like a plan, buddy,” Parker's voice rang distant and shaky. “A night away from the kitchen, I could get used to that. Climb in, let's go home.”

During the ride home, Jaime wondered, was something developing between them, were they becoming more than just friends? No. He dismissed the thought. Wanting Parker so badly, Jaime was willing to read imaginary things into the situation which did not exist but in his own mind.

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After disposing the dinner dishes in the dishwasher, Parker suggested they go out back and chill with a couple of beers. Under the stars, they reclined in two folding loungers. A balmy breeze breathed across their bare chests, while they silently digested dinner and nursed ice cold beers.

Parker stared into the night sky, and swallowed. “When did you first know you were gay?” His question came out husky and he drew a swig of beer, trying to lubricate his suddenly dry mouth.

“I don't know. It wasn't exactly something I jotted on the calendar with an expectation to celebrate annually.” Jaime chuckled, taking a gulp of beer.

“Honestly, when did you know?”

“In a way, I probably always knew.” Jaime replied. “But it wasn't till – I was maybe fourteen when I came to terms with my sexuality. Accepting myself for who I was and stopped trying to meet everyone else's expectations.”

“But, you never acted all sissy like.”

“Thanks.” Jaime snickered. “Besides, not all gay people are effeminate.”

“So, when did you first – kiss a guy?”

“Not until I left here. Think about it, how many gay people do you know in this town?”

Parker did not respond, since he figured the question was rhetorical.

“That's exactly my point. I didn't meet a gay guy till I went into the army.” Jaime added.

“Are you happy – you know – being gay?”

“Are you happy being straight?” Jaime snickered at his come back.

Parker was quiet.

Jaime began to pick up on Parker's silence. He had always admired Park's easy nature, always the life of the party, quick wit and ever present contagious laugh. Not tonight, Jaime sensed Parker's unusual seriousness causing growing concern from Jaime.

“Why the interrogation tonight?” Jaime asked. “I know it's not something we've really talked about, but why the sudden interest?”

“I don't know.” Parker replied slow and thoughtfully. “Guess I just want to know more about you – you know – as you said, stuff we never talk about.”

“That's cool,” Jaime rose from the lounge. “Want another beer?”

“Sure.”

“Be right back.” Jaime absentmindedly trailed his finger tips across Parker's bare shoulder blade as he sauntered toward the house.

Parker's body tingled from the touch, his dick swelled in his worn jersey shorts. Cupping his face in his hands, Parker was overcome with confusion, not sure if he wanted to cry or rejoice. Was he craving human contact so badly he welcomed Jaime's touch as substitution for that of a woman? Parker shook his head in disbelief. *This isn't happening. I'm not gay. I'm not.* Successfully, Parker tucked his ballooning boner between his legs before Jaime returned with two more bottled beers. Accepting the beer, a jolt of electricity coursed through Parker as their fingers touched. Peering into Jaime's twinkling eyes, Parker was rattled, unable to explain his desire to be close to Jaime.

Parker's thoughts drifted back to when he and Jaime were fifteen, when they knew everything like most teens do at that age. They had decided to go camping on a Saturday night in the woods; they had been camping on their own for a number of years, but not in late January. The weather had been unseasonably warm so they packed their gear and went against parental advice. They had completed setting up camp before nightfall and had cooked their dinner on an open fire. It had been much like most of their camp outs when suddenly it began to rain. Not just any rain, but a gully washer. Taking refuge inside the small pup tent, they were soaked, with no change of clothes and the temperature had taken a dive accompanied by a howling north wind. Not wanting to get their sleeping bags wet, they stripped out of their wet clothes and planned to crawl into their dry sleeping bags. Then Jaime realized his sleeping bag was outside. It would be soaked. The unexpected rain and cold had caught the boys off guard; they could either brave the storm without extra protection and go home or wait out the storm in the tent, where it was at least dry. Parker invited Jaime to share his sleeping bag; their combined body heat would keep them both warm. In the morning, after a nights sleep, they would make the return trek home.

During the night, Parker had woken, his body pressed close against Jaime's back side. He remembered the heat generated from their naked bodies felt really good. Parker wrapped his arm around Jaime to keep him close as the rain continued to fall on their tent. Looking back on that night, Parker was uncertain, if he had held Jaime for heat or had he simply taken advantage of the moment so he could cuddle Jaime?

