



Second Sight
By Sean Michael

Copyright © 2004 Sean Michael

Illustration Copyright © SA Clements

All rights reserved. No part of this eBook may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information address Torquere Press, PO Box 4351, Grand Junction, CO 81502.

ISBN: 0-9749923-5-6

Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press electronic edition / August 2004

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, PO Box 4351, Grand Junction, CO 81502.

<http://www.torquerepress.com>

Chapter One

Pablo pulled off his jacket and hung it carefully at the end of the coat rack. There weren't a lot of hangers used, which didn't surprise him. The day was cold, the wind bitter; not many people found their way through the cold to the library. It was his favorite place, and he came every evening after supper. Sometimes, if he had a project, he'd come straight from school. He would sleep here if he could, with the smell of books all around him. The library closed at eleven, though.

He made his way to the section of shelves that housed the biographies. He'd read his first book about Marco Polo last night and there were three others that he wanted to read through tonight. They were still in. Good. He let his fingers run along their spines and then plucked them from the shelves and made his way to the back corner of the non-fiction section.

There was a large, old chair there, donated by some long dead patron of the library. It was a funny almost grass green with large yellow and brown flowers on it and it had clawed feet and white wood making a funny sort of crown on top of the back of it. But for all its ugliness, it was soft and large enough to curl up in, the perfect reading chair.

He was halfway down the last row before he was brought up short. There was someone sitting in his chair.

Well, sitting wasn't exactly the right word. It looked a lot closer to perching, really. The guy in the chair was all legs and arms, a huge book propped against his knees, one hand holding the book steady while the other wrote furiously.

The man was muttering beneath his breath, two pencils stuck behind his ear, wire-framed glasses just barely hanging onto his thin nose. "...fucking fabulous use of light there. Gotta try easing up on the ochre and adding some white to the base..."

He took another step forward and then one back. What did he think he was going to do? Walk up to the man and tell him that was his chair?

Another step backwards and his foot knocked against a book that stuck out from the lower shelf, sending him stumbling. In the end he didn't lose his footing, but he did drop his Marco Polo books and knocked half a shelf worth of books onto the floor with his windmilling arms. Face flaming, he bent to gather up the books. There was nothing quite like a sudden, large noise to draw attention to oneself in a library.

A shadow fell over him and a long thin hand picked up two of the books. "Dude, you okay, man? That damned Frieda Kahlo book's gotten three people already today." The voice was rough and scratchy, but the laughter in it didn't seem unfriendly.

"Frieda Kahlo? Oh, the book I tripped over." He nodded, keeping his head down as he collected books. "I'm fine."

He winced as he heard footsteps coming around the corner. He half turned as they stopped, a pair of black Doc Martin's coming into his line of sight. He raised his head slowly, past the old-fashioned grey skirt and the navy cardigan to the wrinkled face with a pair of bifocals perched on the crooked nose.

"I'm sorry Miss Barstein, I tripped over Frieda Kahlo."

"Oh, it's you Pablo. Hand her over -- I hope you haven't broken her spine."

He pulled the book from the shelf and handed it up to the librarian. He offered her an apologetic smile, but she was already heading back to her desk, muttering as she fondled the book.

The stranger was picking up his bag, sliding his pencils into the faded material. The denim jacket he wore was beautiful – it had a phoenix on it, rising up from the ashes of its nest.

He gathered up a few huge books under his arm and stood, with his curly red hair wild and disheveled he looked at least seven feet all. "I'll give you your chair back, Pablo. I'm usually gone by the time you show up to claim it."

Pablo blinked up at the tall stranger, disconcerted, "Oh, you know my name? And how did you know about the chair?"

"Barstein called you Pablo and she's not really the nickname type, you know? And I spend lots of time in here. I'm usually at the tables by the time you show up." The stranger grinned. "And the chair is here in the 700s. My very favorite number in the Dewey decimal catalogue."

"Art? You've seen me before?" He shook his head, feeling a little out of his depth. "I've never noticed you -- which is funny because you look like the kind of person who gets noticed."

"Relax, man. I'm not a stalker or anything. I sit and draw. Read the books. You know, library shit." He reached up and smoothed down his hair. "I usually leave right after you show. Work and stuff."

"Draw. So you're an artist. Nice jacket. Cool hair -- it's really...uh... orange." He bobbed his head and shoved the books he had onto the shelf. He wasn't used to talking to strangers in the library, he wasn't used to being noticed at all. He was the type who just kind of blended in and he liked it like that, sitting in his corner and reading. He rescued his Marco Polo books and clutched them against his chest, the comforting quiet of the library replaced by a heavy silence as he searched for something to say, even if it was just goodbye.

Watery blue eyes peered through thick glasses at him. "Thanks. I'll see you around. Watch out for that Frieda chick, she's hell on the ankles."

He found himself smiling, his discomfort easing at the look in the bespectacled eyes. "I will."

"Cool." The lanky guy turned to leave and then turned back. "Oh, I'm Marc. Figure if I know your name, you ought to know mine."

The long, ink-stained hand was offered easily.

He shifted his books to his other arm and took Marc's hand. "Hi."

"Hey." The books began to slip and Marc caught them easily, looking at the spines. "Marco Polo, eh? The guy who discovered spaghetti and hide and seek in the pool?"

"Well he didn't really discover spaghetti -- I mean the Chinese had already discovered it, but he brought it back to Italy with him, along with a lot of other cool stuff that everyone just assumes is Italian. Well, and fireworks of course. The hide and seek thing doesn't really have anything to do with him." He held out his hands for the books, taking them somewhat awkwardly. "He was... uh... a pretty neat guy though."

"Cool. You know this guy, Manet? He loved art so much that when his hands were too weak to paint, he cut out pieces of paper and made art." Marc opened up one of the books he held, showing a familiar piece of art. Pablo thought he'd seen a print hanging in the cafeteria at school. "He was pretty cool, too. I mean, he didn't bring noodles, but he was one hell of an artist." The book closed suddenly. "Not that you asked for a fucking lecture from a stranger, eh? Sorry, man. I'll let you get back to the noodles and fireworks."

Pablo blinked and back up a half a step. "Maybe I'll read about him next. There's so many books, I get anxious sometimes that I'll never get to read them all and I know that's pretty dumb, 'cause you can't read *all* the books, but I really wish that I could, you know?"

"Yeah. It's like painting. I was born so late, I'll never catch up."

"Did you paint your jacket? It's a real nice bird." He didn't know why he was babbling to Marc, who was really just a stranger, even if he did know his name.

"Yeah, I did. I like the idea of the phoenix, rising from the ashes and stuff." Marc gave him a friendly grin. "I'll bet you've already read through mythological beasts and legends, though."

He blushed. "The dragons are my favorites."

"Dragons? Cool. Look at this. It's one of my pieces." Marc shrugged off his jacket and pulled up his t-shirt sleeve. A bright green dragon flew on his bicep, tail trailing down his forearm, eyes blazing.

"Oh..." Pablo reached out, fingers stopping just before he touched Marc's arm. "It's beautiful. Did it hurt?"

"Not as much as you'd think, no. Burns some. It's the noise that's the worst." Pablo was given a grin. "You can touch it. Just feels like skin, even though it looks like it's floating above."

He slid his finger tips over the outline of the dragon. "It's warm..." He traced the tail right down to the tip. "It looks like it should feel scaly."

Marc chuckled. "Freeway's good, but she's not that good. Although it would be wicked cool, man."

He continued to stroke the dragon, fascinated by the dichotomy between how it looked like it should feel and how it did feel. "It looks alive. Feels alive, too."

"Well, last I checked the skin it was inked on wasn't dead." Marc's arm flexed and the dragon's wings seemed to flutter.

"Oh!" His instinct to pull away when he realized he was caressing Marc's arm was immediately replaced by the need to touch the wings. "Do it again?"

"Sure." Another flex, another flutter of the green wings. "Pretty cool, huh?"

"Oh, yeah." He stoked them one last time and then pulled his hand away, taking another self-conscious step backward, eyes still riveted on the green dragon. "It really is beautiful."

"Thanks, man." Marc shrugged his jacket back on. "I need a smoke. If you decide you want to chat, learn more about crazy artists and tattoos, I'll be upstairs by the big windows."

With that, the tall man disappeared down the stacks.

Pablo walked slowly to his chair, books clutched in his arms. He settled and opened the first, but for a long time, he just stared at the page, mind on Marc.

Several times he thought maybe he'd go upstairs and see if the orange-haired stranger was there, once he'd even gotten up, but chickened out at the last minute, going to the bathroom instead. Finally he settled into his book and before he knew it the lights were flickering with their ten-minute warning. It was time to go home.

Hands. Michelangelo's hands were long, fine-muscled, reaching for hope and God across arched ceilings. Escher's hands were heavier, clumsier. Dali's melted.

Marc drew fingers and thumbs, knuckles and wrists and life-lines and nails. Over and over and over in a filthy ripped notebook that some coed had thrown at a blond, square football player after he fucked her best friend or tore her favorite sweater or had the audacity to shoot off in her mouth or some such atrocity.

He drew the librarian's hands -- dry and rough, the paper of the books sucking the oil right off her fingers, almond shaped fingernails and torn cuticles. He drew Bobby's hands -- one finger missing, remaining digits swollen and stiff from too many years in the factory, too many years at the bottle, too many years. He drew fat baby hands with no lines and finely manicured businessman's hands and the clipped, kool-aid and tempera paint stained hands of mothers at toddler story time.

He drew Pablo's hands -- smooth and dry, light and easy. Not thin, but square -- hands that were meant to be tools, but hadn't worked. They were the hands of a working class son trying to make good. Doctor's hands, lawyer's hands, computers or literature or something where heat and sun and snow and foremen were never an issue.

Marc smiled as he sketched, hand growing wrist growing arm growing shoulder. The chair, that damned ugly, wonderful, comfortable chair that he'd sketched for an entire rainy spring before someone took up residence in it.

He figured Pablo sat in it all the time, but that winter and spring he'd gotten a job developing pictures at the drugstore from 3 to 11, so he hadn't been around when the kids got out of school. Of course, once summer rolled around and the store manager found the series of photographs he was developing for free, well, he'd had a little free time.

The kid read ravenously, curled up in that grand old chair. It was kind of cool, someone so quiet and peaceful. Marc liked to catch sight of him -- it was so constant, so normal. Marc hadn't intended to ever speak to him, but when he'd tripped backing away because his chair was occupied -- well, that had to be a sign, didn't it? A sign of what, Marc wasn't sure. Leo just laughed at him, teased him about needing more food and fewer hours sniffing paint, but still, it had been neat to talk to the boy in the chair, find out Pablo's name.

Pablo's face, his eyes, appeared upon the lined paper as the pencil moved, loud and scratching in the silence of the library.

"Hi." The voice was quiet, shy, a little unsure and Marc looked up into the eyes he'd been sketching. "You um... said to come up if I wanted to... well you said it yesterday, but I thought maybe..."

"Hey! Pull up a chair." Marc felt a pleased grin fill him, let it show. He let the pages in the notebook turn, covering up his newest sketches. "How's Marco Polo?"

"It's Louis Armstrong today." Pablo sat across from him, setting two books down on the table next to him.

"Dude! You must read a zillion words a minute." Marc patted the book on renaissance painting techniques on the table. "I've been reading this for more than a week."

He had a step-sister once that could read like that. He'd been so jealous, watching her flip pages, eyes moving easy over the letters like they were nothing.

"Well I'd already read one the night before, so I was really just scanning through the ones I had yesterday, looking for stuff that was different."

He chuckled. "I'm just lucky the kids at the college aren't doing finals or I'd never get to finish this one, somebody would've checked it out."

"You could check it out."

"Don't have a card. Too complicated." Marc winked and changed the subject. "So, why Louis Armstrong?"

Last thing he wanted to discuss with Pablo was the intricacies of getting a library card without a telephone number or any identification or an address.

"My Mama was playing a record by him last night when I got home. I thought the music was nice." Pablo shrugged. "And I like reading about different stuff."

"That's cool." Marc bent his head back to his tablet, turning until he found a blank page and beginning to draw again.

He'd slept downtown last night, huddling between Leo and Kris, panhandling and sharing their last pack of cigarettes. There'd been music for them, too. Krissy'd waited tables for a few days and bought strings for her old guitar, so she'd played for them. The missionaries had even brought them a blanket to share and a cheese sandwich apiece. He still had a quarter of it saved up in his pocket.

"What'cha drawing?"

"Your hand." Marc felt himself flush, eyes fastened fast to the paper. Damn his mouth, anyway. One day he'd learn to engage his brain before opening his mouth.

"Oh..." Pablo drew his hands back and then put them back on the table. "Why?"

"I like the lines of them. I like to draw people's hands. I have pages and pages of hand sketches." Marc shrugged, meeting Pablo's gaze. "It used to be noses. Before that? Frogs."

"Noses?" Pablo giggled a bit and covered his nose with his hand. "I guess I'm glad you're doing hands now."

"Oh, you cover your nose up like it's scary or something. I'll have you know I'm the proud owner of a certified MacAllen schnoz, steep enough to ski off and sharp enough to cut paper." He turned his head, giving Pablo a view of his profile.

Pablo giggled. "But it suits you -- you'd look stupid with a little nose."

"You think?" Marc pressed down on his nose, making it as small as possible. "You don't think I'm the cute button-nose type of guy?" Then he pushed up on the tip, crossing his eyes. "Or the up-turned snobby nosed type?"

Pablo's giggles turned to laughter, the brown eyes shining up at him.

"Shh..." Bobby shook his finger at them, the middle one because the index was missing. That made Marc start chuckling, grinning over at Pablo like a fool.

Pablo smiled back. "You want to go get some ice cream?" he asked in a loud whisper. "There's this place over on Third -- they've got the greatest soft-serve and you can get a half and half cone." Pablo was blushing a little. "You know, so no one shushes us."

Marc thought about the quarter of a sandwich in his pocket and the forty-seven cents that were hidden beneath it. He thought about spending the evening alone and lonely until Leo finished doing whatever it was Leo did. He shut the notebook and shoved it into his knapsack. "Sounds cool. Let's go."

He'd just tell Pablo he was allergic to milk. Those places would usually let you have a cup of ice for a dime and free water.

"Did you know that if you're cold it's better to eat something cold? Most people don't know that, so they drink hot chocolate and coffee and stuff in the winter, but ice-cream is actually a better way to get warm faster -- 'cause you're body reacts quicker to the cold inside it than the cold outside." Pablo checked his pocket. "First one's my treat."

"Really? I didn't know that." They wandered down the staircase and headed towards the door, stopping to let Pablo grab his coat. "So your body heats up trying to unfreeze the ice cream?"

"Yeah, exactly. And you know that expression about mad dogs and Englishmen drinking tea in the noonday sun? Well see, it seems they're not so mad, 'cause the same thing works in the opposite -- if you want to get cool you drink something hot." Pablo's hands waved gently as he talked, moving softly, like his voice.

"So coffee in July is a good thing?" He was tempted, suddenly and inexplicably, so reach out and touch one of those hands, hold it for a moment, just pretend that they were good friends off of school for the evening. The cold wind hit him and he shoved his hands in his pockets.

Pablo's hands also disappeared into his pockets. "Oh man, it's always the wind that gets you, isn't it? You wait and see though -- I have an ice-cream most nights -- it really does warm you up."

"Yeah. It cuts through you, especially at night." Marc took a deep breath. "You sure about buying? Because, well, it might be a couple of days before I dig up enough to pay you back and I'm happy to just hang and talk. You mind if I smoke?"

"I invited you -- I should pay. That's the way it works, right?" Pablo gave him an impish grin. "And you know smoking's not good for you, right?"

"Of course. Why else would you do it?" Marc smiled back and pulled out a cigarette, lighting it and pulling the warm smoke deep into his lungs. The smoke warmed him and took the edge off his hunger. He looked over at Pablo. "It's a filthy habit. Don't ever start."

Pablo shook his head. "It's an expensive habit -- I prefer spending my money on ice cream." He shook his head. "Besides, I couldn't do it at school or at work and I'd hate to have to get up and go smoke while I'm at the library - once I'm settled in I kind of stay that way, you know?"

"Smoking's cheaper than eating, man, and warmer." Marc tilted his head, letting Pablo get a bit ahead of him so the smoke didn't blow on him. "Where do you work?"

"Bridlewood Retirement Community." Pablo made little quote marks in the air on the word community. "I just work weekends, two nights after school. I'm kind of the resident grandson. Play cards, call out bingo numbers, listen to them talk, let them feed me their chocolate pudding, but I always say no thank you to the Jello -- I don't know how you can screw up Jello, but Bridlewood manages it.

"Most of 'em are just lonely and like to have someone to talk at, someone who'll listen and ask the right questions at the right time. These folks have been around for so much history though -- I mean you read about the day John Kennedy was shot and Pearl Harbor and the depression and all and these people lived it. I've got a whole bunch of notebooks filled with their stories."

"Ah, so you're a writer." Marc took another drag, huddling in his sweatshirt. His hair was flying wildly, giving him what he not-quite affectionately thought of as his starving Bozo look. "Sounds like a sweet gig, suits you."

He could see Pablo listening, paying rapt attention to one old story after another, gathering them up. It was like the image of Pablo curled up in the green chair. It just worked.

"The trick is convincing my father."

"About the writing or the job?"

"Oh, he thinks the old folks thing is a good deal. Instills responsibility without taking too much time from my studying." Pablo deepened his voice, speaking with a slight accent as he imitated his father. "But the writing... well that isn't a job is it?"

"Oh, man, it's more than a job. It's art." Marc finished his cigarette and moved closer to Pablo, letting him break the wind. "I mean, you have to work too, at the beginning, but think of the guys who made it. I mean, that Stephen King guy makes serious buckage."

"Yeah, but for every guy who made it, Papa brings up a dozen who didn't. And art -- well that's pretty but it never put food on the dinner table did it?" Pablo shook his head and grinned back at him. "You don't have this argument with your father, do you? 'Cause -- and I don't mean to dis you or anything -- but those are amateur stage arguments. I'm in the pro leagues when it comes to arguing with my father about what an appropriate career choice is."

Marc shook his head. His father had died or left or something a long time ago, not that he would have been much into arguing if the old fucker was still around. "I don't live with my parents, haven't for a few years, but I don't think Linda really worries about my art."

"You don't live with your parents? I didn't think you were that old. Linda? Is that your mother?"

"I don't and I'm legal and she is." He shrugged, grimacing at the cold. He looked over at Pablo. "I'm sort of on my own, you know? Couldn't really handle the school/home/real kid thing."

Pablo's head was tilted and he was looking at Marc, really looking at him. "You know, on the one that sounds really nice the 'being on my own' thing. I've got three sisters and I can't tell you how many times I've dreamed of getting a place of my own, but I only have this year left in school..." Pablo shrugged. "Sounds kinda tough too though."

"It's okay. I got a lot of room and Leo, my roommate, is pretty cool." There was no way he was going to admit that he lived in an abandoned building with a guy who worked the streets panhandling. Or that they ate for three days a week by sharing two shelter sandwiches between them. The kid would have him turned in before he could say "for your own good".

"I've got my own room, but it's pretty small." Pablo smiled at him. "Guess it's a trade off, huh?" The smile widened. "There is it, best soft-serve in the city."

Marc smiled over, belly threatening to growl, and opened the door. "You know, I really don't need one, man. I don't like owing, you know? And I'm strapped for cash right now."

And yesterday and tomorrow and next week...

"Oh, but I've been selling you on how good the soft-serve is -- you gotta try one just so you know I'm not making it up." Pablo frowned and then nodded at the notebook tucked under his arm. "You could give me the drawing you did of my hands. 'Course then I'd probably owe you like a hundred soft-serves."

Marc grinned and nodded. "That's fair enough. I do work for food." Marc leaned over and nudged Pablo's shoulder with his own. "Thanks, man."

Pablo smiled at him, eyes as bright as his smile. "You won't regret the soft-serve, Marc. And hopefully the company either."

"Hey, I was interested in the company way before the ice cream came up." Marc felt his cheeks heat and tilted his head, letting the wind blow into his face to hide it. "Let's go try this miracle ice cream of yours."

Pablo ducked his head and went through the door, making the bell above it ring. The sound competed with the wind until he closed the door behind him.

"That's better," said Pablo, undoing the zipper on his jacket. "One of these days I'll actually listen when Mama tells me to bring my hat and mitts."

Marc nodded and rubbed his hands together quickly, using the friction to warm them. "Winter's are a real bitch."

"So you wanna split some fries first? Manny only makes 'em when you order 'em, so they're hot enough to burn the roof of your mouth. A little vinegar and some salt..." Oh, fuck. Just the mention of the food made his toes curl in his canvas tennis shoes and his stomach growl loud enough to be heard over the crowd. Pablo grinned at him. "I'll take that as a yes."

Pablo let the way to the counter. "Hey, Manny -- large fries, please." He turned back to Marc. "Hey, you want something else?"

"No. No, thanks." Marc shook his head. "I'm cool." Shame and hunger battled in his stomach -- it made him queasy. "Gonna hit the john, man. I'll be back in a sec."

He found the bathroom and washed his face with cold water. Looking in the mirror, he told himself he wasn't using Pablo, wasn't panhandling, wasn't mooching. When he'd convinced himself, he dried his hands and went back to find Pablo.

Pablo was easy enough to find, sitting by himself in a booth near the back. There was a large basket of fries in the middle of the table and a couple of drinks on either side of it. Pablo was busy eating a hamburger. He colored

slightly as Marc approached and shrugged. "I was hungry. I forgot to ask what you wanted to drink -- I hope you like coke."

"That works, man. Thanks." He slid into the booth with a grin and took a long sip. "So, where do you go to school? Up at the Rock or down at McNell High?"

"McNell," Pablo answered around a mouthful of hamburger. He was wolfing it down fast enough. "Rock's for rich kids, super jocks and brainiacs, not for Latinos whose fathers work double shifts, you know?"

"Yeah. I was 'sposed to go to East City. Linda lives down in the mobile parks past downtown, works in a little cafe that way." Marc drank his soda slowly, enjoying the bubbles and the sweetness.

"So you didn't like it, or what?" Pablo grabbed a fry and blew on it before biting into it, a look of bliss crossing his face. He pushed the basket toward Marc.

"Yeah, something like that. I, uh, never went, I guess." Marc took a fry and ate it, eyes closing at the flavor.

"I like school." Pablo grinned and shrugged. "Yeah, I know that makes me some kind of freak. 'S not even school that I like, but the learning. Which probably makes me an even bigger freak, but there's just so much learn -- you could do it your whole life and still hardly know anything." Pablo shook his head and snagged another fry.

"Oh, that's cool. I don't... I mean, I like to read and shit. They just need phone numbers and addresses and get involved and stuff." Marc rolled his eyes. "Last thing I need is some teacher wanting to visit Linda 'cause my hair's blocking the view of the chalkboard, right?"

Pablo giggled. "Oh, I love your hair. It's so bright."

"Like Bozo." Marc grinned over. "It just keeps getting bigger and bigger." He stole another fry, relaxing into the booth and pulling out his notebook. "You mind if I draw you while we're talking? You've got great features -- kick ass eyes."

"As long as you don't draw me shoving a fry in my mouth."

"It's a deal, man. No fryage." He pulled out his pencil and began sketching. "Can I draw ice cream on your nose?"

Pablo giggled, brown eyes shinning brightly at him. "You still don't believe me about this ice cream, man -- if I had any on my nose I'd lick it off before you had a chance to draw it."

"Now that I'd pay to see." Marc looked up and grinned, his body taking a real interest in the visual Pablo's words invoked.

Pablo blushed, head ducking. "You have a nose fetish?"

"More like a tongue thing." He grinned at the shocked look on Pablo's face, then winked.

Pablo giggled and went back to scarfing down his hamburger, brown eyes glancing back up at him now and then. It wasn't long before the burger was gone and Pablo started munching fries. The basket was pushed back toward him. "Help yourself, I'm looking like a pig here."

"Nah, you're cool, man." He stole a fry, making little shading marks that he'd finish later before turning the page and starting again. "You got a girlfriend? Somebody special?"

Pablo blushed again. Really hard this time. "Ah... nobody special."

"That would explain the hours in the library, yeah?" He could dig it. Hell, him and Leo weren't the world's greatest love affair. More fuckbuddies hanging together, squatting together and trying to keep warm.

Pablo picked up a fry and looked at it for a long moment before putting it back down and looking at him shyly. "I don't. I. I won't ever have a girlfriend, you know?"

"No?" Oh, dude. Cute and smart and queer? No fucking way. "You're not looking to become a priest, are you?"

"A priest?" Pablo giggled. "Only in Mama's fondest dreams."

"Yeah. Well, you uh... aren't the only guy seriously not in the girlfriend business, if you catch my drift." God, that sound was sweet.

Pablo's eyes widened. "Really?" Then he got a shy grin. "Cool."

"Yeah. Really." He ate another fry, licking the salt off his fingers. "So what're you going to read about tomorrow?"

"Well I thought maybe that Manet guy you mentioned." Pablo shrugged and gave him a sweet, blushing smile.

"Oh, man. He? Rocked. One day? My shit might be in one of those books."

"That would be cool. Do you think... I'd like to see your stuff. If that would be okay?"

"Sure." He looked out the windows -- already dark, but the lantern had propane in it and Leo'd be out working the streets -- Friday's were good for that. "You want to see them tonight?"

Pablo looked a little surprised but pleased. "Yeah."

"I sorta live downtown and uh... I sorta don't have electricity or nothing, but there's a lantern that me and Leo found and a hose with water that we run from Old Lady Gregg's place. I just didn't want to freak you out."

Pablo blinked at him, the quick mind obviously putting things together pretty quickly. Pablo reached out and squeezed his hand. "I'm sorry. I'd still like to see them though."

"Sure. After ice cream? We'll go and have an official Marc MacAllen gallery showing." He squeezed back, winking.

"Oh, that sounds like fun!" Pablo hesitated a moment and then pulled his hand away, picking up another fry to eat. "Have you ever sold any of your work?"

"To tattoo parlors, yeah. That's how I earn my ink."

"You mean for them to use to put on people? That's pretty cool." Pablo was eating up the fries, one after another, licking salt and vinegar from his fingers before each new one was picked up.

"Yeah. Pretty cool work if you can get it." He was getting hard, watching Pablo. Silly, really, because, hello? Middle-class normal kids didn't fuck poor white trash, but still.

Pablo suddenly pushed the basket back toward him. "Here, you can finish these up while I get us our soft-serve. I'm not gonna have room for the ice-cream if I keep horking these down."

"Oh. 'kay." He nodded, eating all the ones that were left. Oh, man. These were good. He'd have to remember that.

Pablo went over to the counter and placed his order, talking with the guy while he waited for the cones to come up, hands moving as he spoke. Solid, a little short, sweet little ass -- way not his type, but still. Marc shook his head, finished his coke. Stop it. Be good. Good.

Pablo came back with two enormous cones, handing one over to him. "You're probably going to hate it now that I've built it up."

"Nah. They look fab." He took a long lick, enjoying the cold slide.

Pablo was watching him closely, brown eyes shining.

"Mmm... good shit, man. Thanks." He'd have said it, even if it wasn't true. It was worth it, too, because Pablo just beamed at him and then started in on his own, tongue sliding around the white ice cream, licking enthusiastically.

Oh, man. That? Was fun to watch.

Pablo was oblivious to anything but the ice cream, occasionally looking up to smile happily at him. Marc chuckled, licking and lapping at his own ice cream, having to lick his fingers clean when the ice cream melted.

"See? Best soft serve ever." Pablo crowed as he licked his fingers clean when he was done with the cone. "I've got a real soft spot for ice cream," Pablo admitted.

"I wouldn't give up smoking for it, but I can see where you could get used to it. Yum."

Pablo giggled again. "Can we go see your paintings now?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Pablo Man." He bowed dramatically, then held out one arm. "Follow me."

Pablo's sweet giggles followed him all the way out to the street where Pablo slipped into step beside him. "So are there a lot?"

"A lot of what? Canvasses? About twenty, right now. Not a ton." He lit the other half of his cigarette, took a deep drag.

"What kind of paint do you use?"

"Whatever I find. Me and Leo and K? We dumpster dive a lot. Behind the Azle? There's always tubes and pencils and canvas and shit. Really cool." He crossed them over K Street, then down Fourth.

"Dumpster diving?"

"Yeah, come on. I'll show you." He grinned, tugging Pablo behind the art supply store. The dumpster was locked, but Leo'd stashed a crowbar and popped the top. He pulled himself up, grabbing marked up canvasses and a handful of old brushes and... "SCORE!"

He hooted, coming up with two whole fucking bags of discontinued acrylics.

He could hear Pablo, voice sounding worried. "Oh. Are you allowed to do that? What if you get caught? Don't fall in."

"If I get caught, pretend you were trying to stop me." He threw the paints down, snagging a few sweatshirts people had painted on with puff-paint. Ugly, but warm.

Pablo's hands were suddenly on his legs, tugging, though not too hard, on his pants.

"Careful! Someone coming?" He hopped down, scratching the shit out of his arm.

"No, I just don't like lying." Pablo shrugged and then frowned. "You got hurt!"

"Oh, don't stress it, man. It's just trash and I don't have the scratch to buy the stuff, yeah?" He grabbed his haul in one hand, Pablo's arm in the other. "Come on. It's windy."

"Yeah, it's never that bad until the wind picks up and then it goes right through you and reminds you its winter." Pablo walked along beside him, skipping every third or fourth step to keep up.

He slowed a little. "Sorry, I always forget I'm tall." They stood at the corner until the light changed, then hurried down to the abandoned building between the Goodwill and the old folks home. "Home sweet home."

Pablo looked around and shivered a little. "Don't you get cold?"

"Sure." He blushed a little and dropped his stuff in the broken file cabinet by the sink and threw the sweatshirts on the piece of foam rubber they'd stolen from a construction site. "Lemme light the lantern and I'll show you my stuff."

"Cool." Pablo shadowed him closely. Marc couldn't blame him -- the place was huge and dark and chilly, clothes and sheets hung over the broken windows, canvasses piled in the back. He found the lantern and lit it, turning it up high and settling in on the big metal barrel that was his table. Pablo rubbed his hands together and bounced. "My first private showing."

Oh. Oh, fucking cool. He grinned wide, feeling a little less scary and a lot more cool. "The ones on the left are one collection and the ones in the middle are another. The ones on the right? They're just paintings."

"Cool." Pablo went over to the left ones, moving slowly from painting to painting.

"Those are the Need paintings. I'm really proud of them." They were light and bright, all about the sunshine pouring in, making things clear and sharp.

"Why 'Need'?" Pablo asked. "They don't feel like need, they feel... right?"

"I..." He shrugged, blushed a little. "I guess because they're what an artist needs -- light, color, that sort of stuff."

"Oh, cool." Pablo nodded, hand reaching out at the last one and tracing the lines, just above the canvas. "They're really good, Marc."

"Thank you." He nodded, eyes moving over the canvasses. He didn't know if they were good enough, but he knew they were *him*.

Pablo moved to the second set. "What are these called?"

"Hunger." They were painted over the summer when the handouts were scarce and Leo'd found a little thing to go off with, leaving him high and dry.

Pablo nodded and shivered a little. "Yeah, I can see that." The brown eyes turned on him, Pablo looking at him intently. "You're very good, Marc."

"Thanks. It's... It's what I am." He reached out, twined their fingers together, drew Pablo over to the mismatched, random canvasses. "You want to pick one of these to keep?"

Pablo's fingers squeezed his. "Really? I'd love to have one of my very own."

"Really really."

Pablo beamed at him and checked the pictures out carefully, examining each one, again tracing lines in the air above them. The close attention made him feel special, interesting. Cool. Pablo narrowed it down to two and finally pointed to one that was a self-portrait. "Can I have this one?"

It was all done in greens and blues, slightly blurred, slightly washed out. "Sure. It's yours."

"Thank you, Marc." Pablo's fingers touched the painting this time, caressing his two dimensional cheek.

"You... I'm right here, you know? You could just touch me." Oh. Oh, be careful. Careful, Marc.

"Oh." The sound was more breath than word and Pablo turned away from the painting and reached up to touch his cheek, fingers trembling.

He smiled, leaned down into the touch, rubbing a little. Pablo's teeth caught his bottom lip, the soft brown eyes gazing up intently at him as the gentle fingers slid into his hair. "Oh... That's nice, Pablo."

"Yeah? I never... I don't." Pablo shrugged, hand sliding away, color high on the olive cheeks.

"Oh, that's okay. No pressure, man. It just felt good." He smiled, tilted his head towards the lantern. "Want to sit for a bit or are you headed home?"

"I could sit," Pablo answered with a shy smile.

"Sitting is good." There was an old beanbag and a lawn chair and he let Pablo have the beanbag, it was warmer, softer, less likely to break.

Pablo giggled again as they settled, neck going back to look up at him. "If we both sat on the beanbag you wouldn't tower over me so much."

"That would be cool with you?" He wouldn't mind that at all. In fact? He was freezing and wouldn't mind sharing body heat a bit. Pablo nodded and scooted over a little.

Their bodies pressed together as he sat and Pablo reached out to take his hand, holding it loosely. "Is this okay?"

"Yeah. It's okay." He squeezed Pablo's fingers, relaxing. "Bet you never thought your day'd be ending like this, huh?"

Pablo smiled and shook his head. "No, I figured I'd be reading all about Louis Armstrong until I got kicked out of the library." Pablo giggled softly and squeezed his hand back. "This is better."

"Well, yeah. I'm way more comfortable than that chair."

That made Pablo giggle harder, brown eyes twinkling, happiness palpable.

"Oh, man. That? Is a great fucking sound." He leaned back, stretching.

Pablo looked around and smiled at him. "What sound?"

He tapped Pablo's nose. "Your laugh."

"Oh." Pablo blushed and ducked his head and then looked up at him again, smiling. "Thank you."

"We're doing a lot of that. Thanking each other, that is." God, he wanted to kiss Pablo. Pablo giggled again. He leaned forward, brushed their lips together, just barely.

"Oh..." Pablo swallowed, brown eyes huge. Then he was given a warm smile, Pablo whispering, "Thank you."

He nuzzled the corner of Pablo's lips with his own. "Can I do it again?"

Pablo nodded, turning so their lips were pressed together. "Please."

Oh. Oh, fucking cool. He took another kiss, tongue just sneaking out to taste. Pablo made a soft noise and shivered.

"Is this okay?" He stroked Pablo's belly, petting. Sort of.

"Uh-huh." Pablo nodded as if worried he hadn't heard the word. Pablo pressed their lips together again. Oh, he could so go for this -- the sweet flavor and the heat and the low moans. Their lips drew apart and Pablo gazed up at him. "I'd never done that before."

"No? Did you like it?" Marc was so toast. