

Better To Give Than To Receive

by Tanaqui

Butterflies danced in Heather's stomach as she waved Jake ahead of her into the house and shut the door behind them. This was the first time they were going to spend the night together at her place. Somehow, that made everything different and new—and just a little frightening again. She cleared her throat and turned to face him. "Would you—? Oh!"

The rest of her words were lost as he pulled her into his arms. Cupping her cheek in his hand, he tilted up her face so he could kiss her. For just an instant, she was too surprised to respond—and then she began to kiss him back, twining her arms around his neck and letting him pull her closer. His lips on hers were gentle but demanding, deepening the kiss while his arms tightened about her.

At last they broke apart, his arms still around her hips and hers around his neck. He gave her a lopsided grin. "Been wanting to do that for the past couple of hours." His voice was slightly hoarse.

Heather blushed, rather glad he'd restrained himself until they'd gotten home. It had been bad enough walking into Bailey's and getting cheered by everyone for finally hooking up, let alone finding out the town had been running a pool on exactly when that would happen. She wasn't sure she wanted to make their relationship any more public than it already was.

"Not the only thing I've been wanting to do." He wagged his eyebrows at her suggestively and took a pace back, tugging her toward him.

Heather wanted to follow, but—. Blushing even harder, she glanced down at his feet and muttered in embarrassment, "Umm. Boots?"

Jake chuckled. "Oh, yeah, sorry. Forgot." He put a finger under her chin and tipped her face up so her gaze met his again. "You have that effect on me."

Letting go of her, he stooped to unlace his boots. Feeling like she must be beetroot red by now, Heather slipped out of her own shoes and hurried around the living room, drawing the curtains and lighting a lamp, before heading into the bedroom to do the same.

As she was turning on the lamp on the nightstand, she heard Jake let out an amused snort. Glancing round, she saw he was standing in the doorway, shaking his head. "You might have mentioned you had a double bed!" he said accusingly.

"Umm, sorry," she offered. She guessed he had a point. While she'd rather liked lying pressed close to him in his narrow cot out at the ranch after they'd made love, they had fallen off the bed somewhat spectacularly the night before, when they'd rolled a little too far one time. Oddly enough, something about the awkwardness of it had helped her to relax. Maybe it was the way Jake had laughed and gone back to kissing her for a while as they lay sprawled on the floor, before picking her up and settling them back on the bed like it was all quite natural. Perhaps things didn't always need to be perfect—perhaps *she* didn't always need to be perfect—to make him happy.

While she'd been thinking all that, he'd pushed off from the door and crossed over to her, sweeping her up in another embrace. She gave herself up to more long, deep kisses, enjoying how his hands moved over her, caressing her in the places and ways he'd learned she liked to be touched, making her shiver with pleasure.

She still couldn't quite believe—when she had a chance to think about it and wasn't simply caught up in how good he made her feel—how much he seemed to be in to her. How much he seemed to want *her* and not just, well, *sex*. They'd made love several times now since their first night together: when they'd woken very early the next morning, wrapped in each others' arms; and again a couple of hours later, once it had gotten properly light. And then that evening and the next morning and—well, quite a lot, really. More than Heather would have expected. Each time, Jake had taken things slowly, not in a rush to be inside her but seeming to enjoy the time they spent exploring and discovering with hands and lips, giving her pleasure as well as taking it. Each time, too, he'd made sure she came: the second morning, he'd even gotten her off first, before showing her how *he* liked to be touched.

Heather guessed she was waiting for the other shoe to drop because, well, guys weren't like this. They wanted sex and then they mostly wanted to roll over and fall asleep. But for now, she was determined to try and enjoy how good it felt to be with Jake—because God, it *was* good—and ignore that it wasn't going to last.

Jake was still kissing her, but he pulled away a little so he could undo the buttons on her blouse, sliding it back from her shoulders and cupping her breasts in his hands. His fingers were hot through the thin cotton of her bra as he stroked his thumbs across her nipples, while his tongue teased hers. She moaned deep in her throat. Not really aware of what she was doing, just knowing she wanted more of him *now*, she fumbled her hands under his T-shirt, dragging it up his back. A moment later, they broke apart so she could help him haul his T-shirt over his head and he could help her get rid of her blouse. Then they came back together, bare skin electric as they once more wrapped their arms around each other.

