



**WILLa OKaTI**

THE BROTHERHOOD 5

# THE OUT OF TOWNER

LooseId

## Praise for the writing of Willa Okati

### *The Brotherhood: Amour Magique*

What an intriguing story to start a series with! Ms. Okati has come up with a novel idea of an incubus who needs friends and wants to help them. But I'm not surprised, her stories are always creative and unique. I can't wait for the next book.

-- *Joyfully Reviewed*

With a unique plot and a host of sexy characters, *The Brotherhood: Amour Magique* is a winner... From humor to intrigue, to sexual sophistication, this is a first-class read.

-- Nancy Jackson, *Coffee Time Romance*

### *The Brotherhood 2: Bite Me*

Tie me up, tie me down, do whatever you want as long as I enjoy it as much I enjoyed *The Brotherhood 2: Bite Me*. The writing is fabulous, with thought processes that are just funny as hell, and when the characters start talking to themselves it's damn hilarious.

-- Sin St. Luke, *Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

### *The Brotherhood 3: The Dragon's Tongue*

I'd have read this in one sitting if real life hadn't intruded. Ms. Okati knows how to draw in a reader and keep them engrossed. Collin is very lovable. You will find yourself rooting for him to find love, and have a few giggles along the way.

-- Astraea, *Enchanted Ramblings*

*Amour Magique*, *Bite Me*, and *The Dragon's Tongue* are now available from Loose Id.

# THE BROTHERHOOD 5: THE OUT OF TOWNER

Willa Okati

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This book contains substantial explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable (homoerotic sex).

# The Brotherhood 5: The Out of Towner

Willa Okati

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## Dedication

*To Allie, who's always there for me.*

## Chapter One

*Be there. Please, be there.*

The alien entity currently calling himself “Joey” looked around himself. So jittery his hands shook, he checked to make sure he’d locked his door. No intruders allowed. He’d barricaded himself in his own rented suite and burrowed into his walk-in closet. No windows, but one could never be too careful. He’d learned as much the hard way.

“See if I ever stick my neck out again,” he muttered in his own language, which translated in English more closely to, “May the hands of the gods, be they ever so merciful, strike me dead with a terrible twist of the spine and the disintegration of my head from my shoulders if I make a fool of myself that way one more time.”

He added a rider. “Men are complicated!” which translated to, “If I did not desire mating as intensely as the sun craves the zenith of the sky, I would cut off my own balls and live the life of a eunuch rather than consort with these insane human males.”

English! The language had clearly been devised by lunatics. It would drive a weaker creature mad.

Joey pushed a handful of worn khaki pants and dirty T-shirts off a dense plastic square that bristled with wires and antennas. An interior power source glowed back at him, far too

bright in the darkness of the closet. Made him nervous. If anyone ever found his *sanctum sanctorum* or discovered his true identity -- well, he'd watched enough "science fiction" to know his life would be over.

Which would be a shame, as he'd only just begun this new existence.

"Be there," he muttered in the American patois he'd tried so hard to learn. "Come on. Answer!"

No response from the box. Joey hesitated, then reached out to slap the side with one of his broad palms. He'd heard this sort of tinkering referred to as "beating on the damn thing till it works" and frankly, he'd witnessed some miracles performed thus with televisions and computers. Also washing and vending machines.

He thumped the box again. "Come in!" he begged. "I need advice!"

The box flickered, glow dimming. Joey exhaled in relief, tasting the mixture of oxygen and carbon dioxide on his tongue, tinged with the pepperoni pizza he'd had for his evening meal. Such strange textures and flavors on this planet. He'd never get used to all of them.

"Are you there?" he asked, hopeful. "Joey to Command. Please come in, Command."

A small figure popped into the middle of the box. Not really there at all, of course, merely transmitting its image from light years away. "Mr. Nebraska," it greeted him.

Joey gazed at the being in wistful awe. He'd been so lucky with his assignment of governmental helper. Ixtl, as it liked to be called, had the beautiful androgyny that the richest families could buy, especially when his/its pretty fe/male face smiled up at Joey. Tall and slender, it floated one foot off the ground on crossed legs.

At the present moment, Ixtl was very much *not* smiling. At all. "You are aware this channel is only for emergencies," it cautioned. Its voice had too much of a silver, chiming lilt to ever sound truly snappish, but Joey could tell he'd displeased his superior.



“I apologize,” he said, bowing his head. Unable to resist, he peeked up through his eyelashes to watch Ixtl float. “I really miss flying,” he murmured without meaning to speak the words aloud.

“You know very well we cannot allow you flight. Human beings, as a species, do not possess the ability. The gravity on Earth is greater than what we are accustomed to. The physics are impossible. If you are to fit in, you must be content with the new body we structured for you. *At* great expense, I might add.” Ixtl crossed its arms as well and folded its wings behind its back, then sank gracefully down onto a soft blue cushion the color of an Earthly night sky. “Why have you called?”

Joey looked up directly at it. “I need assistance,” he said in relief. He’d been more than half afraid Ixtl wasn’t going to listen at all, opting to scold him and disappear instead. “Please. Guide me.”

Ixtl gave a long, put-upon sigh. “Very well. What seems to be the problem?”

“There are so many things. I will attempt to be concise.”

“Please do.”

Joey lifted his hand, pausing ever so briefly to shake his head at how large and solid it seemed compared with the one he’d possessed previously, and counted on his long fingers. “This body is so peculiar. I cannot seem to manipulate it with any measure of grace at all.”

“We have told you it takes time to grow accustomed to the gravity. Reminded you time and time again. It may be you’ll seem ... clumsy ... until you’ve adjusted. “Ixtl shuddered. “I do hope this is not your sole reason for re-establishing communications. You are aware of the risk.”

“Oh, yes, I am, I am,” Joey hastened to reassure Ixtl. The governmental helper was his only remaining contact with his home planet, and if Ixtl decided to withdraw, Joey would be totally alone. He knew how dangerous it was for them to speak at all. Encoded and

encrypted government channels aside, anyone with enough money to pay a “hacker” to break into the system feed would be able to trace him “in a heartbeat.”

Joey shook his head again. “I think many of our books on the species of sentient beings on Earth are wrong,” he blurted out. “Cats may indeed be as intelligent as we’d hoped, but they do not speak. Wolves and seals have their own language, but humans do not comprehend them. Nor whales.”

“Interesting.” Ixtl arched one slim eyebrow. “I presume you are having difficulty communicating with humans, too?”

“Yes. Of all the locations on this planet, why was I sent to the Americas, and a southern state? The language is nothing such as we were given to understand. I have had to learn slang, dialects, accents, and all manner of linguistics that follow no rules of order and change on a whim. For example, did you know there are no less than seven separate patterns of inflection in the local culture, plus one corruption of English that is hardly English at all?”

Ixtl looked bored. “You will have to learn. Joey --”

“Why do they put the adjective in front of the noun? A blue car, not a car blue. This construction makes no sense! I --”

“Joey!”

He subsided. “I apologize.”

“You will have to learn,” Ixtl enunciated very precisely. “I understand the difficulties and, yes, it would have made the transition easier to place you in a country with simpler rules of grammar and syntax. However, the DiXini family knows you studied countries such as France in your youth. They have already looked for you on other continents.”

Joey’s eyes widened in shock. “You didn’t tell me!”

“I did not deem it necessary for you to know.”

“But DiXinis! Here, on Earth! The danger I was in, and you didn’t tell me?”

Ixtl appeared to be getting closer and closer to truly upset. “Not necessary information,” it said. “Besides, they have left to search other planets. I believe they are currently sending probes into the Andromeda system.”

Joey sagged with relief. “Thank you.”

“We are not about to present you with real danger. We knew the DiXinis would do a cursory search of Earth at the very least, given your childhood interest in the planet and your studies of their customs. They appear to be satisfied and going on about their business hunting down the ‘enemy of their family’ elsewhere.”

Joey wondered if his imagination were playing tricks on him or if Ixtl actually looked smug. The thought crossed his mind that the being needed a good “cussing out” to “take him down a peg,” but he discarded the notion as unwise. He *needed* Ixtl. Ixtl’s company. Ixtl’s delivery of funds.

Ixtl, and the governmental protection of his home planet against the DiXinis, a crime syndicate dedicated to killing Joey for daring to testify against one of their own.

On Earth, they called people in his position participants of “Witness Relocation.” His planet had another phrase for the operation, but the same essential meaning applied. Joey sighed unhappily and reached out to lay his hand against the box, as if he could touch Ixtl.

He was *so* very homesick.

“There are too many things I don’t understand,” he admitted, his voice sorrowful in accordance with Earth cadences. “I’m by myself with no guide but you, and I tell you, much of what has been written in our books of study is wrong. Either much has changed in five thousand years, or the explorers fell prey to drugs or strong drink.”

He tugged at the hem of his loose button-down shirt and at the slightly torn knees of his jeans. “The clothing you gave me ... You would not believe how people laughed when they saw someone walking down a street in a loincloth. They asked me if someone was filming a movie entitled *Tarzan*.”

“I did note you appear to be wearing far more than we thought necessary ...”

“Loincloths are only for swimming, and then they are fitted tight.” Joey cocked his head. “Or for dancing in clubs where men smoke until the air is gray and foul, drink watered-down alcohol, and shout impolite comments to the performers.”

Ixtl looked slightly intrigued. “Are these clubs sexual in nature?”

“One would think so. However, for the longest time I was unable to find one that suited my particular needs. They were all focused on the display of ... women.” Joey shuddered eloquently.

Ixtl made a shocked face. “For shame! You were so exemplary in your lack of xenophobia, I am dismayed by your lack of respect for heterosexuality.”

“Ixtl!” Joey gasped. “Such language --”

Ixtl held up a hand. “Stop right there. One thing we did note in the books, which appears to hold true yet, is that males and females are the predominant coupling pairs on Earth. Not men and men, or women and women. You must not cling to the old ideals of our world when, for all intents and purposes, you are as fully human and a part of the planet you live in as any who were born there.”

Joey sagged. “Yes, Ixtl.”

“I understand loneliness,” Ixtl went on, soothingly. “But surely you could find some place to search for company? We were careful to consult the auguries. A companion and mate waits for you in the very city where you dwell. You have only to find him.”

“It is so hard ...”

“Is it?” Ixtl actually craned its head, as if to look! “How can one tell, beneath so much clothing?”

“Ixtl!”

The being blinked. “Is this a transgression of manners?”

“In this culture, yes. One does not do such things unless they are intimately interested in one another.”

“My apologies.” Ixtl exhaled. “And see? You seem to have learned a great deal already, then.”

“Some. Not nearly enough. Another thing we may have gotten wrong, Ixtl. Anatomy. I think I am ... misshapen.”

The words earned him a blink. “Mis-- However so?”

Joey felt his cheeks turn red, a sign of human unease, embarrassment. “I believe it is too long,” he said, voice small. “Also too thick. There are men who accept money for temporary relief of physical urges. I showed my organ to one. He said ‘no way!’ and fled.”

“Nine inches is too big? But we were so careful to keep everything proportionate with your body size, which had to be large, heavy with muscle, and strong for self-defense ...” Ixtl’s eyelids sagged.

Joey stared. Was he imagining things, or was Ixtl putting off an air of sexual interest? He squeaked and covered his crotch with a hand. “Please stop!”

“Why?” Ixtl’s murmur was low and aroused.

“It is ... one doesn’t ... if you are not someone I intend to ‘make love’ to, this simply isn’t done. Gazing at the cock is not polite behavior.”

Ixtl blinked. “Your genitals have altered to resemble a barnyard animal?”

“No!” Joey squirmed. “Cock is a name for the penis. Also dick, pecker, wee-wee, Mr. Happy, trouser snake, custard chucker, pleasure port, joystick --”

“Enough. I take your meaning.” Ixtl looked vaguely ill. “So crude.”

Joey lifted his hands. “You see what I am up against.”

“I do.” Ixtl tapped its chin with one finger. “Is there nowhere you can go to search for your partner, then? Nowhere at all?”

Joey perked up. "Yes! This is the primary reason I contacted you. I have discovered a male-to-male dance club called Amour Magique. The walls reek of age and magic. If I am to find my manQueen anywhere, I am sure he will be in there."

"Good! Have you begun your search yet?"

"Er ... no." Joey wilted. "Amour Magique has a very strict set of rules about who is permitted inside. Not just anyone can gain entrance. I had hoped you might ..."

"Ah, yes. You wish for our influence in providing you an invitation?"

"Please?" Joey tried not to sound or look too eager.

"We will see what we can do." Ixtl reached for a floating digi-entry pad and began thumbing it. He glanced up sharply. "No individual considerations that might make a spectacle, though. I cannot countenance you bringing yourself to the attention of anyone who might be seeking you."

"I understand." Joey watched excitedly as lights flashed on Ixtl's connection box. "Can you ...?"

"Done. This Amour Magique is of Earth origin, but it seems to possess an intelligence of its own. The building is mutable, chameleonic, and remembers us from our previous visit to Earth. You will be permitted entrance. However, as they are unsure of what powers we possess, you receive no special favors. If your manQueen is there, you must find him on your own."

"Agreed! Just so long as I can make the trip inside." Joey was certain his grin stretched from ear to ear. "At last. Thank you, Ixtl. You've made an impossible dream come true."

"Joey! Remember the rules. Now that we have gone to such trouble, you have an immediate and specific duty to bed this manQueen. According to our studies, the men on Earth do this in the same way as we have for millennia. Once you have finished, if he does not accept you, you know your duty. Allowing you a mate is a privilege, and you may only be with one you trust entirely. If this man should not measure up ..."

“I must be alone. Forever. One mate for one man. Yes,” Joey said, dejected.

“Good,” Ixtl said, extending six arms from behind his back and waving them in an expression of benevolence. He chittered at Joey reassuringly.

Despondent, Joey chittered back, wishing he still had the ability to spin a web.

They were so much more comfortable than “beanbags.”

## Chapter Two

“Not again! I swear, this always happens to me. Got a big party to go to? Well, heaven forbid I have a single stitch that’s fit to wear outside my front door.” Micah pouted, hands on his hips. He checked his ass surreptitiously for any sign of fat before going on. “Honestly -- I tell you, there’s not a thing in here fit to wear tonight to *the* premier gay dance club in Charleston. I wouldn’t be caught dead in some of this ...” He shuddered. “... out-of-date fashion.”

His guests, David and Christian, each perched uneasily on the edge of Micah’s complicated wardrobe chairs. They glanced at each other, then at Micah, and finally at the walk-in-closet he stood in front of.

Micah could read their thoughts. *All those clothes, and he’s still complaining?*

Micah rolled his eyes. Amateurs! What would they do without his help? Not that he could let them know he had any soft spots on his carefully shaped hard body, oh, no. He kept up the act for these two, even if he did want to pet them like a pair of puppies sometimes. Helpless innocents! No wonder neither of them had ever gotten laid more than a handful of times. Handful, for sure. Their own palms were their love lives. He’d lay money on the fact.

If he had money.