Settling back into the lounge, “I'd forgotten the simple sounds of home, especially after dusk, the

quirky critter chatter and how dark it gets at night.” Jaime mentioned while he lazily scanned the night sky. “Just look at all those stars. Man oh man, there are so many little things I'd forgotten about home. Most of all, its good being here with you again,” Jaime rested his hand on top of Parker’s. “Just like old times, you know?”

“Yeah,” Parker cleared his throat and took a sip of beer. Pinching his eyes closed, he struggled to purge the unnatural desires coursing within. Jaime's warm hand felt nice on his. *This ain't right*, he thought to himself. Warily, he tugged his hand away. Suddenly willing to chop it off his arm if that would eradicate his unexplained degenerate thoughts. *Why am I suddenly having perverted feelings for Jaime? He's a guy for Christ's sake!*

“Honestly, what's bugging you?” Jaime inquired in a concerned tone. “You've been terribly quiet all evening.”

Parker took a long draw from his beer. “Just have a lot on my mind, I guess,” unable to comprehend the confusion colliding inside his brain.

“I can appreciate that. Maybe I should go to bed and leave you with your thoughts.” Jaime rose to leave.

“No.” Parker grabbed Jaime's wrist. “Don't leave.”

Stunned by the tight vise like grip, Jaime searched Parker’s eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Parker apologized, releasing his strong hold. “I don’t know what came over me.”

Something disturbing was obviously troubling Parker.

Jaime could not leave his bud alone in this state of mind. Hesitantly, Jaime settled back into the lounge, his heart bled for Parker. Not a man to let work or anything bother him, Parker had always been an easy going guy; tonight’s behavior was so unlike him. Or maybe, after all these years, things actually could eat at Parker. There was too much shared history and a friendship at stake for Jaime to abandon him.

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A waning crescent moon sailed effortlessly like a pristine swan on a placid lake. Absorbing nature’s ambient music, eloquently performed by an ensemble of night insects, Jaime had longed for the simple pleasures of home.

“Did your parents know you were gay?” Parker asked, breaking the long silence between them.

“You're kidding right?” Jaime chuckled. “My Southern Baptist Bigoted Bible thumpin' parents?”

A sobering pause lingered in the air.

“I never had the chance to tell them. Well, maybe I didn't have the courage...” Jaime’s voice dropped into a whisper of remorse, “anyway, they died never knowing.”

Pensive silence hung thick to be interrupted by a brief commentary of a near by bull frog, out of respect, crickets paused to listen; resuming their chatter after the frog had concluded its oration.

“Who knew you were – well – that way – besides me?” Parker questioned.

“What? Being gay?” Turning, Jaime looked at Parker. “Honestly, only you.”

Curiously, Parker examined Jaime. “Why me?”

“I guess, because we never kept anything from each other. You were the only person I felt I could tell and I knew you’d keep my secret,” Jaime took a swallow from his beer. “Looking back, I realize it was an awful burden to lay on you. I just had to tell someone. You’ve always been supportive of me, and for that I’ll eternally be grateful.”

“You don’t have to answer if you don’t want,” Parker started. “Have you ever had feelings for me – I mean, as in any way other than friends?”

Swallowing hard, the lump in Jaime’s throat did not budge. “You’re kidding right?” Jaime laughed nervously.

“No, I wanna know.”

Silence reigned for a few minutes while Jaime considered how to best answer a question he never imaged Parker would ask of him.

“No”, Jaime choked, hoping his response sounded believable. “You’re just not my type,” Jaime forced a dry laugh in a lame attempt to mask his guilt for lying.

“Ditto,” Parker breathed.

In the lingering silent solitude between Jaime and Parker, a medley of invisible nocturnal creatures carelessly gossiped among themselves.

“Years ago, did you ever imagine we’d someday be chillin’ in your backyard, shootin’ the breeze about gay shit and downing brewskis’ under the stars?” Draining the last of his beer, Jaime studied Parker’s well-proportioned body, glistening like a Greek god in the mellow moonlight.