More kisses, in between Jake's mouth sliding away from hers to nuzzle the tender skin behind her ear or drop a kiss in the hollow of her throat or trail his lips along her collar bone, while she tangled her hands in his hair or drew her fingertips in long strokes across the firm muscles of his back and shoulders. After a while, his hands groped for her jeans, and she reached for his, their mouths still hungrily exploring while their hands worked at their clothes. Another brief separation while they shed their clothes, his gaze finding and holding hers, dark with desire. Then he was drawing them down on to the bed, twined around each other; his skin burned against hers where they touched and she could feel him hardening against her as he once more covered her mouth with his.

She returned his kiss, her body tingling as he ran his hand up and down her back. After a while, his touch and his kisses turned lighter and she shivered at the feel of his fingertips grazing over her skin and his lips teasing hers. She was still unsure what she should be doing with her own hands when they lay like this and where *he* wanted to be touched. Tentative experiments had taught her that he seemed to like it when she stroked the nape of his neck. Now, brushing her own fingertips lightly across him, she was rewarded with a low growl in the back of his throat that told her *yes, there*.

They went on kissing and stroking each other like that for a while. The frenzy with which they'd undressed each other had gone and yet his quiet touch was slowly building an ache within her, until she had to haul in a deep breath, and then another. As if that had been the cue he'd been waiting for, he slipped his fingers under her bra strap and unhooked the clasp. Dipping his head, he shifted away from

her and slid down the bed a little so that, peeling her bra away from her damp skin, he could drop his mouth to her breast and close his lips around her.

She arched her back toward him, letting out a small gasp as he sucked at her. He covered her other breast with his hand, his thumb brushing over the nipple, while his tongue flickered across her. She knew even less what to do with her hands now or what she should be doing to return the pleasure he was giving her, but he seemed to like doing this as much as she liked him doing it, without expecting anything more from her.

At last, his hands moved downward and he slid his fingers under the sides of her panties. Still teasing her with his lips, he began to wriggle her underwear down. When her panties were somewhere around mid-thigh—she'd lifted her lips to help him—his hands halted. Raising his head a little, he backed further down the bed so he could draw them off over her feet.

She expected, once she was completely naked, that he would come back up the bed and stretch himself alongside her again. Instead, she felt him drop a kiss on the inside of her ankle. A moment later, he reached up and gently pushed her knee sideways, spreading her leg so that he could trail kisses up the inside of it: along her calf and in the crease at the back of her knee—a shudder ran through her; who knew it could feel so good to be kissed *there?*—and then on up her thigh. She propped herself up on her elbows so she could watch him for a moment as he moved up her leg, enjoying the sight of his bare shoulders, lean and strong, and the way his hair curled and clung to the nape of his neck, and his long, clever fingers splayed on the bedcovers. Then—it was when he reached her knee—she closed her eyes and tilted her head back, giving herself up to the feel of his lips on her skin.

Heat was pooling in her belly and the ache to have him inside her was growing more intense as he moved closer to—*there*. She still wasn't comfortable even thinking the words: the proper ones were too clinical and the others were too crude. *There* was all she could manage, but *there*, oh God, yes, she was ready for him *there*. She opened her mouth to say his name, to let him know she was ready and then—.

His breath hot on her and his lips soft and—*tongue?* His hands gently spreading her legs wider and, again, *tongue* and *lips* and *there* and—. "Jake!"

His name came out in a squeak as her eyes shot open. She pushed herself up further on her elbows so she could look down at him, at where he knelt between her legs. He tilted his head to look up at her, a frown creasing his forehead.

"I'm sorry. I thought—" He ran the tip of his tongue over his lips nervously, the *tongue* that had just been—.

She shivered, remembering where it had just been and what it had just felt like. God, he must think her such an idiot. It wasn't as if she didn't know that *this*... that people did... *this*. That it was meant to be good. She just—.

"I wasn't...." The words came out as a croak. She swallowed and tried again. "Wasn't expecting...."

"Ah." He gave a slight nod, as if he understood, though he probably still thought she was being silly. He raised his eyebrows a little. "Is it...? I can stop...."

"No!" The answer came out quickly. "No. Don't. I... it was nice. I just didn't—." And then she didn't

have any more words and didn't need them, because he'd bent his head back down and he was kissing her again, *there*, his tongue flickering over her while he gently nuzzled her with his lips, each quick lick of his tongue sending another rush of pleasure shooting through her.

Letting her head fall back, she gave herself up to it: to his tongue flicking across her and across her and across her—until she came, shivering and gasping as he took her over the edge.

Panting, she collapsed against the bed. She was dimly aware, beyond her own tingling body, of Jake crawling back up to lie next to her while her breathing steadied. Opening her eyes at last, she saw him propped on one elbow and grinning down at her.

"Guess we can do that again, huh?" He reached out and trailed a finger lightly up and down her arm.

"Uh-huh." She nodded at him. He went on looking down at her, his expression serious, almost anxious, and she suddenly wondered if that was what he wanted to hear, or whether he was just being polite. She added hastily, "You know, if *you* want to...."

He frowned a little, his fingertips hesitating for a moment on her arm before he went back to stroking her. "Why wouldn't I want to?"

"Well, you know," she gave a slight shrug, feeling the heat rush to her face, "it can't be much fun for you...."

He blinked, and his hand on her arm stilled. Then he chuckled. Moving closer, he dipped his head and pressed his lips to her temple for a moment, before he pulled back and caught her gaze and held it. "You know how hot it makes me when I get you off?"

"Umm. No." Oh, God, he really must think she was *such* an idiot.

He gave her a lopsided grin. "Very. And doing what we just did? Being able to hear and feel and know how good that feels for you?" She felt a shiver run through him as he spoke, telling her more than any words could that he meant it when he said, "You bet I want to do that again."

"Okay." She smiled back at him shyly, glad he didn't seem to mind her being so clueless. Glad, too, that he wasn't like the other guys she'd slept with back in college because, God, *yes*, she wanted him to do that again as well—and soon. Now she was the one to shiver as she remembered how good it had felt.

He'd started stroking her arm again while she thought all that, once more looking at her with an anxious expression on his face. She dragged her mind away from what they'd just done and thought instead about what they might be about to do. He'd made her feel good, so now she reckoned it was her turn. She licked her lips. "Do you want me to, uh—?"

She dropped her gaze for moment to where his half-hard penis rested against her, noting absently that he'd gotten rid of his underpants himself at some point although she didn't know when. Feeling rather cross with herself, she wished she knew the right words for these things. *Blowjob* sounded so... seedy and unromantic, but she couldn't think how else to say it.

"Go down on me?" Jake supplied and she nodded gratefully. Yes, that was a better way of putting it. He tilted his head a little and cleared his throat. "Umm, actually there was something else I wanted to ask

you. You know, if you're willing...." He was the one who seemed embarrassed now. Probably her evident complete lack of experience meant he was afraid he'd scare her with whatever he wanted to suggest.

But whatever it was, she'd try. For him. Because of what he'd just done and how he'd made her feel. With a smile, she reached up and cupped his face in her hand. "What?"

"Umm," his expression turned a little shamefaced, "I'd really like it if we could, uh, if you could be on top."

"Oh." She tried not to sound too surprised. From the hesitant way he'd asked, she'd been expecting something a bit... weirder. But she remembered now that he'd seemed to be expecting them to end up with her on top their first night together. He hadn't mentioned it since, but she guessed that was how he liked things. A small knot of fear gathered in her stomach as she tried to imagine just how that was meant to work and what she was supposed to do. But she nodded anyway. Because it was what he wanted and it wasn't like he was asking her to do anything *that* strange. "Okay. We can do that."

Some of the tension left his expression. Half smiling, he slid his hand up to rest on her shoulder and drew her toward him so he could kiss her. As he deepened the kiss, he ran his hand back down her arm, taking her hand in his and pulling it down to where his erection pressed against her. Understanding what he wanted—maybe she wasn't completely clueless about this after all!—she wrapped her fingers around him, sliding her palm up and down his shaft. He moaned softly and she felt him growing hard again. He tangled his hand in her hair, holding her close as he went on kissing her and she went on bringing him to the point of being ready. She tried not to think too much about what would happen after that, hoping he'd continue to show her what he wanted.

It didn't take long before he was hard enough and each stroke she made was prompting a small, involuntary hitch in his breathing. Gently pushing her away, he sat up and leaned across her to where, without her noticing, he'd left a packet of condoms on the nightstand. Snagging one, he lay back and quickly rolled it on. Then he held his arms out to her.

"Uh...." She looked at him uncertainly.

"Here. If you kneel...." Somehow, he guided her so she was straddling him, her knees either side of his waist and her bottom resting on his thighs. Grasping himself with one hand, he put his other hand on her hip, encouraging her to lift herself. After a moment, she figured out how things was supposed to work—really, it was all just a matter of *geometry*, she thought, trying not to giggle—and she put her own hand over his where he held himself and shifted her knees a little so she was in the right position to—

He let out a gasp as she guided him into her. Raising her head, she saw he was looking up at her, his eyes wide and dark while his breaths came quick and shallow. Holding his gaze, she slowly sank down, letting him slide deeper inside her. Though he'd satisfied her earlier ache, she still enjoyed the feel of him filling her. Seemed like he liked it too: he made another inarticulate noise in the back of his throat as she shuffled her knees further apart, allowing him further in until she had completely surrounded him.

She paused for a moment, drawing in a deep breath. What now? She looked down at herself and guessed she needed to move, the way he'd moved when their positions were reversed. Except when she

tried lifting herself, the way she found the way she was settled was all wrong and—. "Sorry," she muttered, trying to figure out how to fix things.

He chuckled softly. "It's okay." When she looked back up at him, she saw he was smiling faintly. "It can sometimes take a bit of... messing about to get it right."

"Yeah." She took a deep breath and wriggled her knees a little and then suddenly everything *was* in the right position and she began to move. As she slid cautiously over him, worried he'd slip out of her if she moved too much, he let out a shuddering gasp. A thrill of excitement shot through her. She moved again and again he gasped.

"Yes?" she said, not needing his answer to know she was getting it right but wanting to hear it. Wanting confirmation of the power she had to make him respond to her.

"Yes," he managed, the word half-strangled, as she went on moving, gradually picking up the pace. His hands on her hips slowly tightened their grip; before long he had thrown back his head, closing his eyes, while his breath came in great ragged gasps. Under her, she could feel the slight thrust of his own hips, matching her movements, and she looked down at him triumphantly, reveling in her control over him: this was *her*; *she* was doing this; *she* was sending him wild like this—

—and then his fingers were digging into her, and he was thrusting into her, and she held herself steady against him as he came, his hips bucking underneath her while a fierce cry escaped him.

They stopped moving, except for their breathing, harsh and loud in her ears. His hands tensed on her, holding her to keep her settled around him, but she had no desire to pull away. She was happy to stay where she was, looking down at him as he drew in a deep breath, and then another. Understanding now, finally, why he liked getting her off so much. Because God, it was such a rush, wasn't it? To be making that happen, to be driving someone else crazy....

Still with his eyes closed, still deep inside her, he slid one hand further around her waist and used the other to lever himself into a sitting position, pulling her against his chest and burying his face in her neck. She put her arms around him, accepting his wordless gratitude and thinking she should be the one thanking him, for showing her something new and amazing.

After a minute or so, he pulled back, opening his eyes and giving her a shaky smile. She reached up a hand and smoothed his damp bangs back off his forehead. "Good?"

He nodded, apparently still not having found his voice. Drawing in another deep breath, he reached down between them, fumbling to hold on to the condom with one hand and encouraging her up with the other.

"Good." She grinned at him as she lifted herself off him. "Because I'd definitely like to do that next time."

"Uh-huh." He sounded a little distracted, like he was less than enthusiastic at the prospect, and a quick stab of fear shot through her. Maybe it hadn't been so great for him, after all. Maybe he hadn't enjoyed it as much as she'd thought, or it hadn't been what he'd looking for, or maybe—.

Settling herself back down and watching him knot off the condom, she bit her lip anxiously. "You

know, that is, if you... if there's going to be... if we...." She broke off, floundering as he looked up at her, eyebrows raised in surprise. She lifted her hands away from where they rested on his shoulders and added, still not finding the words and stopping again with the sentence half finished, "You know, if we —."

He looked at her for a long moment, and then he put the condom aside and took her face between his hands.