Still, they didn't need to know about that. Dragging the two Brothers back to his main problem at hand, Micah twitched impatiently. "Well? I'm asking you. Look at this!" He drew away to gesture, runway model style, at the closet. "Everything is last year, last month, or last week. Some of it's yesterday. You have to move with the times, boys, if you want to catch anything on your hooks," he lectured, praying his words would sink in to the adorably fashion-challenged pair. "Especially at a place like *Amour Magique*."

David and Christian looked at each other again. Micah struggled not to roll his eyes, thought better of it, and raised them to the skies.

"Honestly, you two are hopeless. Why did I invite you over here?"

"Um ... because you were afraid Liam would stop by if someone wasn't watching over you?" David offered. "At least that's sort of what you said ..."

"Afraid? Micah is afraid of nothing, little man. Or not so little. Did you even try the new diet I clipped out of *Hot Homos* for you?" Micah tsked, taking in David's slight layer of padding. "So pudgy!" Actually, he wanted to squeeze David to see if he'd giggle, but managed to keep his cool.

David's cheeks turned red. He squirmed. "I tried, but Micah, a guy can only eat so many oranges before he starts feeling like if you hug him he'll juice ..."

"Don't you wish," Micah said archly. "Citrus fruit and oatmeal. I swear, it peeled away those three stubborn pounds I gained during those Brotherhood pig-outs."

"All you ever eat there is the plain rice."

"And maybe a bite of dessert," Christian piped up. "But those are just flavored snow."

"Flavored with sugar, thank you. Lots and lots of sugar, which goes straight to your ass and hips. Not what you want invading that piece of your personal real estate." Micah frowned. "David, stand up."

When the man hesitated, Micah bustled over to him and seized his wrists. "Come on, don't be such a girl. Stand up!"

David resisted. "I don't want to," he mumbled, gaze fixed on the ground.

Micah released his arms. "Fine, then! And I suppose what you have on is what you'd planned to wear tonight?"

David's eyes widened. He put both hands on his plain red T-shirt. "What's wrong with ..."

"Oh, nothing. Not a thing at all, if you're going for Miss Tacky of the Year. You two. Why do I bother? Christian, please tell me you're wearing something other than your work clothes. Wherever you work, anyway. What is that, some kind of burger barn uniform?"

Christian wasn't so easily cowed as David. "This is from a job I had before college," he said, leaning back as best as he could in the peculiar chair. "I'm not wearing my work clothes from the ... job I have now."

For no reason Micah could understand, a flake of pink flared under each of Christian's cheekbones.

"I'll get it together. Don't worry. But I thought the whole point of us two being here was so Liam didn't come by, and to help you pick out your own gear."

"Nominally." Micah sniffed. He turned his back on Christian and David, glaring at the closet. "Why didn't I leave myself time to go shopping?" Plucking a blue silk shirtsleeve out of the tightly packed garments and holding the fabric between finger and thumb, he made a noise of disgust. "I don't know how I'm going to show my face."

"What's wrong with what you're holding?" David ventured. "I like the color."

"You would, sunshine boy." Micah released the offending sleeve. "Besides the fact that this is from the spring before last spring's collection? The shade doesn't go with my eyes. Or my hair."

"I thought you looked good in blue ...?"

"In some shades of blue, yes. Cerulean. Periwinkle. Azure. Even teal. Not navy, now that I've had to stop going to the tanning booths. A man has to be so careful of his skin these

days. Besides, it's dated. I'm not a sailor, thank you very much, and I'm not about to get involved in those kinky games."

"What about a green ...?"

"David, for pity's sake, would you let me get a word in edgewise?" Micah whirled on the gentle man and dealt him a gimlet stare. For his own good, of course. David's love life would go better if he didn't open his mouth and reveal his lack of guile every chance he got.

Christian, ever the bleeding heart, reached out to pat David's knee, rubbing it soothingly. Micah glared at him, too, but Christian managed a few seconds' decent stare back before he crumpled.

Micah sighed, flipping the shirt sleeve aside. "Oh, don't fret. I didn't think either of you would be any help."

"Then why didn't you ask someone else?" David muttered. "If you brought us over here just to humiliate us, I'm leaving."

Micah blinked. Had David's testicles finally dropped? But wait, no, it wouldn't do for them to leave, and they were getting up! Oh, God. He couldn't face Liam. Not that little Fairy Godfather. There were only a few people in the world who made his spine do the fandango, and Liam was one of them.

He only put up with the tweaked-out twinkie because, on occasion, he came up with jewels like this VIP pass to Amour Magique. The other Brothers might not have known anything about the club, but Micah kept up with what was what, and who was who, and where people who were people hung out to party, drink, and dance. Lately, in Charleston, if you were gay, and you were one of the In Crowd, you went to Amour Magique.

Ooh, he couldn't wait to get inside those walls! Micah shivered deliciously. The club owners were so private they checked people for cameras or recording devices at the bouncing rope and allowed no paparazzi inside. No one who went there seemed to want to

talk about it. All you saw in the magazines was this star or that one caught walking away, possibly even turned down at the door.

Unlike a few certain stars, though, Micah had the promise of an all-access pass!

He smiled, not a nice smile, he knew, but one of his favorite expressions. The look made him resemble a sly cat who'd just finished the cream and was looking forward to sneaking another bowl. Not that he'd actually eat the fattening stuff, of course. Skim milk only. Had to keep the figure fresh and toned, right?

"There has to be something in here," he muttered, stepping into the closet. With only ambient light from the bedroom seeping in, the shadows made the interior too dark to see properly, but no way on God's precious green earth would he turn on the closet's bare bulb light. Too harsh and unforgiving -- especially when he had company. He could barely stand how sallow the seventy watts made him look when he was in private.

Besides, he had no intention of letting either Christian or David see how, past the first hangers full of polished, pressed stuff, the rest of his clothes looked sadly worn and ill-repaired. Micah scowled at the cuff of a pair of suede pants he'd tried to mend. They'd been oh, so fashionable just a year ago, and he'd adored the way they hugged his hips and ass ... but then there had been the tiny tear close to the ankle.

Of course, a rip *would* happen to something he actually liked. Naturally, he hadn't been able to afford taking them to a tailor, so he'd tried stitching the edges himself -- and totally ruined them. The puckered knot of clumsy seams mocked Micah as he made an ugly face at his botched repairs. He had never been any good at the last-minute quick fixes all the other models took to like ducks to water. His fingers were nimble, but every time he got hold of a needle, he fumbled all over the place. So tacky. He hated failing.

Speaking of which ... another thing he didn't like: being poor and doing without. He wasn't used to not having whatever he needed. Well, there *was* a medicine that would cure all his ills; all he had to do was take the dose and stop hiding out from the dating scene,

which he'd been doing for far too long. What he needed was a sugar daddy, and since he'd been keeping himself fit and pretty, he had a plan for his trip to Amour Magique: hook a big, fat fish and reel him in.

Well, hopefully not literally fat. Micah didn't like swallowing more than his dignity, and that hurt enough. He flipped through a rack of pants, marking each option off his mental list. God, would he have to eat his pride as well?

He suddenly realized David and Christian had been suspiciously quiet. Whipping around, Micah half expected to see them gone -- but no. They sat in his expensive Swedish chairs, fragile and worth more than five pairs of pants put together each. Big, solid David and tiny little Christian. David would probably break the one he sat in, and Christian had one leg slung over a delicate chair arm. The sight made Micah's heart thump faster out of fear.

To cover it, he clapped his hands sharply. "What have I told you?" he demanded. "Sit up straight! No one's going to want someone who looks like they're too lazy to take care of themselves. The men who are worth catching want someone who's clearly self-sufficient. They want pretty arm candy, and they want it polished when it's by their side. God knows I've tried with you two, but do any of my lessons sink in? No, no, no. Sometimes I feel like I'm talking to a brick wall."

David flashed him a sullen glance. Christian obediently sat up straight, even if his tapping fingers betrayed nervousness or irritation. Micah surveyed them with pursed lips. "Not much better, but I don't have any more time to waste."

"Found something?" David asked sharply. "Can we go now?"

"Not yet!" Micah snapped. "Be patient."

He turned once again, listening carefully for sounds of movement behind him, and went in deeper a few steps. "Leather," he said aloud to himself. "Maybe leather. Can't go wrong with that, unless you go too far, and then it's all eighties hair-band-land. Or bondage."

“You’ve done bondage?” Christian sounded interested. A bit too eager, in Micah’s opinion.

Still, a taste of intrigue never hurt. He swished his hips, sashaying a bit. “Sweetheart? I have tried everything at least once. If you get the chance, go boldly forth, right? Still, just because I tried it doesn’t mean the fad’s still hot. No one goes for all those straps and whips and stilettos anymore unless they’re seriously twisted.”

“Stilettos?” David sounded horrified and fascinated.

Micah winced, then quickly smoothed his face before he put himself in danger of a wrinkle. “On the women, you dolt,” he lied, nudging a pair of high-heeled boots well out of sight with his toe. “As if I’d be caught acting like a lady.”

“Micah, you’re the biggest queen I’ve ever known.”

Micah froze. Had David ... oh, surely he hadn’t dared. “Tell me I’m going deaf,” he suggested mildly, his fingers tightening around a leather jacket sleeve. “Tell me I did not just hear what you might have had the nerve to say to me.”

He heard David shuffle his feet but keep quiet otherwise. Micah snatched down a leather vest and a creamy ivory shirt completely at random and turned on him, ready to give Dough-boy a piece of his mind --

He heard the front door to his condo open.

“Quentin!” Christian said excitedly. “We thought you weren’t coming.”

Micah refrained from stamping his foot and sulking. He’d invited Quentin just to make his Greek chorus complete and keep Liam off his back about “helping” some others, but who knew why Quentin had to be one of them?

Micah didn’t like most of the Brothers all too much, and he loathed Quentin in particular. From the way he dressed, the man had money, and he dressed damned well. Better than Micah when he’d been rolling in the cash. From his long, sweeping hair and

those big, woeful “please don’t hurt me” eyes, he screamed “competition.” Watch him have every soft-hearted rich man rushing to his side once they reached *Amour Magique*!

Micah burned with loathing. “We’re done here,” he snapped, not turning around. “Go home, Quentin.”

Quentin said nothing. He rarely did. Micah did hear David stand, his chair creaking in protest, and then what sounded like the one wrapping the other in a hug with a gentle kiss of hello. He indulged himself in a quick about-face. Those two! Why didn’t they just go ahead and fall for each other, already? Probably because only heaven might know why a GQ like Quentin would want to be interested in David, and heaven wasn’t sharing its gossip.

Christian got up, too. “We’re finished? Really?”

God, he didn’t have to sound so thrilled. Micah tossed back the ivory shirt, and raised his vest to the light. Suede, not leather. Still, if he took off a stud here and ever so carefully, and please, Lord, successfully mended a small tear there ... it’d do. There were matching pants, perhaps a size too small, but showing off your ass and your assets never hurt.

“We’re done,” he sulked, not turning around. “Get out of here. I’ll see you tonight.”

Micah felt Quentin’s presence hovering at the door to the closet. “I liked the ivory,” he said quietly, before he disappeared. Probably with big old David’s arm around him, ushering him out. David treated Quentin like he was made of fine china, for pity’s sake. What a pair of girls! No one with a Y chromosome should be handled that way.

“Bye!” Christian called cheerfully, his voice already fading out as he made for the door. A slam, and Micah knew himself to be alone in his condominium. He looked down, realizing he’d had his hands fisted in the suede, leaving fingernail marks. Oh, God! Another outfit ruined! He examined it dejectedly. Just as well, he supposed. The tailoring just screamed late nineties, and last century would never do.

Despondent, Micah slid down into a crouch and put his head on his knees. He couldn't do this. He wasn't ready. The depression forever lurking behind closed doors in his head sprang out like a tiger.

He reached up and caressed the ivory. "Luis," he whispered, letting the name slide over his tongue. "Luis, you ... I ... you utter, utter bastard!"

The shirt had belonged to *him*, Micah's ex-lover. They'd been together for almost three years, after starting off as competing flirts ...

*Bet you can't get into Luis's pants.*

*Bet you can't get Micah to bend over for you.*

Micah covered his ears as if the gesture could block out the voices from his past. The chatter of a dozen friends who no longer gave him the time of day after what Luis had done, and the utter violation of code he'd committed in unsuccessfully suing the man for palimony. People he'd actually liked, spent time with, shopping and eating dainty dietetic lunches with, sipping sparkling mineral water, and making fun of the lame bar-hoppers who dared approach them with awkward offers of a drink or pathetic come-ons.

He hadn't spoken to any of them ... since Luis.

The words of their last argument rang in his mind.

*You know nothing about what it is to live like I do! The pressure, the cameras, the reporters -- oh, wait, you did know. Once. Before you became old and they no longer cared about you.*

*Old! You prick -- I only just turned twenty-nine --*

*Ancient, in this business. You're a has-been, Micah. You bent over for too many sluts and now they have no higher opinion of you than I do.*

*Luis, why are you saying things like this? I thought you ... you ...*

*What? Loved you?*

Micah could still hear Luis's derisive laugh.



*I loved who you used to be. A star. I have no time nor interest in a down-and-out, Micah. Your candle has been snuffed. No one wants you anymore. Definitely not me.*

A door slammed in Micah's memory. The sound of the man he'd actually fallen for walking out of his life, leaving the rags and tags of his wardrobe behind, taking almost all the money Micah needed to live on. Seven years younger and moving forward with his life, on to bigger and brighter stardom.

He still saw Luis's face on some of the fashion rags. His sharply cut, Latino face looked coy, sexy, tempting, and he was always dressed in the latest styles. Half the fags in the United States were in love with him, even if the nastier tabloids were full of stories about his temper and his diva rages.

Simon had told Micah he was better off without Luis. *If someone loves you*, he'd said, leaning back in his padded lawyer chair, *they don't leave you. Occasionally a man has the sense to walk away from a bad relationship, but people like you ... they've been cheated. There's no closure to a relationship ending in lawsuits. I'd like to invite you to a meeting of a small support group I chair ...*

Micah laughed, groaned, and dry-washed his face -- delicately -- with both hands. He'd gone to meet with "The Brotherhood," and just because he knew Simon knew too much about him, he'd stayed. Kept going to meeting after meeting. Letting them know he despised the cabalistic trappings and the stupid in-jokes, even putting up with twerps like Quentin. Managing not to flay annoying Liam into shreds with the sharp edge of his tongue. Not easy.

The rest of the time, he'd hidden away in his apartment. He didn't want to see anyone he didn't have to, or be seen. The money he'd had when he was younger melted like water as he shopped online. His investments went belly up like a dead whale.

Micah was all but broke, in a condominium full of riches, and if he *didn't* get lucky at Amour Magique, he'd have to start selling things soon. His heart and soul shuddered away

from the notion. So ... common! So desperate. What if anyone found out? He'd be laughed to shame.

No. He had to snag himself a prize among prizes at the dance club. Only a few hours to go, and he had to be polished to perfection by then. Waxed, yes, hair styled perfectly, and an outfit that showed off all his good sides but still teased men into wanting to see more.

He didn't know what else to do but look good. He'd never learned any other skills. He'd been a model, and then he'd been ex. What other good did knowing how to smile, flirt, and look pretty do out in the ugly, cold "real world"?

Standing, Micah took several deep breaths to compose himself. "All right," he said softly. "I can do this. I'm Micah. I ruled this town once. Tonight, I'm taking it back."

He considered the ivory shirt for another moment. To give him his due, Luis had been a savvy shopper. The silk had a timeless quality. Not obeying any particular whim or quirk of fashion, it would hang temptingly and cling snugly in all the right places. Pair that with some dark pants that hugged his ass, and ...

Did he dare? Hell, yes, he dared. He was *Micah*. He had to remember that.

And Micah, who'd claimed the world once, would raise himself back on the throne at Amour Magique.

"Watch out," he muttered, draping the ivory shirt carefully over a lower rack of pants. He peeled off his current designer "casual" outfit a piece at a time, sending each one smacking against a wall. "Watch out. The bitch is back, and it's time to play."

*Micah parties tonight.*

### Chapter Three

Eight forty-five and showtime, showtime! Micah all but wiggled in the back seat of the nicely appointed taxi he'd splurged on. Not as good as a limo, but if he'd gone the stretch route he wouldn't have been able to afford his gym fees for a month. He'd weighed the decision carefully, gas fumes against looking good in the future, but in the end he hadn't been able to bear the thought of letting himself go to seed.

God! Micah made a moue of distaste. He'd end up like David, or Collin -- or worse, Bree. Shameful, all of them, and they should have known far better. Who would they ever manage to catch, the way they looked? So many people who needed savvy fashion advice, so little time!

Speaking of looking ... Discreetly, so he wouldn't catch the eye of the uniformed driver -- this was an *excellent* taxi service, catering only to the rich elite -- Micah checked himself over. No wrinkles, sags, tags, tears, or rips? No. Good. He'd been delighted when Luis's outfit had fit him, and all through the hour he'd waited, he had hardly dared move for fear of mussing anything.

Of course, the situation was about to change. Micah let himself smile broadly, indulging the stretching of his facial muscles. Pity, that to avoid plastic surgery and having a

mask for a face, one couldn't really show any emotions, which made for another type of mask. Ah, well. He'd live. And if he got lucky at Amour Magique ... well, he'd be able to afford any enhancements he might need in the future.

*Oh, if only this were a limo, Micah lamented. I'd pour myself a glass of champagne and toast the night ahead.*

He checked his watch. Eight-fifty. They were supposed to be at Amour Magique by nine, but whoever heard of fashionably early? No, no, looking too eager just wouldn't do. He'd step out of his lovely taxi at about nine-fifteen, cool and polished, looking slightly bored -- he paused to practice the expression, though not long, as it was familiar to him -- and ask, "Is this the club?" Just as if he'd had a dozen better things to do instead, but had decided to grace them with his presence. The perfect impression to give the locals and the hopeless blunderers waiting in lines.

Oh, yes, there would be lines. Micah wasn't any stranger to Amour Magique. He kept up on his gossip. It could take hours to see if you'd be allowed inside. They skimmed the silver and tossed the dross.

Lucky for Micah his little pass made him *shine*.

He shifted uncomfortably. If there did happen to be a deliciously rich fish nibbling at his bait, would he have to display all his goods to hook them? He hadn't ... not since Luis ... and, well, the body had to adjust, didn't it? He might have always been a bottom, but the body had elasticity. Things snapped back into virgin tightness if they weren't put to use for certain purposes in a while, and Micah just couldn't fathom himself bending over without a lot of TLC to ease the way. Unfortunately, men with the kind of money he hoped for weren't usually big on taking sex slow and gentle. He'd tried easing his way back into things -- so to speak -- with a few toys, but he knew they weren't anything like the real McCoy. Silicone didn't compare to meat.

Well, he'd just have to coax them into a romantic mood. With any luck, like the best clubs out there, Amour Magique would have several rooms besides the main dance floor. Surely there'd be something with elegant classical music and candlelight in one cranny or another. He'd just have to tease his catch in and soften them up. He knew how to do the job. Melt them like butter in his mouth, or possibly melt them in his mouth, if push came to -- well.

Sounded like a plan to him. Satisfied, Micah leaned back, careful not to wrinkle, and peeped at himself in the rearview mirror. *Looking good, looking fine*, he reassured himself. Hair falling attractively into his eyes, eyes sparkling with excitement -- *better tone that down*, he warned himself -- and clothes worth a fortune hugging a body fit to kill for.

Oh, yes. He was more than ready to knock the metaphorical socks right off Amour Magique's feet.

A cell phone trilled politely from its mount on the dashboard. Micah cocked one eyebrow in mild curiosity. Of course, a company like this wouldn't be so crude as to use walkie-talkies or a CB system, but he'd thought their schedule was appointments-only. Surely no one would be calling in to direct the driver to his next "fare"?

The driver seemed surprised by the interruption. Clearly resisting the urge to turn and apologize to Micah, he lifted the phone with one gloved hand and rested it carefully by his ear. "Yes?" he murmured.

Silence. The driver's eyes widened with first confusion, then indignation, shifted briefly to indignation again as a voice warbled loudly and overly cheerfully from the other end, then finally settled into mostly concealed disdain. He pulled the car gently onto the shoulder of the road and turned to Micah. "Sir?" he asked, nodding his head in a show of respect. "I do believe this call is for you."

Years of training kept Micah from bellowing "What?" and snatching for the phone. He managed to keep it to a blink and a slight tic before gracefully extending his hand. If there

was ever a call he didn't want to take ... not that he minded people craving his presence, but only one person knew he'd be taking an escort service instead of his own low-class car to the club. Only one person, who, coincidentally, would be the one with enough balls to wreak havoc in the careful order of the company and track him down like a common country dog ...

He put the phone to his ear, asking without really needing confirmation, "Liam?"

"Micah!" The crazy little freak's voice bubbled exuberantly out of the speakers, loud enough that Micah was sure the driver heard. He could almost see, all but floating over the man's head, another check-mark going down in the "unsuitable client" list.

Hiding a wince, he lowered his voice to murmur. "Liam, quietly, please."

"Oh! I suspected I was perhaps too ebullient for such rarified company," Liam said pertly. "Really, how rude people can be in the name of genteel manners! Don't you find this to be the case?"

"Liam, please," Micah hissed. He could see the driver watching him in the mirror now, no longer trying to hide his distaste. "Do you need something?"

"A kind word would not go amiss, but I'll get none of those from you, now, will I?"

"Liam ..."

"Oh, go on with your scolding and your lessons on what is and what is not done. You are late, Micah. Five minutes late already. I said nine o'clock, did I not? I recall being most specific on that point. All of us are gathered here save for you and Bree."

"Yes, well, Bree probably won't be coming, that prick." The words escaped Micah's mouth before he could censor them. Another check-mark appeared on the driver's list. Micah scooted down a bit, still careful of his clothing but too humiliated not to hunch. "Liam, I'm on my way. I can't be more than ten minutes away."

"You do not seem to appreciate the importance of this gathering," Liam said, disapproval radiating from his voice. "I paid a price to ensure our entry into Amour Magique

tonight. Just because it would not register on your scale of costliness does not mean I did not sacrifice to make certain this night would be perfect. Perfect, I tell you! And you? You have the nerve to play at being so in style and late enough to drive us to distraction?"

Micah felt his cheeks coloring. Another thing he hated about Liam: after all the modeling and the lifestyle, no one should have been able to make him blush or feel small, but let the tiny man set up a rant, and he flattened Micah every time.

At the moment, Micah almost hated him. "I? I have nerve?" he snapped -- softly. "Liam, let me inform you that you don't understand me. I'm doing you all a favor by joining in with this little spree. I'm in demand. You should see the stack of invitations I turned down, hear all the phone calls where I said 'no' to --"

"I could not, because they do not exist."

Micah fell silent, stunned.

"You still think yourself so much better than everyone," Liam went on, sounding angry himself. "Very well. I will do what I had hoped I would not have to do, and you will not like my plan."

"What are you going to do?" Micah flung back. "Revoke my invitation?"

"Yes. I am."

Micah's mouth fell open most unattractively. When he gathered himself enough to speak, the line had gone dead. "Liam? Liam!"

No answer, of course.

At some point, the driver had started his taxi up again. They purred to another stop, this time with the sounds of music and the chatter of crowds surrounding them.

"Sir?" The driver no longer bothered with respect; he sounded bored. "We have arrived, sir."

"We have?" Micah said, half-dumbly.

“Yes, sir.” The driver’s eyes were sharp in the mirror. “Please return my phone to me, sir.”

Heat flooded Micah’s face again. Did the man actually think he’d steal? Angry and not bothering to hide it, he slapped the phone into one outstretched hand and tugged at the door handle. Normally, the driver would come around and let him out, but he wouldn’t stay in there a moment longer.

He had a bill tucked into one flat pocket for a tip, but would he pass it over? He thought not. In fact, he thought he might just write a letter of complaint to the company. They owed him for interrupting his privacy with Liam’s call, for their driver’s rudeness, for everything that had gone wrong.

Revoke his invitation? Liam couldn’t! The passes were for the whole group, and Micah was part of the group. Liam would just have to see reason.

Slamming the taxi door behind him, he barely registered the sound of the car pulling away in a most rude sort of hurry, an automotive “fuck you” if he’d ever heard one. He stood on the curb, staring up at Amour Magique. His Taj Mahal. The stately pleasure dome. If he couldn’t get inside, if he couldn’t try to seize his chance --

“Micah!” he heard Liam call out -- warningly? Frowning, Micah glanced across the way, toward the entrance, and froze. Solid as ice in his tracks.

Liam appeared to be breaking up a fight. He had his hand planted on Collin’s chest, and he was shaking his head at the other opponent, dressed in black leather that would shame a prostitute.

Himself. No, someone who looked just like him.

Wearing *horrible* clothes.

Micah thought he might die of humiliation -- after, that was, he figured out just what the hell was going on. What had Liam done, gotten an impersonator? He’d show the runty twinkie a thing or two about respect and manners and timing and --



Micah didn't see the obstacle coming, because to all appearances, it wasn't there. However, he certainly registered it as, with a resounding clang, he ran head-first into something invisible and fell backward, too stunned to yelp.

## Chapter Four

Micah himself wasn't what he would call a truly moral man. After all, just like good old Luis, he'd fucked and sucked his own way into small-time stardom -- but he did live life by a code.

*Never scowl or frown or pout; it makes wrinkles. Never show your fears or shed your tears. Outer perfection is what counts, so stifle your inner voices. Be as two-dimensional and pretty as your pictures, because they're all anyone wants to see when they meet you in person.*

He was a Stepford fag, knew it, and wore the imaginary circlet of pearls with a bright smile and a coy come-hither aura. The look had served him well enough until he'd hit the doomsday birthday, and ever since then it had all gone down to dirt.

When he thought about where he'd ended up, and why, Micah found himself swimming in a sea of confusion. Like a child or a very old man who'd dropped his ice cream, he found all the good times and tasty bits of his life missing, but couldn't figure out where they'd gone ... or how they'd led him here.

So he'd done what he always did, more or less. Applied his code to life when he went out in public, let his inner bitch rip at The Brotherhood, and kept searching for a way back

into the good life he'd loved to live. Realizing day by day his chances of finding another doorway leading inside the golden circles were getting slimmer and slimmer.

Who wanted a has-been?

Amour Magique had been his shining star ever since Liam had mentioned the group would be visiting en masse. He'd clung to a slender, fragile hope that inside the club, he'd find himself a prince. Whether old and fat and ugly or young and strong and beautiful, he didn't care. Just someone to take care of him, because he had no idea how to do live life on his own two feet, and he wasn't about to ask anyone like Simon or Liam.

He'd *known* he would get lucky.

Which was why, as Micah raised himself from the pavement, dazed, his ears still ringing, he stared at the sight of The Brotherhood and his doppelganger vanishing inside Amour Magique, and would have screamed out a protest if he'd been able.

Instead, he scrambled up off the pavement, did a frantic pat down of his doe-supple pants for rips and his ivory shirt for smudges, breathed a prayer of thanks when he found nothing but a tiny stain dim light would hide, and ran hell bent for leather to catch up with the others.

He did pause long enough to test the *whatever* he'd run into. Felt pretty foolish, but he thought he was discreet in how he handled things. A slight kick of the foot, a lean forward with one shoulder -- and nothing there to get in his way. Breathing a heavy sigh of relief, he slowed his pace to a sexy, "The world is my oyster, and woe betide the fool who doesn't know it" lope.

The lines of men behind the velvet ropes set up a growling as Micah walked past. He heard everything muttered or shouted behind him as he moved forward outside the queue with deliberate carelessness.

"Bastard!"

"Hey, you can't cut in line like that, man!"

“Who does he think he is, fronting everyone?”

“Who is he?”

“I know I’ve seen his face before. Maybe in a magazine?”

“Is he a movie star?”

“I don’t know. He kinda looks like that guy who was in the film about the aliens, you know, the one with the messy hair ...”

“Honey, his hair is not messy. It takes a couple hundred dollars at the stylists’ and a few dabs of hair gel worth its weight in gold to get his ‘tousled’ look.”

“Like you’d know.”

“Sweetie, this kind of glamour you don’t see on ordinary mortals. I’m telling you, he’s either someone famous or someone rich.”

Micah hid his smile at the campy praise and kept moving. To his pleasure, the mutterings were turning more or less positive.

“God, he’s gorgeous.”

“You’re telling me? I’d do him in a heartbeat.”

“You should be so lucky.”

The two men who’d made that particular exchange burst into laughter. Micah stopped his frown of confusion just in time and kept on slinking at his own leisurely pace.

“Maybe he’s a porn star,” a youngish voice said, just about college age and finally, eagerly legal to drink. “I think I saw him in *Little Gods of the Big Top*.”

“Oh, yeah, right! He was one of the Nelly bottoms.”

“You’re crazy. Someone as smooth as he is? No way. Top.”

“I’d put money on it.”

“Put the cash where your mouth is, then.”

Micah fought to hide a scowl. He did not look like the cheesy, sleazy actor they were comparing him to. He was ... Micah almost wilted ... younger. Better endowed. Indubitably higher class.

*Stop thinking. Keep walking. Don't let them know you've heard what they're saying. A star never stoops to gossip. Almost there.*

"Me, I think he is beautiful."

The simple statement almost stopped Micah in his tracks. Despite all his training, he couldn't stop turning just a bit to see who -- oh, God. His eyes flickered up and down the huge man waiting in line, muscles bulging *deliciously* beneath his tight button-down shirt. Ugh, department store goods! Expensive, yes, but so common! A shame someone so gorgeous didn't have better sense ...

He realized he was staring when the giant gave him a timid smile. "Hello."

Micah quickly looked back toward the bouncer. Just a few feet away. He'd be there in no time. He didn't mean anything harsh by ignoring the ill-spoken big guy, honestly. But who on earth said men were beautiful? Add that to his complete lack of clothes sense and Micah's radar pinged, Loser!