Lost in thought, Parker’s glazed eyes focused blankly at something far in the distance, vaguely aware of Jaime’s presence.

“Life can be puzzling sometimes, ya know?” Jaime said softly. “Some things change and others stay the same.”

\* \* \*

Like the night before, Jaime lay naked in bed, thinking about Parker. But tonight, he sensed something was not right with him. Sliding out of bed, he padded barefoot across the room, quietly opening the door, hoping it would not squeak, to avoid disturbing Parker. Slipping bare-ass naked into the hall, he worked his way to Parker’s bedroom door. Finding it slightly ajar, he peeked in. Parker slept soundly. Jaime was relieved, but he could not take his eyes off the naked man, stretched across the bed, lying on his side, round firm butt cheeks faced his direction. In the filtered light cast through the window, Parker was absolutely fucking gorgeous. Jaime was unaware he was stroking his hard cock until he felt precum lubricating the fist he was unconsciously fucking. The sight of Parker, the lubrication in his hand – then Parker rolled over onto his back, exposing an erect, thick cock, jerking wildly in the air. Jaime’s balls drew tight to his body and he gasped, propelling thick creamy streams of jizz from his fist. Slumping against the door frame, Jaime’s heart and breath raced in his lust. Parker began to thrash and mumbled something inaudible in his sleep. Jaime quietly hurried back to his room. Discreetly closing the door, Jaime slithered back into his bed and quickly slipped into sleep.

\* \* \*

“Jaime!” Jolting up in the bed with a jerk, Parker clasped his hands to his mouth.

*Gawd, I hope he didn't hear me.* Parker listened keenly to detect if Jaime stirred in the next room. Nothing. Apparently his outburst had gone unnoticed. Climbing out of bed, he paced naked in the dark, recalling the details of yet another dream. Not much different than the previous night's dream. However, for some reason, the thought of kissing Jaime was not as frightening. He was actually contemplating the idea of kissing the lips he loved to watch.

Flopping onto his bed, he laughed. Pinching his eyes closed, grabbing his pulsating cock in his fist, he feverishly pumped to the arousing images of Jaime spinning madly in his head. Releasing a groan, Parker fired a geyser of liquid white heat, splattering across his chest and stomach; immersed in his spent juices, exhilarated, unable to stop laughing. Never had he cum that hard before, and it was all because of that crazy, ridiculous, hot, beautiful, wonderful dream of Jaime.

Maybe I've had feelings for Jaime all along, and I've been in denial all these years, Parker thought to himself.

Parker's mind drifted back to their junior year in High School. One evening, Jaime and he had remained on the field practicing new football plays after the rest of the team had headed for the showers. Later when Jaime and he had arrived at the locker room, it was empty and they had the place to themselves. Parker recalled he had hesitated before entering the shower as he watched the soapy water glistening down Jaime's sleek body. Parker's cock had begun to swell. Panicking, Parker had ducked from the shower and quickly dressed without Jaime seeing him. Even back then, had Parker been attracted to Jaime, but didn't want to believe it?

The confusing memory faded as Parker recalled something Jaime had mentioned earlier while they had lounged in the yard, 'Life can be puzzling sometimes, ya know? Some things change and others stay the same.' Parker let the thought percolate in his mind. Over the years, Jaime had not changed. He was still gay Jaime. But Parker sensed a change occurring inside himself.

“What exactly is this I'm feeling? Sure we're friends, best of friends, but we've always been more than just that, Jaime's – like a brother. We have a connection. We understand each other. We're buds, chums, we've got each other's backs. We're each other's family; it's all we have left. So why wouldn't I have feelings for Jaime? But exactly what are these feelings? Could it be more than just friends? No way. I'm not turned-on by men, that don't float my boat, but something recently is definitely causing my mast to fill.”

Parker shook his head in disbelief.

“This is crazy, what am I thinking?”

Lying on his back, Parker stared up at the ceiling, mulling things over in his brain.

*Could I be falling in love with Jaime?*

Like a raging cyclone, questions circulated in his head. This was all too much for Parker. One does not wake in the middle of the night thinking he may be falling in love with his best friend. That was crazy! Even Parker did not believe it.

*But these feelings – they're too damn real.*

Parker had never experienced deep feelings like this towards a woman, let alone a man.

“How can I possibly convince Jaime that I'm falling in love with him? Jaime will probably assume I'm making fun of him and get really pissed. Then, on the other hand, what if Jaime believes me? But, what if Jaime rejects me? Jaime's never shown any interest, other than being friends. Even tonight Jaime had said 'You're not my type'. What about our friendship?” Parker clutched a pillow tight to his

chest, he wondered if telling Jaime his feelings was worth the risk.

“Can I live with myself if I don’t at least try?”

### Thursday Afternoon

Parker sat in the drive of the Duncan home, as a pounding hammer echoed from inside the house. He knew Jaime would be there, since his father's truck would be in the shop for at least a week or more while its engine was rebuilt. Parker had been more than a bit dumbfounded when Jaime announced he wanted to restore his father's old '57 Ford F-Series pick-up. Until the truck was running, Parker would play chauffeur. He did not mind it, he enjoyed the extra time they had together. He only hoped what he had to say to Jaime would not affect their friendship; he had to get this off his chest. Now. Stewing all day over how and what he would say to Jaime, he had rehearsed the conversation relentlessly in his head. Selecting just the right words, the most precise phrasing, figuring where to place the inflection of his voice to drive his point. Parker winced as he rubbed his gut.

*I'm probably getting an ulcer, if I don't already have one.*

Jaime had to be told, never had they ever kept secrets from each other. He owed that much to Jaime, even at the cost of losing his best friend in the entire world.

Extending his leg beyond the open police cruiser door, he froze. He could not do this. Suddenly, he heard the voice of his grandfather, “*Step up, be a man.*” Pinching his eyes closed, he drew a deep breath, held it for a few seconds, before releasing.

*You're a cop.*

Maybe that was the only way he could do this without losing his nerve, *think and act like a cop.* Moving with renewed determination and purpose, he advanced toward the open front door, as if about to confront a perp or make an arrest.

*You're a cop.*

Body rigid, alert to his surroundings, Parker’s arms to his sides, ready to draw his weapon if need be. Parker was in stealth police mode. Cautiously stepping inside the house, he was keenly alert to any potential danger. He scanned right, he scanned left. No sign of anyone, at least not in the living room.

*You're a cop.*

Closing the door, he propped the back of a chair under the doorknob, blocking the exit, deterring potential suspects from escaping or accomplices from entering. Moving in the direction of the hammering, he silently stalked his prey like an agile panther. Approaching a doorway, he pressed his back firmly against the wall; there was no backup if there should be trouble. He would have to be cautious. Guardedly peering around the door frame he spotted his target: a single male and his back to Parker. This would give Parker the advantage he needed over his adversary, the element of surprise. Leaping into action, a concentrated cloud of dust filled the air as he threw his arm around the perp's neck, knocking the hammer from the suspect’s hand. He pulled the culprit’s arm behind his back, rendering him helpless. Retrieving handcuffs from his belt, he cuffed one of the cad’s wrists. Forcing the punk into a dining chair, he cuffed the other wrist, securely pinning both the scum’s hands behind the chair.

“Real funny Park, you got me good this time.” Jaime laughed, expelling dust from his lungs.

Parker stood silent behind Jaime.

“Ok, great joke. You can let me go now.” Jaime struggled to free himself.

Parker did not flinch.

“Enough already, the joke is over, let me go,” Jaime’s tone edged of agitation.

Parker pinched his eyes tight and hoped the world would stop spinning.

“Have you gone fuckin' crazy? Damn it! Let me go!” Jaime’s demand echoed in the empty kitchen.

Something came over Parker, as if waking from a dream. Amidst a dense dust cloud, he recognized a pleading handcuffed Jaime begging to be released and a deranged, confused cop.

*What the hell? Have I gone batshit insane?* Parker thought to himself, *this was not supposed to happen like this.* Had he gone into cop mode and totally lost control? In silence, Parker began pacing the floor, frantically rubbing his palms over the thickening stubble rising on his dimpled chin. Panic stricken, he had no idea how this had occurred. It all happened so quickly.

“God damn it Parker!” Jaime wheezed between coughing fits. “Let me go. This isn't funny any more.”

“Shut up.” Parker snapped.

*Why did I say that? Parker attempted to internalize. Okay, none of this is going as planned. Not exactly as I'd intended, already waist deep in shit, salvage what I can and finish what I came to do. Parker, you've really fucked yourself this time.*

“Please Jaime. You've got to hear me out.” Parker begged, blinking away gritty dirt particles scratching his eyes, attempting to recall the eloquent speech he had so well rehearsed. But his mind was a jumble of disconnected thoughts and Parker was unable to connect the dots.

*What's happening to me? Have I gone totally insane?* Parker thought to himself.

Being held captive by a crazed man, Jaime had little choice. He stopped struggling and bit his tongue, preventing himself from further exciting Parker. After all, he was in no position to argue with the man. Never, in all their years had he ever had cause to be frightened of Parker, until this moment. All throughout the day, Jaime had worried about Parker. After the episode last night; he felt there was reason for concern. Now, he had conclusive evidence. Parker wasn't mentally stable and needed help.

*I'll see to it he gets the psychological attention he needs. Then, I'll get the hell out of this town. I swear and I'll never look back.* Jaime thought to himself as tears mixed with dust, streaked Jaime's face, his heart was breaking.

Racking his open palm through his dust coated cropped hair, Parker refused to make direct eye contact with Jaime. Studying the floor, Parker searched as if his speech were etched just below the surface of the grimy linoleum. Each step leaving telltale imprints as he paced back and forth across the gritty tile.

“Jaime,” his voice cracked. “You know, you're the best friend I've ever had –”

A pensive pause caught in the cloud of murky air.

Parker continued pacing, desperately searching for the words. “I think you know – I'd do just about anything for you, right?” Parker stared at the floor, avoiding Jaime's puzzled expression.

“Yes, I guess so.” Jaime hoarsely conceded, realizing Parker was waiting for a verbal confirmation.

“I'd never do anything to hurt you or to jeopardize our friendship...” Parker rubbed his eyes with his open palms; his breathing came in short labored gasps.

Jaime had never seen Parker so distraught. He had always been his rock, the stability Jaime could always depend on. Now, he was concerned about his own safety, Parker had obviously snapped mentally, all he could do was helplessly watch and pray Parker would not harm him.

“Damn it Jaime, this is so hard for me...” he slammed the kitchen table with both fists, dust and Jaime jumped. Extending his arms across the table, his white knuckles gripped the table’s edge. Head bowed, Parker stared at the table top, knowing he would lose his nerve if he looked at Jaime.

“Ever since you've come back, I can't think straight, Jaime, I can't get you out of my head. I don't even know who the fuck I am anymore...”

A pause hung in the thick air.

“You're even in my fuckin' dreams...” Beads of sweat formed on Parker’s brow. “Do you know what it’s like – to realize your world has turned upside down, suddenly realizing you’re falling in love with someone you know is wrong, but your heart says otherwise?” Parker drew in a deep breath, mustering the strength to confess. “What I’m trying to tell you is – I think I’m falling in love with you.” He raised his tear-filled eyes to meet Jaime's stunned expression.

Looking in Jaime’s wide eyes, Parker knew he was losing the one person who meant the most to him in the entire world. Hot frustration, confusion and guilt stung Parker’s eyes.

*How else could Jaime respond? Parker thought to himself. After I've unnecessarily roughed him up, handcuffed him, treated him like a criminal, then I tell him that I'm falling in love with him? Me, a straight dude, falling for another guy, Jeez I'm a fuckin' lunatic. I don't deserve him as a friend.*

Tears filled Parker's eyes, as he surveyed his best friend for the very last time, knowing their friendship was over.

Jaime’s eyes dropped to the floor as he said softly, “I love you too.”

Parker cocked his head. “What?” He swiped tears with the back of his hand from his color drained face.

“I've loved you for as long as I've known you,” Jaime slowly looked up to meet Parker's teary gaze.

“But, last night...” Parker started, “... you said I wasn't your type?”

“Park, I'm sorry. I lied.”

“Why?”

“I got scared.” Jaime said. “I didn't know what to say. I'd never risk jeopardizing our friendship, you're too important to me. If the only way to keep you in my life was to just be your friend, I'd gladly give up my dream of us being more.”

Rushing to Jaime, Parker knelt in front of him, “Since you've come back, I've been an absolute basket case. It wasn't until this morning I realized what was really bothering me. It wasn't about being gay or straight. It was about love that I've denied myself for a very long time. I was too stupid to realize it before.”

“You're not stupid and I understand. We don't choose who we love. Years ago, I came out to you, but I couldn't tell you it was you that I loved.”

“Honestly?” Parker asked. “You're not just saying that?”

“I've pretended for what seems like forever that I didn't have feelings for you, when deep inside it's been breaking my heart.”



Parker wrapped his arms around Jaime's waist, "Now I know I'm falling for you. What do we do now?"

"First, how 'bout you uncuff me?" Jaime chuckled.

"Will you forgive me for being so slow to realize our friendship was much more than that?" Parker's eyes pleaded.

"There's nothing to apologize for," Jaime whispered, tenderly placing a kiss on top of Parker's head.

Parker fumbled to unlock the cuffs.

Jaime rubbed his wrists, stinging from the tight restraints that earlier bound him.

Cupping Parker's face in his hands, Jaime gazed into the most beautiful expressive green eyes he had ever seen.

"Jaime, I want you to know, I'm falling in love with you. I know. It's been a long time coming. Right now, I'm so fuckin scared. I've never been with a man before, and I have no idea what two men do together. But I know for certain, I want to be with you." Parker drew a deep breath, "Will you be patient with me?"

Growing weak in the knees, this was the moment Jaime had only dreamt of, lost in the emerald eyes which had filled his thoughts every night for most of his life. "Yes," he choked through tears of joy.

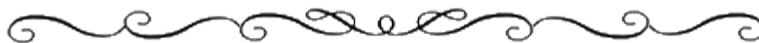
Encircling Parker's waist, Jaime tugged him in, their lips all but touching.

Parker gazed into Jaime's eyes, filled with such longing, love and desire, he knew he should be trembling, but he wasn't. His heart was saying *yes* but his brain was saying *no*, his body was voting with a resounding *hell, yes* by following suit with his emotions. Never, had he felt like this for another man, let alone considered what he was about to do, it felt strange and all so right at the same time. Having never been more hopeful than at this moment; he needed to do this to fulfill his destiny, to be the man he was meant to be.

Desperately desiring Parker, he allowed Parker to take the lead for the first time in their life-long friendship. After all, this was a huge step for Parker, one Jaime was not sure Park was ready to make.

Their future was now in Parker's hands, was he truly ready, willing to take the plunge, opening his heart to the love of another man?

Jaime closed his eyes, if this did not happen, at least he could hold the memory of this pivotal moment in his mind forever. Parker's warm breath whispered over Jaime's quivering lips, ever so gently, Parker's lips pressed into his. Moaning, he succumbed to Parker, partly because he never expected this moment to arrive and partly to encourage Parker to take him. Slipping his tongue inside Jaime's more than willing mouth, a gentle, tender kiss boiled into a storm of unbridled passion. Nurturing an undying devotion to blossom, a love they would share together, forever . . .



Special Note: The original **Storm of Passion** (short story – 7856 words) was released July 8, 2011 on Goodreads <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/11993080-storm-of-passion> website during the M/M

Romance Hot Summer Days short story promotion. The above is a revision of the original manuscript.

A newly expanded **Storm of Passion** (novella – 22239 words) goes beyond the short story “first kiss” and into a journey of discovery for both Jaime and Parker was published July 18, 2011.

The expanded **Storm of Passion** (novella) is available for purchase at:

Digital download: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/74592>

Kindle download: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B005DFO3AK>

Nook download:

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/storm-of-passion-dustin-adrian-rhodes/1104562249>

Paperback: <https://www.createspace.com/3636220>

Paperback: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/B005DFO3AK>

### **About the Author**



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Vicariously living life through writing contemporary GLBTQ themed fiction including short stories to full length novels, Dustin’s style runs the gambit; humor, drama and romance, all in an effort to capture the potholes and puddles encountered while making one’s way along life's journey. Dustin is single and hangs his Stetson and Tony Lama’s in Austin, Texas, USA where he is currently working on the next manuscript.

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