"Heather." He stroked his thumbs across her cheeks, gentling her. "I love you. And I can't think of anywhere else I'd rather be than where I am right now or anything I'd rather be doing than what we've just done." He gave her a slightly embarrassed-looking lopsided grin. "I know you don't have much reason to believe that. But I want to go on being with you, doing this, until you do believe it." His lips twitched. "And then I want to go on being with you and doing this long after that. For the rest of our lives together." He leaned forward and kissed her gently. Still holding her close, he murmured, "I want us to figure this stuff out. Try stuff. Work out what makes you feel good and what makes me feel good. And sometimes that means we'll mess things up. But even if that happens, I'm not going anywhere. All I want, for the rest of my life, is to be able to go on going to sleep next to you and waking up at your side. Everything else, we'll figure out as we go along, okay?"

He pulled back from her so he could meet her gaze, still holding her face. She looked at him in silence, trying to figure it out, trying to put aside the little voice that told her, *He doesn't really*.... He raised his eyebrows, clearly wondering what was going on inside her head.

Abruptly, she let go of her doubts. Sliding her arms around his neck so she could pull his mouth down on to hers, she gave him his answer.

After all, she had to believe that he really was as interested in her pleasure as his, didn't she? All the evidence he'd provided meant there really wasn't any other explanation, strange as the idea was to her. And she didn't think he could have faked the way he'd responded to her just now.

As for whether he'd still want *her* in a month or two.... That she didn't know. Couldn't know. She was pretty sure they couldn't carry on forever in the crazy way they were now. But that didn't mean Jake wouldn't want to see her again. And until he started acting like he didn't—and, God knows, she knew what *that* looked like—she'd trust that he did.

oOo

Jake accepted the kiss, not entirely sure what it meant or even what had just happened, but glad he'd apparently found the right words. Because the last thing he wanted was to lose this—again—as a result of his own stupidity.

A few minutes later, with Heather falling asleep spooned against him, he tried to figure it out. He'd realized pretty quickly—during their first night together—that she wasn't very experienced and that what little sex she'd had previously had probably been mediocre at best. He didn't mind. In fact, he was rather enjoying helping her discover how good she could feel. He'd always enjoyed giving pleasure as much as taking it. He smiled wryly to himself. He'd had to: Em wouldn't have let him get away with anything else.

Maybe that was the problem: he and Em had muddled their way through their lack of experience

together. And in the years he'd been away, sure, there'd been a few other women. The ones that he'd let pick him up, those nights when he'd been too lonely or too tired of living with himself to not want some kind of comfort, however temporary. Women who'd been confident in who they were and what they wanted and what positions they liked. He'd been happy to please them and follow their lead, and to feel a little less worthless because of it. None of it had ever lasted long enough for him to surprise them or for them to show him their doubts.

But Heather wasn't like that. She was inexperienced and unsure—and brave and willing to try. When she'd straddled him and he'd seen the determination with which she'd tackled the task, despite her evident uncertainty, he'd remembered again why he'd fallen in love with her in the first place. And then, once she'd figured it out, the way she'd taken charge—

Unconsciously, he pulled her closer to him, pressing his face into her hair and breathing in the scent of her shampoo. She made a sleepy noise, half-question in it, and he loosened his hold on her a little. "Shhh. Go to sleep," he murmured into her hair.

That was the thing: he wanted her to take charge. Just like he wanted to make her come and to go down on her and to do so many other things with her. But not only didn't she know what *she* wanted or what would feel good, she didn't know what *he* wanted and might like either. And he couldn't assume her assumptions about any of that were the same as his.

What he needed to do, he reckoned, was slow things down and take his time proving that he really did like doing all the things he'd said he liked doing, rather than rushing on to the next thing, no matter how good that might be. Convince her, too, by doing it again and again, that he'd really meant what he'd said earlier about getting her off being just as important as getting him off.

As for what had just happened—her sudden fear that she'd overstepped some invisible mark and scared him away—he didn't know quite where that had come from. Not right at that moment, anyway. But he knew damn well what the roots of it were and why she didn't trust him. After the way he'd behaved, she had no reason to. But all he could do about that now was to go on being there, to go on showing her he wanted her and needed her, in bed and out of it, for as long as it took.

Nuzzling her hair again, he grinned to himself. Like that was going to be such a *hardship*....

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