He couldn't afford a loser, no matter how nice he seemed or how downright cute he was. No matter how much he might wish otherwise.

Wait a second! What, was he slipping?

Micah boggled at his thoughts. He did not go and fall for every Johnny Hayseed who happened to have a cute face and a voice made of pure sex. He was there at Amour Magique for one reason and one reason only: to hook a huge prize out of a vast pond. There'd be competition, sure, but if he knew anything, Micah was well aware he had the face, the body, and the inner wellspring of charm to draw on when he felt like making use of his infrequently tested talent.

Just a few more steps. Micah carefully regulated his breathing, dropped his eyelids to half-mast, and ignored the men behind him hooting at Babe the Blue-Shirted Ox.

*Think sultry. Project confidence. Exude sensuality. No one can turn you down. Now, come on, boy, and get this party started!*

He pulled to a stop in front of the bouncer, tilted his head fetchingly to one side, and began, "My friend Liam said I should mention his name --"

A huge hand flew through the air to land palm-first fractions from his nose. "Liam?" a voice welled from the pit of the bouncer's burly chest. "I already let him and his friends in. Twelve guys altogether. Them's all who get to get in VIP and free."

"Yes, but there had to have been some mistake --"

"Nuh-uh. I counted. Twelve. T-w-e-l-v-e. One guy who looked kinda like you, 'cept he was about to bust through his go-gos." The crowd behind the ropes burst into laughter. Micah's ears burned. "You might be his twin or somethin', but you weren't with the group Liam said could go in."

"But I was supposed to be with them! I -- he -- me --"

"Duh, duh, duh," the bouncer mocked. "You think I give a flyin' fuck, Miss Priss? Get your pretty ass to the back of the line. You weren't with Liam, so you don't get no special treatment."

Micah stared, mouth hanging slightly open.

"I don't take bribes, neither," the bouncer said, flicking Micah's lip with his thumb. "But, hey, maybe you come see me later, off shift, huh?"

"Why, you ill-bred, unmannered --"

"Oh, get to the back, Princess." The bouncer shoved Micah, hard enough to make him stagger. "No one wants you up here. Just about don't want you at all. Ain't no one here who'd let you jump them in line, either. That right, men?"

Crowds, always so fickle. As if delighted to see Micah brought low, every last one of them, from the hecklers to the admirers, burst into a ragged cheer.

All, that was, except one. A familiar voice, as husky and dark as molten sugar cane juice, burred out, "He can take my place in line, if he would like to."

Big ol' Blue. It figured.

## Chapter Five

The giant offered Micah another of his shy, almost boyish smiles and shuffled back a step, clearing an inch or so of space to be squeezed into. Open, honest, generous, and corn-fed as a prize steer. Did they feed corn to cattle? Micah blinked and shook himself mentally.

Decisions. He hated decisions. Almost as much as he hated being scorned and scoffed at. The crowd was still loud in his ears, rooting for the bouncer, who looked just about ready to give Micah another push back “where he belonged.” Wisdom said to get moving, pride said, *To hell with this -- I demand my rights!*, and bewilderment won the day as he stared at the big, gentle-seeming lug who was willing, despite the way he’d been snubbed, to offer him a place in line.

“Come on, pretty boy,” the bouncer warned. “You wanna get thrown off the grounds for good tonight?”

Micah wavered. The huge man in his ill-chosen clothes smiled again and held out a hand. The bouncer balanced on the balls of his feet, clearly ready to take a swing.

“Well,” he said to the gentle giant, forcing his voice to be as silky-cool and sensual as if he’d been offered a glass of champagne at a party -- something nice, but expected as his right -- “how kind of you to offer such a thing. Excuse me, men.”



With a toss of his very expensively *tousled* hair at the bald-shaven bouncer, Micah strode back a few steps. He paused at the edge of the rope. Manners, yes, he had to remember those. Showing how well-bred he was never failed to impress people who knew how gentility worked. "Micah," he said, offering a hand and ignoring the hoots of "Limp wrist!" that went up behind him. "And you are?"

"My name Joey is," the ox said, his shy smile blossoming into a huge grin. "Come in to join me." He lifted the rope in one huge hand, pitons scraping in protest as they left the pavement to dangle in mid-air.

Swallowing a gulp at Joey's obvious strength -- dear God, those things were solid iron - - Micah stepped boldly under the ropes and found himself snuggled chest to chest with more muscles than he'd been in close proximity to since his last iron-man party. "My, you are a big one," he said without thinking. Damnation! There went his blush again!

Fortunately, the giant -- *Joey*, Micah reminded himself -- didn't seem to take offense. "Yes. I am big." He beamed genially. "But not to hurt. No. I am gentle, like teddy bear. Nice man."

"Yes ... I'm sure." Micah gingerly tried to edge back, and got an elbow to the ribs for his trouble. Apparently the people behind Joey didn't appreciate his show of kindness as much as he did. Well, screw them! There was one true-blue man left in Charleston, and he'd decided to play by the rules of order. Far be it from Micah not to take advantage.

Though he did feel rather sheepish at how he'd treated Joey earlier, to have his rudeness repaid by generosity instead of a slap in the face in return as he deserved.

Micah did a mental double-take. *What is wrong with me tonight?* he demanded of himself. First feeling sorry for people, and now repenting his sins? God help him, he'd turn into a preacher soon, and wouldn't that be a sight for the devil's eyes?

Joey put a huge but surprisingly nimble and mobile hand on Micah's shoulder. It felt big enough to engulf him, but his touch was delicate, not heavy. "See?" he asked hopefully. "I mean you no harm."

To his surprise, Micah believed the big ox.

Also, to his even greater shock, he actually found himself enjoying the feel of that great vast mitt laid down on him. Gave him some lovely thrills and chills racing up his spine, zinging little perks of interest down to his cock.

Ooh, this was *just* the sort of man who whirled Micah around in their dream castle at night. The kind who'd feed you grapes while you reclined lazily in bed, fuck you blind, and make love to you until you saw the light, then go make a pot of coffee to wake you up.

Definitely not rich as caviar, so minus several dozen zeroes and points, but one hundred percent edible. Almost made Micah's mouth water.

What would it hurt to pretend -- just make believe -- for as long as they were waiting in line? He'd have to send his new friend off once he got inside and went to either track Liam down and make him pay, or dive right into the pool and set himself up to be worshiped. Why not show Joey how a grateful man paid his debts of honor?

*Yes, Micah decided. I will. Why be a jerk like rotten old Luis to this guy when he did me a favor, when he saw what I was worth? Besides, someone like him isn't going to have a great time once he gets inside. It'd be like poor old Simon jumping into the leather dancers' pits. No, I'll give him a good memory of this night.*

*I'll give him something to remember me by.*

Leaning closer into the wall of chest muscles, Micah gave in to the urge to run his fingers up and down the ridged stomach and test, playfully, for ticklishness. Joey laughed, a big, booming, unashamed guffaw and half-doubled when he hit a sensitive spot. "You play with me!" he exclaimed, not realizing how it would sound.

Micah ignored their growing peanut gallery. "I expect I am," he said, keeping his voice low and slinky. "Do you mind?"

"Mind? I not mind. Not one bit. Play more?"

*Aww, it's like King Kong wanting to toss a ball.* Micah flicked a glance downward. Given the height differential ... if the mass pressed against his stomach wasn't a cell phone or a banana or possibly a wrench, then, oh, yes, the oversized ape definitely wanted to play.

He couldn't go so far, even if he was the sort of man to do such things. Still, Micah suspected he'd possibly be able to blow Joey's mind with the little bit he did have on offer. "I don't want to play," he leaned up to whisper in Joey's ear. "Not games for children, anyway."

The skin of Joey's face wrinkled up as he frowned. All the same, trusting as he could possibly be, his huge arms slid down to wrap around Micah's waist, helping hold him up so he could reach. "I not understand."

Micah chuckled, liquid sin in chimes. "I want to play a grown-up game," he said, ruffling his fingers through Joey's hair. Oh, good hair. Thick, soft, silky, ever so tactile. You could do amazing things with a mane like Joey's if he hadn't cut it so boringly short and floppy. If he could keep the man around, wouldn't he love to see him after a trip to Francois's salon?

But no use thinking along those lines. Micah flickered out the tip of his tongue to dot, dot, dot against Joey's earlobe. The man sucked in a breath, his grip tightening for a moment before he relaxed with a conscious effort. The weighty length all but crushed between their bellies, however, tightened up.

Micah concealed a sigh of regret. Really, he didn't fall for strangers, and he didn't swim in the shallow end of the money pool but, oh, this big guy was a serious temptation. Just like chocolate fudge, though -- so good on the lips, and you'd pay the price for ages if you let yourself give in.

Speaking of lips, though ... Micah drew back a little and let his smile glow up at Joey's big, honestly confused face. Poor guy, hadn't anyone ever wanted to kiss him before? Micah kept his hand curled around Joey's neck. "I'd like," he said softly, "to thank you."

Joey's face brightened. "Oh! You are welcome. Is that how you say --"

"No. Like this," Micah whispered, laying his lips over Joey's and capturing them in a kiss he meant to start off gentle and stay that way, a light and chaste caress.

Seconds later, as the tingles to his cock turned into multicolor lightning bolts, he began to suspect he'd spoken too soon.

*Whoa, baby!*

## Chapter Six

*Oh ... my ... God.*

*Ohmigod.*

*Oh, my God.*

The words ran over and over in Micah's head, a gabbling litany of disbelief as the man he'd intended to give a courtesy buss wrapped him in a huge, hard embrace and proceeded to kiss him like he'd never been mauled before. Joey didn't smooch like a yokel, slobber like a hound dog, or go at it shy and closed-mouthed as a neophyte. No, this man more than knew what he was doing, and was more than happy to share his experience.

*Really happy*, Micah amended as Joey picked him up as easily as a rag doll for better access and held him bodily plastered against chest, iron-hard cock, and tree trunk legs. Micah felt dizzy, and didn't think it was just from the change in altitude.

Joey's kisses were wonderful to feel. Soft lips moving just right, as if he were whispering words in his native language across Micah's mouth. A tongue delicately traced his lower lip, then snuck its clever way inside to play. Sucked on his top lip, giving it a tiny bite, then licked away the small sting. Sealed their mouths together, breathing each other's life in and out, in and out. Took small breaks, then plunged back in.

Definitely the kiss of a lifetime.

But more than that -- beyond the tingles, electric sparks, and shooting thrills of sensation -- Joey's kisses made Micah think of things he'd long since forgotten. The buzz of his first time with another young man, back in college. It'd been so illicit and dangerous, daring to lay his lips on a boy's the way he'd always wanted to. How things had moved so fast, from tentative fingers on the hem of a T-shirt to pulling it off above Micah's head, to kisses that trailed down from his nipples to his navel.

When Joey kissed Micah, Micah remembered the searing heat of that gorgeous loss of his virginity.

With a quiet moan, either of giving in, giving up to the inevitable, or letting his hair down, Micah twined his arms around Joey's neck and kissed back. He tasted the man, marveling at his flavor. He'd scoffed at novels that described men as tasting of chocolate, or berries, or pink lace. Whatever; he didn't know. Those he'd kissed had smoky mouths, either pot or tobacco, or stung with an alcohol burn. There'd been mouthwash smooches, minty fresh, and morning coffee sours. But Joey ...

How exactly did one go about recanting a former philosophy? Micah wasn't sure, but knew he'd have to figure it out. Joey did have a taste, not of salt or smoke or booze, but something Micah couldn't quite put his ... tongue ... on. A little like fresh fruit, maybe. Cherries, or sugared almonds. A hint of nutmeg-like spice. Kissing Joey tasted like eating dessert and, oh, mercy, if he didn't have to watch his weight ounce by ounce, Micah would have been such a cookie queen.

Joey drew back a bit, moving his lips to the corner of Micah's mouth. "You like?" he whispered, running his fingers up Micah's spine. "Is good?"

"Oh," Micah managed. "Yes. Is good. More, please?"

Joey's delighted laughter was swallowed in more of the delicious, heady kissing even better than mulled cider. Micah was vaguely aware, from various whoops and hollers, that they had an audience, but what did he care? They could watch for free.

Far back in his mind, a small but puffed-up figure bawled Micah out for such an appalling public display of affection, scolding him that no rich man like the one he needed to catch would want such a slut, and telling him he was a moron for out-in-the-open grappling with a virtual stranger.

Micah told the figure to go to hell, and got back to kissing Joey. A much better use of his energies, in his opinion.

Joey seemed to agree. Sliding one hand beneath Micah's ass, he kneaded one cheek ever so gently, always careful as could be, as if he feared Micah would break under his strength. He nudged his groin against Micah, who couldn't help a tipped-back head and a gasp as the startling length, weight, and heat of Joey's cock rubbed against his belly. He felt an answering hardness rising in himself, blood rushing into channels, pulsing and pounding, sending him even dizzier than he'd been before.

He almost laughed. To think he'd been planning on blowing Joey's mind! Might be they had simultaneous ... mental-gasms instead.

"What is so funny?" Joey murmured against Micah's mouth, not stopping in his eager embraces.

"Not much," Micah managed to respond, dipping down to nip at Joey's chin, then back up to the gold mine. "Just something I'd thought about earlier."

"You have no regrets?"

Micah drew back far enough to meet Joey eye to eye. "About us? This moment? Not a one, sugar. Absolutely nothing could make me sorry I've done this here with you."

“How about me?” a surly voice butted in, two ham-like hands pushing between them to knock Micah and Joey apart. They stumbled backward, Micah nearly losing his balance. From the anguished yowl behind Joey, sounded like he’d bumped someone a little too hard.

“What do you mean by this?” Joey thundered, sounding as displeased as Micah ever wanted to hear him. “I am busy.”

“Yeah? Well, so am I, thanks to you two. We got rules around here!”

“Oh? Tell me of these rules, and how do I violate them?”

“Just about humping like dogs in heat is kinda off limits on the streets, or didn’t you know that? So, you gonna behave, or do I hafta turn the hose on you two?”

“Humping? Hose?” Joey looked perplexed.

“That’s it. I don’t take smart asses, and you’re damn lucky I’m not kickin’ you out of here for good. Back of the line!”

Separated from Joey, Micah’s head had begun to throb. He’d only vaguely heard the exchange of words through a blur of migraine-type spangles dancing in front of his eyes, and the rush of blood in his ears. He reeled, then steadied himself on the pavement, his eyes falling shut.

*Oh, my God.*

He put a hand to his forehead and massaged lightly. What the ... what had he been thinking? And who ...?

He looked up, and his heart sank.

Oh.

The bouncer.

One really big, genuinely pissed off bouncer. And Joey, looking like a dark tornado head building up.

Well, the night just kept getting better and better, didn’t it?



## Chapter Seven

*Oh, dear Lord, help me. What on earth do I do now?*

Micah stood frozen to the spot, glancing back and forth between Mountain Joey and Mountain Bouncer. One might be a bit bigger than the other, but neither one of them would be someone you'd want to get in the way of if they were looking for a fight.

And they were looking. Right at each other. Stuck between them, Micah felt more than a bit like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck. All he could do was blink stupidly and pray he wasn't about to get squished.

"Public displays?" Joey growled. He pulled Micah to him with one vast arm, pinning him fast. Micah squeaked, but went along for the ride -- no way to avoid it. "Do you call what I am doing an inappropriateness?"

"I call it actin' like a horny damn fool," the bouncer shot back. "You are on my last nerve, boys. You don't get to the back of the line, we're gonna see trouble."

"You think you could fight me down?"

The bouncer whipped a nightstick, police grade, out of his belt. "Bet I could try."

Micah winced on the inside. This was about to get uglier than ugly, and he was smack dab in the middle of it. He should have known better than to kiss Joey in the first place.

After all, he did understand the laws about public indecency, and while you might get away with a swiftie smooch, sucking face and grinding groins just didn't fall in any kind of gray area.

Hell, they'd been all but having sex with their clothes on. He shuddered in distaste at memories of other couples he'd seen doing the same, then with horror as he realized how cheap he must have looked.

Joey's big hand patted down Micah's shoulder, which raised up, almost arching with indignation, like a cat would. Oh, no. He couldn't have any more of Gentle Giant's tempting caresses. Time to suck it up and play by the big boys' rules -- so to speak.

Not-so-gently nudging Joey's ribs with an elbow -- he figured nothing less would catch the man's attention -- Micah wiggled. "Mind letting me down?" he asked, no trace of eroticism in his voice, but plainly and matter-of-fact. "Don't you worry. I'll get this straightened out."

Joey let him go, all but radiating waves of confusion and hurt. "Why have you gone cold?" he asked, woebegone.

Micah hardened his heart and patted Joey's huge hand comfortingly. "Sit tight, tough guy. What happened here is my fault, not yours."

"Fault?" Joey ran his fingers through the artfully arranged mess of Micah's hair. Micah struggled not to *purr* and butt his head in return. Sinful was what it was. No one's touch should feel as good as Joey's. He'd bet it had more calories than chocolate mousse, and it couldn't possibly be less addictive. If Joey didn't let Micah go soon, there would be hell to pay, yes, indeed, for both of them.

Micah was falling, and he couldn't afford to pay for the trip down.

He carefully rearranged himself from "disheveled fuck toy" to "casually disarranged elitist." Not an easy transition given how his cock almost whined at being separated from Joey. He faced the bouncer, then slid one hand into his pocket and produced the fifty he'd

planned to tip his taxi driver with. Holding it discreetly out, he offered, "We're all reasonable men. I'm sure we can come to some kind of agreement here."

"Yeah?" The bouncer eyed him up and down, sour as unripe persimmons. His mouth pursed when he caught sight of the bill's edge peeking out from between Micah's fingers. Not up to his standards? Micah bit down a groan. He knew fifty wasn't anywhere close to a decent bribe for a bouncer at an establishment like *Amour Magique*, but he hoped the man would nibble all the same. He could handle going to the back of the line, if there was still a chance he'd get inside the doors before closing.

Dear merciful heavens, he *had* to get inside.

"Why do you give him money?" Joey sounded thoroughly disapproving. "Do you pay him to be rude to us?"

With the greatest of effort, Micah managed not to slap a hand over his own face in chagrin. His smile wavered a bit as he held out his hand, keeping it steady. "Joey, sweetie," he said through clenched teeth, "shut up, okay?"

The bouncer snorted. "Yeah, right." He grabbed Micah's hand and, as it fell open and nerveless with surprise, plucked the cash out. Holding it up to the light, he snorted like a disgusted bull, and tore the money neatly in half. "That ain't worth enough to polish my shoes," he said. "Back of the line, now! You'll be damn lucky if I let you in come time you make it up here again."

Micah thought, briefly, of the other two bills he had stashed in a secret pocket. He'd meant to buy himself a drink or two to start things off if no one offered first, and to make it look as if he wasn't pathetic and alone. Good alcohol, the kind made of liquid gold. Pricey enough for him to sip carelessly as plain water. Status symbolism in a glass. He knew just about what liquor he wanted went for.

"Fifty more?" he suggested in a low whisper.

“You will not pay this rectum for disrespecting you!” Joey boomed. He reached out and snatched the torn bill away from the bouncer. “Piece of fecal matter. Respect your betters!”

Micah closed his eyes briefly. *Oh ... well ... crap.* He waited for the explosion. It wasn’t long in coming.

The nightstick whistled as it soared through the air, aimed at someone’s gut. Micah covered his face with his hands instinctively, protecting himself -- and heard the sound of splintering wood. He glanced up, eyes popping when he saw Joey, expression severely displeased, snapping the weapon like a toothpick.

“Do not try to hit him,” Joey warned. “Do not make me angry.” He made a weird chittering noise, which Micah supposed was his native tongue. Good lord, it sounded worse than those clicky languages. He expected it translated to, “You wouldn’t like me when I’m angry.” Some things were universal.

The bouncer had gone darker than his normal deep color with rage. “Out!” he bellowed, shoving Micah back into Joey with enough force to make Joey shuffle. “Y’all get out of this line right now, and I better not see you here again tonight. You understand me?”

*No!* “But my friends -- Liam!” Micah pleaded.

The bouncer’s eyes narrowed. “You think I care?” he threatened. “Take yourself and your big-ass boyfriend outta here, or I’m callin’ the cops, and I bet he ain’t quick enough to get their weapons down!”

Micah’s heart stuttered. Police? Oh, even worse! Looking up, he saw the gathering words on Joey’s face and, once again, instinct stepped in and took over his mouth. “Joey,” he said, “Lift the ropes for me? Let’s go.”

Joey blinked at Micah, clearly bewildered again, but obediently did as he’d been asked. Micah ducked under, then on the other side, made a beckoning gesture. *Come on, Joey. Come to Micah.* Slowly, almost certainly not understanding a bit of Micah’s strategy, he lumbered out -- no, not lumbered. Micah stared at how gracefully Joey moved. Almost like a

French danseur compared with how the bouncer moved, which was like a pile of rocks strung together with rubber bands.

Out of the line, he reached for Micah's hand. Micah let Joey have it, patting his knuckles soothingly. "Don't call the cops," he whispered to the bouncer, "and I'll make sure he doesn't come back. But you'll let me in, won't you? Please?" He swallowed his pride, his dignity, and his fear. "I'll make it worth your while," he said, his voice leaving nothing to the imagination.

The bouncer wavered briefly, then shook his head with an expression of mulish stubbornness. "No way, bitch. You two are out of here for good tonight. Maybe a few other nights, too. Least until I forget your faces." He sneered. "Not real memorable, anyway."

Micah flinched back, stung to the heart. Joey still wasn't following, but apparently he had real skill at reading body language if not understanding the vernacular.

"You do not insult him!" Joey thundered. The swish of air past Micah's ear was all he had time to register before Fist met Bouncer Face, and then Bouncer met Pavement.

"Oh, shit!" Micah whispered, staring down at the fallen muscleman. "Joey, why did you --"

Joey looked at Micah, honestly bewildered. "He insulted you," he said. "I should allow this? You do not want me to defend your honor?"

"My *hon* -- Joey, you just don't do things like this!" Micah snuck a glance behind him, at the line. Most of the waiting men were cheering and pumping their fists in the air, but a few had cell phones out, and Micah just *knew* they'd be calling the local PD. "We've got to get out of here," he said urgently, grabbing Joey by the arm. "Is there anywhere around here we could go?"

Joey frowned. Slow and thoughtful, he reached into the back pocket of his stiff jeans and pulled out a wallet big and bulky as himself. He flipped it open and peered inside. Micah

got a glimpse of the contents. His jaw dropped. He hadn't seen so many C-notes since the last time he'd window-shopped at a famous jewelry store in New York.

"Don't flash those around!" he hissed, trying to pry the wallet out of Joey's hands.  
"Someone could rob us -- I mean, you!"

Joey gave Micah a doubtful look, then glanced at the bouncer for emphasis. *All right, point.* "Have I money enough to hire a taxi cab?" he asked, amazingly without any sort of guile. "Enough for two to ride?"

"Yes," Micah said with relief. "Taxi. Great idea. Let's get out of here, huh?" He stepped forward, meaning to summon one of them from the bank, but as he did he caught sight of a police car rounding the corner.

Grabbing Joey's hand, he began moving back, away from the squaddie, at high speed.  
"On second thought, let's walk," he said. "This way. Fast."

## Chapter Eight

How they got away from the club without being spotted by police officers, pointed out by the crowd of cheering, jeering men, or nailed by the groggily rousing, thoroughly grouchy bouncer, Micah didn't know -- and didn't think he wanted to. He'd just thank heaven for small mercies and get out of there while he still had two working legs to carry him away.

All the same, he couldn't resist a small, pitiful whimper, like a disappointed puppy, when he peeked back over his shoulder and saw *Amour Magique* had vanished. Completely out of sight. Walking away felt like saying goodbye to Shangri-La right after you'd found your way into the stately pleasure dome. How had things gone so wrong, so fast? One minute he'd been sniping at Liam, and the next? Somehow catapulted into a crazy world with men the size of boulders who kissed like Prince Charming on E-lectricity and bouncers with both a chip and a grudge.

"Micah?" Joey's hand hovered just over Micah's arm, not quite touching. "You are upset? What have I done wrong to make you so sad seeming?"

"Oh, get off of me!" Micah snapped, folding his arms around his waist and marching on. "Haven't you done enough for one night?"

*Er, Micah ...* A small voice in the back of his mind tried, hesitantly, to get his attention.

"I have done something wrong?" Joey asked, wounded. "Tell me what it is I have done so I may hammer it. Nail it? Fix it!"

"You? I doubt it."

*Micah, now, slow down. You're overlooking something fairly big, here, and it's not just Joey's forward bulge.*

Micah swatted at the annoying voice and stomped onward. "I should have walked away and left you where you stood," he grouched. "God only knows why I --"

He stopped.

*Now, do you remember?* his internal counselor asked. *Wallet. Fat. Packed with large bills. Joey equals naive. Naïve equals excellent sugar daddy material. Joey also equals large and delicious. Hello? Do two and two make four, yet?*

Micah shook his head, fingers creeping up to cover his lips. Dear Lord.

"Micah? What wrong is?" Joey persisted.

"Nothing ... nothing's wrong, so much," Micah answered a little feebly. "Tell me, Joey, what do you do for a living?"

"Do?"

"Occupation. You know, where you draw a salary. Where do you work?"

"Oh!" Micah glanced up to see Joey beaming like the sun. "I do not. I am rewarded for good service, and I have all the money I need in payment. Also some inherited."

Tiny dollar signs lit up deep in the pupils of Micah's eyes -- he was sure they were there. Hastily, he lowered his eyelids, just in case an avaricious gleam shone through. "So your family is rich?"

"Oh, not so very much. Many others are more wealthier. They have billions. My family only leaves to me a few millions. Not much."



Micah's heart skipped a beat. "How ... many millions?" he asked carefully.

"About ..." Joey frowned thoughtfully. "Ten and six, I think? Possibly ten and seven if the IRS cashes in."

"IRA?"

"Yes, that is the word!" Joey patted Micah on the back. "You know so much about these things, do you?"

"A little," Micah replied, still absent. He pulled to a stop and tipped his head back, gazing up to meet Joey's gaze. Warm and genial as the sun, totally unsuspecting, and friendly as a cuddly teddy dog. No idea he had just revealed his net worth to one of the sharks circling the pool of life, ready to sink their teeth into any innocent and juicy morsels.

Something within Micah's heart, which he'd believed to be frozen, shriveled. He crumpled. He couldn't do this. No matter how desperate, he couldn't just throw his arms around Joey's neck and kiss him silly while feeling for his wallet.

*Why not?* his inner voice protested. *Grab the prize and run to show off your gold!*

*I'd have been able to if he had an ounce of common sense,* Micah argued back, realizing the insanity of holding a conversation with himself, but more or less unable to stop. *If he were an old tycoon, savvy and shrewd, who knew what kind of bad man I am and what I would do for money, not love. Not Joey. He thinks I truly like him, and ...*

*And ...*

*Well, dear God, I do like him. I'll bet you anything he isn't dumb at all, just kind of childlike in his knowledge of good and evil. He didn't get a taste of the apple in the garden, I suppose, like most of us did. Maybe it's a cultural thing. Could be the language barrier, too. But I swear, he's looking at me like I have a halo, and can I stop this line of thought and just start kissing him before I die from wanting those lips on mine again?*

The inner voice shut up. Apparently some things were worth about as much as money to Micah's psyche, and wasn't that just the shock of the decade? Surely not one he'd planned

on when he'd gone to setting up for the night's party. Dress fine, play big, win rich. Not get dirty, get mauled, and go on the run.

But, oh, God, if he didn't feel about happy enough to have sunlight burst through his buttons. His chance at Amour Magique was ruined, lost. Why not go for what he could salvage of the evening? Could be his last chance to live large, in all senses of the word and, well, just didn't make sense not to grab all the gusto he could possibly cram in.

*Cram in ... ooh.* Did he dare?

Why not?

"Joey," Micah said, coming to a decision. "Stand still for a second, would you?"

Joey stood there, his smile heartbreakingly sweet and guileless. "What am I doing?" he asked.

*Winning me over.* "You're about to be thanked for being such a gallant knight." Micah covered his inner tumult with the flippant words.

Joey's frown when he began to say, "I do not understand," was just plain so cute Micah had no choice but to reach up and kiss the lines away before they set into wrinkles.

Hmm. Looking at the issue that way, it was his duty to save Joey from himself, wasn't it? He'd hate for bad things to happen to that chiseled jaw. Lord save them all from jowls! A few kisses should do the trick ...

Apparently Joey agreed. Leaning down and into Micah's embrace, he kissed back.

Lightning flared and burst inside Micah's mind. *Ladies who are gentlemen, and gentlemen who are ladies, we have contact*, he thought dizzily, and then happily lost himself in the embrace.

## Chapter Nine

*Oh, good. A lovely alleyway. Right there to hand exactly when we need it. God, are you shining down on me after all?*

Which, Micah reflected as his body happily clung to and writhed over the mass that was Joey, would be a pretty stupid question. Seemed like when they touched lip to lip, the rest of the world melted away into absolutely nothing important at all. Nothing mattered but the hunger for more, more, and still more woken by the big guy's touch.

Micah wondered if a man could turn addict with just two tastes of good stuff. What did folks say? It only takes once? Well, normally that didn't apply to men like him in the usual sense, but this particular line did: *takes two to tango*.

*Olé!*

Joey, though -- fast learner, that one, Micah thought dazedly as massive hands roved over his arms, his back, and the tight curves of his ass. One finger ran wickedly down the cleft, making him moan like a shameless slut and arch forward into Joey.

"I don't -- I don't do things like this," Micah managed to gasp in between grabbing Joey by the hair and kissing him back with equal fervor, crazy for his taste. Just like a preacher during visitation heading for the last piece of a southern grandma's fried chicken on the

buffet, but didn't he have better things to be thinking about? Like slipping his tongue back in for more of Joey's tasty, honey-sugar almond flavor?

*Oh, yes, yum, good ...*

"You do so do things like this," Joey retorted, squeezing Micah's buttocks.

Micah writhed against him a second time -- or was it third? -- losing any traces of cool. The man just drove him wild! He had a feeling if they could just slow down and he could sit a block away with a non-fat latte for thirty minutes, he might come to his senses, but while he was being swarmed by the movable mountain? Not likely! Micah loosed a third low cry, and pressed his lips to Joey's eyelids, nose, cheeks, and chin, hunting to see if the rest of him tasted quite as good as his mouth. Almost. Definitely worth the time to check.

Joey growled and leaned forward, backing Micah into a wall.

*Nice wall. Oh, yes, good wall.* Micah liked it in particular because it meant with the wall there to support his back, Joey's hands and lips were freed up a good deal to explore further. Wicked, magical hands! Everywhere they landed, brushed, pinched, or stroked, they left tingles of the most delicious static buzz everywhere.

Micah arched happily against his aggressor, feeling as if he were on fire. Oh, so incredibly good -- and to hell with common sense and playing smart with strangers. He wanted more!

He told Joey so, not with words, but in plain enough terms, and thanking his lucky stars he was still limber enough to pull off this particular trick. Bracing his back against the wall, Micah clung to Joey with both arms and wrapped his legs around the vast man's surprisingly trim, hard waist.

*Yes, yes, yes -- that's the honey pot.*

They wouldn't have been able to manage it standing up in front of each other, but just like this, their groins could meet, heavy cocks bumping hard, one against the other. Both men drew in a sharp breath, then paused briefly to pant over one another's mouths.

“Want you,” Joey said, voice thick. He slid his hands under Micah’s ass and pulled them closer. Micah began to rock back and forth, absolutely shameless, setting up a delicious friction that Joey surely did seem to appreciate. Snarling, almost animal-like, he let loose with a string of chittering syllables and then dove back in for the gold.

Long moments later, Joey tore his mouth away, gasping. “You,” he said, breaths ragged. “You make me -- don’t know words right to say --” He broke into more clicking noises, finishing with “-- devour you.” He clutched Micah tighter, sliding his tongue into Micah’s mouth and dancing a fandango.

*Mamma mia!* Micah gave as good as he got. Exotic sex rhythms met the eroticism of the Charleston and, my, but it was a big party in the old town tonight! But finally, needing to breathe, Micah was the one to pull away. A man could only inhale through his nose so much, no matter how much practice he had, before shortness of breath made him dizzy in a way no make-out partner would be likely to appreciate in the end.

But still -- “More,” he mewled, undulating against Joey as if he were a cat in heat. The things this man did to his libido! He wanted Joey more than iced tea on a summer day. “Give me more!”

Joey rasped out a glittering string of sharp-edged words that made no sense, at least not in English. Might have been his native speech, or might just have been the babbling of a man pushed all but past the point of no return. “There is not enough of you,” he said. “No -- wrong. I am wrong. I cannot get enough of you. You are shaped well and ever so delicious and --”

“Shut. Up,” Micah growled, stopping Joey’s voice with a ravenous kiss. They struggled and pushed, shoved and grappled again for deliciously torturous, endless moments or hours until the need for oxygen asserted itself once again.

Panting, they leaned against each other, Joey’s face buried in the crook of Micah’s neck. Even his breath smelled fragrant, Micah thought in wonder, carding and combing the

fingers of both hands through Joey's soft, thick hair. God, he had to grow that mane out! He'd be beyond sexy, then. A modern Zeus -- he giggled -- lightning bolts and all!

"What is funny?" Joey asked against Micah's skin, the words tickling.

"Me," Micah said, and laughed out loud for the joy of it. Being with this stranger, in an alley of all godforsaken places, all but fucking him blind and stupid because the need drove him on? Pure bliss. Had he ever cared about money? To hell with money! He wanted to be paid in currency of Joey, and he demanded his check for the big payoff.

Speaking of which ... one of Joey's massive hands was crawling down Micah's chest, rubbing each ridge of his abs before creeping further, stopping at the belt of his leather pants. *Ooh, I can get behind this idea*, Micah thought, laughing hysterically at himself. *What on earth has gotten into me? I don't know, but there's one thing I'd like to put in me ...*

He reached for the fastening on Joey's jeans. The living rod of iron just underneath fascinated him to no end. Dear God, was his cock long enough and hard enough to be peeking out his waistband? Micah did believe he had the truth of it. How big *was* Joey? Size-proportionate? Oh, Lord!

"Hallelujah," he whispered, his fingers diving.

To his dismay, Joey intercepted them mid-plunge, shaking his head frantically against Micah's neck. "No, no," he gabbled. "Too much -- I am -- you steal my voice -- I cannot -- not here, not now -- too close --"

Micah struggled, but it was like some unlucky fool who wasn't named Arthur yanking at a sword stuck in a stone for all that he could move his hand. "Want," he pouted into Joey's hair, diving down to nip at the top of one well-shaped ear. *Not the only thing about him cut just right ...* "Please?"

"No, I cannot. Not yet." Joey struggled for control. "But you -- I could you do --" The hand not holding Micah's arced beneath the leather belt holding Micah's erection pinned

into place, swiping at the top -- and Micah all but turned inside out as the electric fizz surrounded his entire cock.

“No!” he yelped. “Leather! Not in leather!”

“What? Why?”

“It stains!” Micah moaned unhappily. “Please, not the leather.”

Joey growled, a deep, irritated sound, and pushed his forehead against Micah’s. Felt a little like being butted by a curly-horned ram. “Neither of us,” he lamented. “Cannot, not right now. No matter how much the want.”

“Want,” Micah agreed feverishly. “Want, want, need, ache, want ...”

“Then why we must wait until the night is over? We can make it early, as they say.” Joey demanded. He let go of Micah’s hand, giving it a warning tap to behave itself, and fumbled in his pocket. He drew out a slim metal card with indentations on it.

Glory day. A hotel key. Micah would have kissed the thing if Joey’s lips hadn’t been handier and a good deal nicer. He showed his appreciation in proper fashion, losing himself briefly to the wild, drunken spree of emotions before yanking away to gasp, “What are we waiting for? Let’s go!”

Joey dropped him, caught him before he could stumble, and held out his hand. Micah grabbed it, fever and fire singing through his veins.

“Let’s go,” his giant rumbled, and if that sounded like an invitation through the pearly gates to paradise? Well, crazy as it was, as the whole night had been, the notion suited Micah just *fine*.

## Chapter Ten

*Now this? This is the life.*

Micah found himself almost wanting to strut like a proud bantam rooster as he made his way down the sidewalks of Charleston with Joey looming at his side. The crowds might be thinning as the hour drew later, but he could feel every gaze on him and the man at his side. Wondering, admiring, envying. Been so long since he'd felt sheer adoration en masse that the sensation all but made his head spin. Lord, if it did any more twirling it'd come clean off his neck!

Micah didn't think he'd mind, though.

He tucked his arm through Joey's, beaming at the women they passed, who looked first surprised, then disappointed. He caught a few whispers of "I knew it! All the good ones are gay!" -- and almost hooted out loud. Good one! *Midas must have laid his lucky hands on me because, tonight, I'm golden again*, Micah thought exultantly.

He knew he looked good. Joey had waited patiently outside a small café while Micah went in, ordered a coffee on his way to the restroom, and checked himself out in the full-length mirror.



A damp paper towel did wonders for refreshing his complexion, and, well, the ivory shirt looked like a Shar-Pei, but blessed be if the cut wasn't so good wrinkles didn't distract at all. Add a gentle smoothing of another moistened napkin over it, ever so light, and the rumpling had fallen right out like autumn leaves from trees.

*And I am an autumn*, Micah had thought, preening in front of the mirror, admiring his trim body in the silk and leather, carefully rearranging his hair for maximum sex appeal. If Joey had liked him before, well, now he just planned to knock the man's socks off.

Did he wear socks? Oh, Micah hoped so. The bare ankles look was awful in anything but sandals on the beach, but in sneakers? Ugh! Not to be considered.

Satisfied, he'd sailed out of the bathroom, collected his coffee, and promptly passed it over for Joey to carry. He'd taken the small paper cup obediently, if with a look of confusion, while Micah'd snuck a glance at his feet. Socks, thank mercy. White athletic tubes, how dreadful, but not too unforgivable with tennies.

He glanced in a shop window as they passed. Dark, but still a decent reflection. "Beauty and the Beast," he murmured, smiling more carefully, keeping it polished and seductive for the public viewing audience.

"What is this?" Joey asked abruptly, startling Micah. The old lug hadn't said a word since they'd left the alley, seeming content to let Micah cling to him and walk slowly enough so Micah didn't have to run to match his strides.

"What is what, sugar?" Micah asked, carefully teasing a lock of hair just so, discreetly, with his pinky finger. *Ahh, better*. He looked up. "Don't tell me you've never had a non-fat latte before, now."

Then again, considering Joey's size, possibly not. Micah gave Joey's arm a fond squeeze. "Go on, try yourself a sip," he encouraged. "Bet you'd like the way they roast the beans."

Joey eyed the cup with alarm. "Roasted beans?"

Micah frowned. "Most folks do like their coffee a little browned before they grind it up to brew," he said. "It's coffee. You know what coffee is."

"Coffee?"

"Oh, come on, now, stop being silly. You know, what you drink when you get up in the mornings. Or do you like sodas, or maybe tea? I surely wouldn't have pegged you as a tea type. I just bet you grew up in a big old farmhouse with a dozen brothers or sisters, and every morning before he went off to kick-start the tractor, your daddy sucked down a few mugs of java. Strong and black." Micah goosed Joey's ass and laughed to see him jump. "Coffee. Espresso. Latte. Cappuccino. All those good things."

"In one cup?" Joey still eyed the container with some confused awe.

Micah's patience was running out. He wanted to bask in the public adoration until he got back to the hotel with Joey, where he then wanted to have spectacular sex -- safe sex, mind you -- and ride the stallion into the sunrise. He did not feel like wasting his time on cultural confusion.

"For heaven's sake, just take a drink!" he exclaimed. "Put the cup to your mouth and sip."

The caution with which Joey took a taste, and the face he pulled, absolutely got under Micah's skin. "Look, you big lug. This is the finest coffee a man can get from a late night café," he snapped. "Not poison. Not toxic waste. I paid good money for this, and you're going to drink and enjoy, do you understand?"

Joey puzzled at the cup for another moment. Then, warmth and a smile spread across his face like a rising sun. "You buy this for me?" he asked, sounding delighted and stunned. "For me this is a present?"

Micah opened his mouth to say, *Don't be silly, I just wanted my hands free so I made you carry the cup* -- then thought better of the words. He closed his mouth carefully,

forming it into a gentle smile, and squeezed Joey's arm. "Drink up, big boy," he murmured, bumping Joey with his hip.

Joey laughed out loud, free and happy as a teenager with his first beer. He tipped up the cup and drank its contents down in three long swigs, easy as milk. "Is strong to be so small," he said, licking a mustache of foam off his upper lip. "Like you, yes? So sweet and so good tasting."

"Stop it, now, you'll make me blush."

Joey cut Micah a sly glance. "When you say these things, you actually mean I should go on, yes?"

*Well! He learns, even if he needn't be so direct about it.* Micah was about to respond when Joey leaned down and burred into his ear, "I should have made you ruin the leather when you said no, then, correct?"

The touch of lips to earlobe sent another set of those mind-fogging, incredibly wonderful tingles down Micah's throat. The buzz arced to his cock, which reminded him it was feeling the binding pressure of leather and would like to come out and play, pretty please, public display or not. He told it to behave, then leaned against Joey.

"I'd have skinned you alive if you'd made me spoil my clothes," he murmured with a coat of sugar on his tone.

"I like you too."

Micah stared at Joey. Of all the ... how dared he ... well. Now this was just something they'd have to discuss. Like didn't enter into this, or it shouldn't. This little jaunt was all about chemistry, and two bodies needing to collide like ships in the night. In *passing*, not to see each other again.

That was, unless, on investigation, Joey did prove to have a few actual million dollars -- U. S., not pesos or rupees. Then, Micah might just see what he could do. He did like a fixer-upper, if it had potential, and he could see what a gem Joey would be with some polish.

Maybe a good strong topaz with Micah on him like a diamond setting. They did look splendid together.

A mental image flashed into Micah's mind of how they'd look in bed, tall with small, sturdy with slender, Micah astride and galloping into the West -- so to speak. Flushed skin, salty beads of sweat, Joey's big hand coming up to encircle Micah's cock with his delicate way of touching -- *oh!* He shivered hard.

He'd just save the lecture on what was and wasn't allowed in polite conversation for later, then, wouldn't he? In the meantime ... "How far is it to your hotel, now?" he asked, clearing his throat when his voice slid up an octave or two. "It's a little *hard* to keep walking so far."

Joey gave Micah a look filled with deep and sexy meaning, like burnished gold over good mahogany. You didn't need a flawless grasp of a language to get double entendres if they were spoken just right. Hell, you didn't need words at all. Micah shivered happily, laying his hand over Joey's. They stood for a long moment, eyes meeting eyes, Micah savoring the tingle where bare skin touched.

Finally, Joey shook his head with a smile. "We go no further."

"What?" Micah blinked.

"No need to travel more. See?" Joey pointed to the next mansion up the street, which Micah noticed had a very discreet sign on the gate announcing it rented suites by the week or month. "We are here. This is my home."

This time, Micah was absolutely positive that dollar signs and golden phalluses lit up his eyes.

And in the back of his mind, he heard that tiny little voice yelling, "Score!"

## Chapter Eleven

“Oh, my word,” Micah said breathlessly, staring around himself. “I don’t think I know what to say.”

Joey beamed. “Welcome to my home! This is where I hang my hat, yes?”

“Where you dropped your hat, at least.” Micah nudged at a ball cap lying on the floor at the foyer’s elegant parquet edge. Grimy and mud-stained, looking like it’d been through some splashy off-road fun, it sat like a dirty lump on the face of sheer elegance and all but stuck its tongue out at him. *Deal with this, Princess*, the thing mocked.

Micah swallowed. There were few things in life he truly did hate, and among them was seeing treasure treated like trash. He’d always kept his place and his things neat and tidy as a row of new pins, even when he’d been at boarding school and you couldn’t do a whole lot with scarred old wood and moldy smelling air. To see a set of rooms that should have sparkled with the brilliance of gems gone tarnished and slightly green around the edges ... well, it almost made him nauseous.

He put a hand to his mouth. “Oh, my,” he repeated.

The words bore a second airing. Joey’s home could have stood a serious airing out. Micah stood in the middle of squalor decorating splendor and struggled for words.

Not much luck. He almost felt his erection begin to deflate.

The place wasn't dirty, per se. He'd seen filth, thank you. For example, the dump Bree lived in, or the tenement David called his apartment building. But, oh, Lord, Joey's home looked to be heading that way fast. The trash can overflowed, as well as two black plastic sacks next to it. A row of stacked pizza boxes and delivery cartons waited to be bagged up. Micah sincerely hoped the empty soda cans everywhere were to join them.

He didn't see any ants. Didn't mean they weren't there, though.

And the clutter? Oh, mercy, the clutter! Joey didn't seem to have a single clue about how to hang up a shirt or fold a pair of pants, or any idea about how to operate a laundry machine. Micah saw more clothes strewn about in piles and bundles than he suspected he owned himself, which was saying a good deal. Each one of them cheap, ill-used, and poorly cared for, if they'd been treated with any TLC at all.

His heartstrings gave a painful twang as he realized a stack of boxer shorts, still in their plastic wrappings, had been stored on top of a Chippendale sideboard. "Oh," he whispered, his fingers trembling. "Oh, *Joey*."

"You like?" Joey swept Micah up from behind, pulling their bodies tightly together. "Is not much, but is home. My home. My pride and delight." He nuzzled Micah's jaw. "I want you happy here."

"Happy," Micah managed, keeping the shakes out of his voice. Happy, in the midst of travesty? "I suppose ... Housekeeping hasn't been by?"

"Not in a while," Joey said, sounding surprised that Micah would ask such a thing. "They say, they give up on me, they are not paid enough. I offer to pay more, but still they say no. I think they do not like the webs."

"W-w-w-ews?" Micah stuttered. One of Joey's big hands, locked together around his waist, extended a finger to point upwards. Micah looked, and was instantly sorry he had. The

ceiling ... *Covered* in spider silk! Thick, heavy webs from rafter to rafter, crawling with little creepies.

Micah shrieked like a girl and backed hard into Joey, his cock going down like a popped balloon. "Spiders!"

"Yes. Many of them. My pets." Joey sounded honestly confused. "Not so bright as I hoped, but still good friends." He paused. "Micah, you go brr-brr-brr, like a man very cold. What is wrong?"

"What is *right*?" Micah burst out. He put his fingers to his mouth. "You live like this?"

"Yes."

"Willingly?"

He felt Joey give a shrug that just shouted of confusion. "I am happy in my home."

Oh, dear Lord. First thing they needed to do? Call a maid service. Pay them whatever it took. Cock all but forgotten, Micah swept the room with a glance cataloging the repair work necessary. Laundry, trash, dusting, polishing, mopping, stocking the cupboards with actual vegetables and, good lord, how much did Joey *eat*, anyway?

He wiggled around in Joey's arms, gazing up at him. "I can't," he said hopelessly. "Not here. Like this. In this mess. Joey, you've got to learn how to live like a man, not a pig."

Joey looked bewildered. "I am not a swine," he protested. "I am not the neatest, no, but I am not so bad. Why do people say such things? But wait, no, Micah -- do not leave! Please, stay with me."

Micah shook his head. "I can't," he said unhappily. "Joey, this place should be a crown jewel, but it looks like it needs to be condemned. You can't live like this, and you can't expect someone to just accept things the way they are. This isn't what I'm used to, and I don't like it one teeny bit."

"Micah." Joey's hands engulfed his own. He looked terribly sad. "How do I know things if no one will teach me? You are so neat, so tidy, so pretty."

“Men aren’t pretty, sugar,” Micah tried to contradict, but Joey cut him off.

“Pretty, handsome, what difference are words? You?” One of the big hands tipped Micah’s chin up daintily. “So lovely. I wish to kiss you, not just on the lips, but all over your body. To worship you, my dark little god. I wish to give you pleasure such as you have never felt before. Yet you see how I do not know how to care for things, and you think, how can I care for you? But I do, Micah. I very much do.”

Joey bent, brushing his lips over his hair. A thrill spangled through Micah’s body. “Please, stay. Forgive my foolishnesses and do not leave. We should make love tonight. I ache for it, I burn for you. I can feel you do, too. Do not walk away and leave me lonely. Stay, Micah. Please stay?”

Micah wavered, his vision growing misty. “I don’t know ...”

Joey stared back, hangdog -- then, inexplicably, brightened. “Let me show you one thing you have not seen,” he said in excitement. “This is a room I do not visit. Usually, when I sleep it is on the couch. But I have a room just for a bed, and I do not go in there.”

He began pulling Micah along, grinning and tickling as Micah hung back. “There, now you laugh again! Perhaps you will smile when you see.” He tugged Micah along to a closed door made of heavy oak, carved with Jacks O’ the Green and -- spiders?

Micah opened his mouth to protest, but then, as Joey threw open the door, let his lips fall wide apart in shock.

A bedroom. A spotlessly clean paradise of a bedroom, with a huge four-poster covered with a satin duvet and silk pillows. Candles in sconces, just waiting to be lit. Through the opened curtains of the window, a view of Charleston finer than any he’d ever seen.

Down in the city, someone was setting off fireworks. Green and blue and red sparks swirled and whooped through the air, glittering with the fire of jewels.

Standing still, amazed, Micah barely registered Joey coming up behind him. “Dragons,” the big man whispered. “Are they not beautiful? But not so good as you. I chose you, you



know this? Picked you out of a hundred of hundreds. When I saw you, I knew, here was the one for me. This is not such a bad room, is it? Come with me, Micah. Lie with me on the bed.” He nuzzled down into the curve of Micah’s throat. “Fuck with me till morning light.”

Micah swallowed heavily. The gorgeous, clean room spoke of wealth and comfort the likes of which he hadn’t seen in ages; the man behind him, of trustworthiness and -- from the bulge in his jeans, heavy, hot and insistent -- of the ride of a lifetime.

He closed his eyes and swayed backward, deliberately putting everything else out of his mind. Pressing his ass hard against Joey’s groin he answered, in his best sultry tone, one which came naturally, “How could I possibly say no?”

## Chapter Twelve

Afterward, Micah would only be able to shrug his shoulders when someone asked him what the first time with Joey had been like. Not out of dismay, or disgust, but just for sheer lack of words. The fizzing energy which imbued all their kisses and caresses shorted out his brain from the moment he'd said yes, and everything came to him as it happened in wild bursts of friction and passion.

It was a span of time he couldn't find the words to describe, and better than anything he'd ever had before. More wonderful, he suspected in brief flickers of clarity, than anything he'd taste during the rest of his life, however long his years happened to be.

Fucking Joey wasn't just sex. It was being consumed, body and soul.

He remembered flickers, stop motion moments captured in his mind ...

"I need you," Joey whispered, lifting Micah ever so easily and sitting him on the edge of the bed fit for two princes of the night. "Desire you so much. More than air or light or salt." He trailed kisses up the leather covering Micah's thigh, pausing to breathe warm air over his pulsing groin. "You are my world, and all I need. May I be as such to you. May I?"

Micah groaned, lying back slowly. The silk sheets enveloped him, warming to his touch. He rolled his head on the duvet, reaching up to grasp Joey's shoulders.

"You want me?" he asked, voice throaty without deliberate attempt to make it so. The need for one another built in the air like the heavy weight of an oncoming storm, one that would knock him off his feet. "You need me like that?"

"And more," Joey whispered, sliding off Micah's suede boots and gently slipping away his socks. Vast hands kneaded his high arches with the daintiest touch, feather-light. Micah moaned and arched, clutching at what skin he could reach on Joey. His cock throbbed, anxious to feel the same whispery yet powerful contact.

"Please," Micah breathed. "Let me be *more*." And the surrender didn't seem out of place at all, never mind how he would never let himself go otherwise. There, at that moment, submitting to Joey's mastery of manipulating the human body to heights beyond his wildest dreams, all he could feel was, *Natural, right. Now, please, now.*

Joey chuckled, soft and low. "Patience," he murmured, hands caressing up the tightly molded leather pants to Micah's thighs. "Be patient, please, rush me do not. Let me now in. I will show you what it is for a man like me, so big and strong, to love make to a treasure like you ..."

Micah lost himself then as long fingers did away with his zipper, sliding binding materials out of his way. Micah thought there were other kisses, neither one of them able to hold out any longer, grasping desperately at each other. He vaguely remembered fumbling for Joey's waist and having his hands pushed aside.

"No," Joey said gravely, standing. "This is for me to do. Have patience, a moment longer, but please, please, do not run away in fear, my Micah ..."

Micah shook his head muzzily. "Run? Why would I -- *ohh*." He watched, captivated as a mouse by a python, as Joey slowly stripped off his jeans and kicked them into a corner.

“You ... you’re ...” He shook his head. God be praised, he’d never seen anything like Joey naked.

Long legs, corded with strong muscles, flexing and rippling, rock hard in their bulges. Legs fit to work hard and play harder, tough enough to do anything from breaking rocks to running a hundred miles without growing tired. A chest broad enough for six palm-spans, carved out of solid granite, yet rising and falling hummingbird-fast with Joey’s quick breathing.

Arms bulky enough to lift a tree from its roots, or to support his lover’s body in any position they could ever want to try. A man so big and strong he put Michelangelo’s *David* to shame, and far more beautiful besides. Looking at Joey, Micah felt his eyes dampen in sheer wonder. How could anyone so marvelous want a washed-up model for their bed-mate?

But he did want Micah, and no mistake. His cock told the truth. A cock impressive enough to take away the most jaded gay man’s breath. Even a connoisseur of porn would have fallen to his knees in worship of the mighty prick Joey boasted, more than size-proportionate, dark purple against the paler flesh of his thighs, easily nine inches long. Not so large that Micah would have been scared, but just enough more than usually came in a man’s package to set his nerves trembling with anticipation.

Joey smiled down at him, and ever so slowly crawled onto the bed, hovering over Micah, their lips all but touching. “Do you like what you see?” he asked.

Micah had nodded feverishly.

He threw his arms around Joey’s neck and brought the heavy weight of him all but crashing down across his torso. Quick thinking brought the massive man to a support on his forearms, but didn’t stop him from crushing their mouths together like a white-capped wave of the sea on to the shore, rushing in with a tidal wave of passion that turned the moments fluid again.

Micah desperately tried to raise his legs, to wrap them around Joey's waist, and felt Joey gently pressing him down, mumbling, "Not yet, not this time, too soon," into Micah's chest. Sharp teeth worried at his nipples, then licked the sting away.

Micah's heart beat so fast he thought it would fly out of his chest when at last, finally, Joey's hand came down to wrap around his cock, thumb circling the tip ever so slowly and lazily, while his mouth whispered wonderfully filthy words into Micah's lips.

He writhed and arched, straining for more contact and still more. Heard Joey gasping, "No, no, wait!" and rummaging in the bedside table, coming out with two condoms and sachets of almond-scented lube, as pleasantly fragrant as his breath. He unrolled one over Micah's cock, easing the latex into place gossamer-softly, the tingles zinging through them both as they rocked and almost came.

Micah reached out, hands shaking, touched Joey's own cock.

Listened to the tortured sounds the big man made as Micah gripped and squeezed, jacked the velvet flesh over the steel core, cupped a huge sac in his palm, and rolled the nuts just right, hard enough to entice but easy enough not to hurt, the way a man knew another man liked.

Reaching up to bite a line of kisses from nipple to nipple as he slid the condom onto Joey's huge, engorged cock and slathered it with some cherry-scented lubricant, all but praying to the organ as it twitched and jerked under his touch. A hungry snake, it bucked in his palm, desperate to bury itself inside Micah and be fed.

"No," Joey whispered, sounding miserable yet thrilled beyond words. "Not yet, my Micah, not yet. I am too much. There would have to be practice much, and I cannot wait. Need you now, fast, hard. I would not hurt you. We make do with this, yes?"

Arching his hips, he sent his slippery cock skating across the hard planes of Micah's belly. He hissed when organ met organ, bumping into each other with only the thin latex to

separate them. Micah had opened his mouth, whether to sing hallelujah or to scream, he didn't know ...

Sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell -- they came in more flashes and sensations. Breaths souged out in great heaving gusts, washing over them, swapping across mouth to mouth as they drank life from each other.

Flesh slid against flesh, slippery slick, trails of fire coursing over their stomach muscles as their pace quickened, unable to hold back any longer.

Blood galloped though Micah's veins, making him as excited as a wild mustang.

He threw his arms around Joey, managed to lift his legs and tangle the two of them harder together. Joey's cock slipped down between the cleft of Micah's ass, and both of them muffled their shouts at the heat and pressure. They barely stopped themselves from crying out, hissing as the fat head of Joey's dick only prodded at Micah's entrance, and groaning as Joey pulled back, then, in apology, lavished Micah's throat with hard sucks sure to raise welts.

Moans and curses, filthy words made beautiful as a heavenly chorus rose as they gave themselves up to the power and the whirlwind of *lust* that Micah knew was thrumming in both their ears.

"Micah-my-own, my Micah," whispered over and over again in his ear between long kisses that tasted of honeyed liqueur and need.

The pressure built to a height Micah couldn't bear, his whole world and all he knew drawn down to the throbbing of his cock, caught between Joey's weight and the hardness of his stomach. His balls tightened and drew up fist-like against the soft skin behind them.

He arched up, babbling a stream of liquid nonsense, screaming out the words that had only one meaning -- *Oh, God, so good, so good, coming, coming now* -- then there was the explosion of molten heat, slick semen filling the condom.

Joey loosed a long string of his own words, arching hard against Micah, hands fisting tightly enough in the duvet to tear the silk, humping his belly roughly enough to bruise, but with such a good pain that Micah's eyes rolled back and his own cock spasmed again, rolling with the thrill as thunder followed lightning ...

... and collapsed, Joey landing on his side, tugging Micah to him, chest to chest, both of them slick with sweat and licking it off each other in slow, lazy stripes as they came down, down, down from the greatest height each had ever known.

Well-fucked, kissing, and boneless in the afterglow.

The ride of a lifetime captured in one blissful span of the hourglass, forever etched into Micah's memory.

He never wanted the bliss to fade.

Clutching Joey to him, Micah raised his lips for another languid kiss, and lost himself again in the sensations of making love.

## Chapter Thirteen

*What have I done?*

Micah slipped his hand beneath the cool linen of a pillowcase, running his fingers over the downy inside before clenching it tight into a fist. He resisted the urge to curl up into a ball, forcing himself to lie still on his side, legs only drawn up just a little and one arm wrapped around his ribs. He shivered, sweat cooling on his bare skin as the central air kicked on, and wished the silk duvet would catch some body heat. He felt so cold.

*What have I done?*

Micah almost shook his head, but stopped himself in time. As the orgasm high wore off, and Joey dropped into a light slumber, it felt as if some spell had worn off. The magic cord weaving them together in a playful wrestling match of chemistry and sexual tension ... snapped. While Joey snored soft and low, Micah shrank away from the big arm which would have held him close, eased onto his side, and began to shake.

He didn't do things like this. In the past, if he'd had sex, he'd had a reason. Always a good reason. A better grade, a modeling contract, coaxing Luis not to walk out on him. Money, favors, a reputation as a fabulous lover. He'd kept his sex life under the same iron



control as his party habit and his modeling career. Everything had a place and time. You just had to know how to work it, to make the rewards worth it.

He'd gotten close with Luis, but he'd never, ever before had sex just because of "So horny gonna explode if I don't get me some of him right now."

How had Joey turned him on so hard, so fast? True, the big old softy was just the kind of man Micah liked best to fantasize about. After all, as long as you kept a solid grasp on reality, daydreams were free, right? No harm in them. When Luis, a big guy in his own right, although tall and lean rather than solidly muscled like Joey, had left, Micah had sent himself to sleep or jerked off in the shower countless times to thoughts of men who looked just like the one sleeping next to him.

Big. Solid as a brick wall. Strong enough to lift Micah with one hand, but smart enough not to try. Gentle. Kind. A considerate lover who made sure they didn't rush, but still had the best of all possible times.

Joey's dream equivalent had been Micah's fantasy for years pre- and post-Luis. So why, when faced with the real thing in bed, did Micah feel terrified and about two centimeters lower than a dust bunny?

Maybe it was because everything had gone so wrong with his plans for the night, and this just felt like more plotting strayed from the path. He should have been at *Amour Magique* right now, either dancing in someone's designer-sleeved arms or allowing himself to be plied with champagne, laughing politely at bon mots. Plying his trade in a way and place where he knew he could handle himself.

Bored by the company, yes, but in control. Not so ... Micah shook his head slightly, gelled locks rustling on the pillow sham. From the moment Joey had touched him, it was like every good sense circuit Micah had in his brain overloaded on input and fried out like snapping wires. His entire self-control blew away in the wind, carrying him along.

Could have been a lot worse. Joey might really have been the no-hoper Micah had figured him to be when they'd first met. He stifled a laugh. Who'd have guessed Joey had more money than God on Sunday and lived in one of the priciest, if messiest condos Micah had ever seen?

*Face it, honey*, he tried scolding himself. *You did get lucky, and you'd best realize as much*. He'd ended up in bed with a man out of his fantasy, a rich one to boot, who treated Micah like a jewel.

Why did he feel so ... wrong, then? As if he'd done something dirty. Some sin he should be ashamed of. Feeling guilt gnaw at his nerves.

Beside him, he heard a long, soft sigh, and then the duvet slithering over bare skin. A warm arm wrapped around his chest as Joey, just barely awake, snuggled up behind him. Despite being so big that he dwarfed Micah, he managed to spoon quite nicely. It felt like being wrapped in an electric blanket, sparks included. Micah inhaled sharply as the tingles started again, racing up and down his skin wherever Joey touched, leaving trails of fire behind.

"Micah-my-own," Joey sleepily mumbled into his ear. "You are cold." Lips nuzzled under his ear. "I warm you up."

Unable to help himself, Micah found his hand coming down to cover Joey's, fingers tangling over his heart. "You sure do," he said through numb lips. "I'll be all toasty in a minute."

"Not too hot?"

This time, Micah couldn't help the bitter, confused laugh which escaped his lips. Joey lay still for a moment, then squeezed him ever so gently, big old teddy-bear style.

"No guilt," he whispered. "No shame. No blame. What we have done, you and me together here? There is no wrong to love. It was want for you that made me say my words in

the line tonight. I did not dream we together would finish here, but I have regrets none. No blaming yourself. Micah-my-own."

Tears prickled under Micah's half-closed eyelids. "I just ... I've never. Not like this," he admitted in a low voice. "Don't quite know what to do with myself."

Joey rocked him. "Easy, easy, easy," he soothed. "You have never felt the scorching? Not ever been with the love?"

Micah shook his head.

"Ahh, then no wonder it is." Joey squeezed again, careful as could be, still radiating affection as he did body heat and chemistry. "You are not used to the opening of hearts. You think you are, what do they say? Easy?"

Micah shut his eyes completely. *No*, he wanted to say. *I know I'm easy. I've tipped my heels to heaven for everything I ever wanted, if I could get my hands on it through sex. I even fucked a man to have him buy me a fur-trimmed coat once. I've been a high-class hooker, and everyone knew me by a tony name, but what was I except a whore?*

*I don't deserve you, Joey. No one as innocent as you needs to have a stain like me in their lives. All I know is looking good, acting clever, and putting on a show. You're pulling back my layers, and I don't like what I'm seeing inside.*

*Will you still want me when you know everything about who I am?*

"Shh, shh, shh," Joey crooned. "I can almost hear you think. None of these bad things are of matter, Micah. What I know to be important is us, here, skin to skin. This is such very good. I could lie here forever." He shifted. "Except this condom is now unpleasant."

Micah couldn't help himself a second time -- he burst into laughter. "You didn't take yours off when we finished?"

Joey butted his head into Micah's, chuckling. "No. I am not so experienced I remember these things always. Not a virgin, no, not blushing and dainty, but I forget when I am overwhelmed."

"You did roll right over and pass out, you big ol' bump on a log," Micah teased, holding back the tears through his giggles. "Come on. Peel the nasty thing off and wrap it in one of those Kleenexes. I'll go throw both of them away. Bring us back some nice, warm wet washcloths to clean up. How's that sound?"

Micah felt a kiss pressed to the top of his scalp.

"Wonderful," Joey said simply. Micah had to swallow hard around a knot in his throat, but nodded.

Disposables pinched between finger and thumb -- why did safe sex have to be so squelchy and uncomfortable after the happy moment? -- Micah slithered out of bed. The instant Joey's warmth separated from his body he shuddered again, suddenly cold.

"I'll hurry," he decided out loud. "Keep my spot cozy for me?"

Joey nodded, his eyelids heavy, lips curling up in a contented smile. Micah swallowed hard again and stood up. "Where's the bathroom?" he asked to keep himself from blurting out something foolish and sentimental.

"Just to the left of the dresser blue color," Joey said with a yawn. "On the side of the room far from us. I think. I do not remember quite."

"It's all right. I'll find it." Micah yearned to reach out with his free hand and brush a wisp of hair off Joey's forehead, but hardened his heart and walked away. He knew the sight of his nude ass and slim hips were a hell of an impressive view from behind, but he didn't bother to put on a catwalk show.

He needed the bathroom for more than clean-up just then. He thought he might just crumble apart if he couldn't take a moment to breathe.

Thank mercy, the facilities were right where Joey had vaguely remembered. Micah snapped on a lamp instead of the overhead light, savoring the softly ambient glow. The room seemed a bit dusty, but as clean as the bedroom had been before they'd torn it apart.

He tossed his handful of tissues into an otherwise empty trashcan and reached for two soft white terry cloths on a rack above the sink. Hot water flowed nice and soft at a touch. Micah used the sound to cover a snuffle.

He wasn't any good for a man like Joey and, no, he couldn't just use him. Didn't know what was going on inside his mind and heart, to walk away from such an easy mark, but God, he couldn't play Joey the way he would have someone who knew the game. No. He'd have to go back, face the man down, clean him off, and kiss him goodbye. Walk away knowing what could have been his if only he'd been a better man.

Micah sniffed again. *Stop it*, he warned himself. *No more of this sissy-boy nonsense. You'll find someone else, and you'll land on your feet. You always do.*

He thrust one of the washcloths under the stream of hot water, then squeezed off the excess. At least he could clean himself up first, get all pretty and sweet-smelling for when he said his goodbyes. Reaching down to where a streak of semen had smeared itself across his body, tacky and gelid, from before they'd remembered the condoms, he began to dab at the  
goo --

-- and froze.

He lifted the washcloth to his face, staring in disbelief. Couldn't be. Some trick of the light. To make sure, he flipped on the strong overhead, but even wincing in the harsh new brightness, he saw what he'd seen before.

Purple semen. Joey had indigo come! Glancing down, Micah gasped in horror as he saw more violet streaks smeared across his skin. *What -- the -- hell?*

"Joey!" he yelped, dropping the washcloth. "Joey, what on God's green earth?"

"What?"

“Joey, get your ass in here right now?”

Micah waited, staring down at himself, while he listened to the slow, lumbering sounds of a big man hauling himself unwillingly out of a warm bed. Joey’s shadow fell across Micah, thick and black, before he looked up -- and all but melted.

Oh, God, even if the man was on some sort of spunk-changing smack, or -- or -- things that didn’t bear thinking about -- how could a guy not fall in love with him? Big old bear, roughly tousled from making love and sleeping, his eyes bleary with half-wakefulness but still smiling, as if Micah were the most wonderful thing he’d ever seen.

Micah *almost* weakened, but held firm. He raised the purple washcloth. “What, exactly, is this?” he asked. Not harshly as he might have, as he’d half-intended, but gentle. As if some of Joey’s good nature were wearing off on him, bashing all kinds of dents in his diva armor. “Tell me you’re not on drugs.”

Joey blinked. Once, twice, and again. He looked down at himself, his cheeks turning rosy and streaks of red spider-webbing down his neck. “Yours is not purple?” he said in a quick mumble. “Damnation!”

“Joey ...” Micah held out the cloth.

Joey wouldn’t look at him. “I am -- I drank much grape soda?” he offered hopefully. “I enjoy jelly muscadine? I had a purple Popsicle from a street cart before I got in line at Amour Magique?”

For the third time, emotions got the better of Micah, and he burst into helpless giggles. “Joey! Do you really think I’m going to believe a word of your fairy tales?”

Joey glanced up sheepishly. “No. But it was a try worth having, yes?”

“Not really.” Micah took up the other damp washcloth and moved toward Joey. “You, mister,” he said, dabbing at Joey’s sweaty skin, “are a mess. Now come on. I promise I won’t be mad as long as you’re not high.” God, if the whole night had been the result of some bizarre disco pharmacology, he thought his heart would break. “You’re ... not, are you?”

“No!” Joey shook his head vehemently. “No drugs. Every so often an aspirin, because it is good for your heart. But no ecstasy, no LSD, no PCP.”

“You know what all those are?” Micah arched an eyebrow as he trailed the damp cloth over Joey’s broad chest. Joey shuddered, drawing in a breath as if the feelings were just too good to be borne in silence, then gamely nodded. “So,” Micah mused out loud, “what are you, some kind of Clark Kent?”

“Some what do you say? I do not know this name.”

“Well, that almost clinches it for me.” Micah leaned against the sink and started counting on his fingers. “Purple come, doesn’t know pop culture, speaks like he’s from another country, never had coffee ... you’re either the biggest hick that ever fell off the potato truck and rolled to America, or you’re an alien.”

Joey reared up. “I am not a potato!” Then, he cringed. “Er ... I am a hickory not?” he ventured.

Micah started chuckling again, losing control over his hands as they tried to continue washing Joey down. “You *are* from somewhere else, aren’t you? Off the blessed planet, even. God help me! I’ve gone and fucked an alien!”

Joey blushed even deeper and peeked up, or rather down, through his eyelashes. “I am guilty?”

Didn’t it just figure? Micah shook his head. Darn him if he couldn’t be mad at Joey, even if he was crazy or lying or, heaven have mercy, an honest-to-God alien.

“I am here in witness protection program,” Joey offered.

Micah dissolved into snorting giggles. “Now I *do* believe you,” he managed between gasps of air. “No one could come up with something like that if it weren’t the truth! And you, you don’t have an ounce of imagination outside of the bed, do you?”

“No,” Joey admitted. “You have much. Perhaps you can teach me?”

Finished with his job, Micah tossed the washcloth into the trash and slithered up to Joey, wrapping his arms around the big man's neck. "Look," he said frankly. "Either I'm crazy or you're nuts or we're both loony. Something is definitely amiss for a man to have purple come, and I suspect it'll be stranger than anything I could imagine. Just say you're not a spider alien and the whole plan is to rip off my head once we've mated, and I'll go along for the ride."

"Er ... not after a performance satisfying ..."

Micah chortled and shook his head, burrowing it against the expanse of Joey's chest. "So, you have intergalactic counselors checking up on you? Do any of them wear Spandex?"

"Ugh! No." Joey shuddered. "I would not like to see Ixtl in stretchy clothes. It wears loose, what is the word, gauze? Chenille?"

Micah cracked up completely. "You have to come from the gayest planet in the galaxy. No wonder you picked out a queen like me." He laughed again, but quickly, as the words sank in, grew sober. He huddled closer to Joey's warmth, feeling those huge arms surround him, ever so warm and comforting.

"Sweetie," he said softly, "I'm not a good guy. You have to know that. I'm shallow as a rain puddle and all I know is surface nonsense. I'm not good at being nice, or kind, or gentle, none of those things. I've lived my life fighting to survive with the few things I did know how to use. You think you can put up with me? I make a terrible example of how to be a human being."

Joey shook with laughter of his own.

"What?" Micah protested, struggling to look up. "Would you like to share the joke?" he asked, poking Joey's ribs.

Joey's smile was a wondrous thing to behold. "I do not want any example perfect of humanity," he said. "I want you. Here, we make a deal. You will teach me about how to take



care of things, and I will teach you how to be kind to others that are not me, as well. Perhaps, we fall in love with one another.”

Micah’s throat closed up. “You -- you mean that?” he asked carefully.

Joey nodded, smiling but clearly dead serious.

Micah finally did let the moisture threatening his eyes have its way. “Then we have a deal,” he said, squeezing Joey just for the fun of the way he felt, so solid and, mmm, so sexy. “You and me against the world, Bear?”

“You and me.” Two of Joey’s massive fingers slipped beneath Micah’s chin, tilting his face up. “It is customary, yes, to seal bargains with a kiss?”

“Not in this culture.” Micah winked. “But I’m willing to learn a few new tricks.”

Laughter surrounded them, echoing through the bathroom, as alien and human touched lips together. Lips, then hands, then, as they lowered each other to the bathroom floor, a great deal more, until they needed fresh new washcloths.

They had no idea where they were going, but they suspected it would be one hell of a ride.

In the club, a small pulse of light emitted violet rays from the watch Liam had put on. He smiled to himself, tapping the surface, letting his fingers play through the beautiful purple.

Micah, now ... well, he had presented quite a challenge. Leading the man to his true love -- no small task. He’d even had to project a glamour so convincing that Collin had fought with it. But, ah, his labors were well rewarded.

Time to go and see about the others, then. Liam glanced up, swiped his hand over his face. Ah, so tired, he felt so very tired. Yet for all the effort he had already put in, his night was nowhere close to over yet, and he had his own problems to face at the moment ...

THE END

## Willa Okati

Although a relative newcomer to the field of e-publishing, Willa Okati has been writing since before she was old enough to pick up a pen. She thinks she knows where those dictated stories are hidden, but she'll never tell.

Willa is also very interested in the paranormal: magery, Wicca, New Age philosophy, transgender studies, and of course, writing. You can drag her away from the computer if you really fight, but you'd better be prepared for a battle.

Just so she doesn't sound entirely dull, Willa has her fun: she is a practicing member of the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) and is involved in her community. She is owned by far too many cats, all of which have serious attitudes, and addicted to anything made out of chocolate or involving coffee. She is quiet, but has a very wicked sense of humor that springs out when you least expect it.

A secretary for eight years, she now writes full-time -- and wouldn't trade it for the world.

She loves to hear from readers, and always responds. You can contact her at [willshenillshe@gmail.com](mailto:willshenillshe@gmail.com) or visit her website to check out her work at [www.willaokati.com](http://www.willaokati.com).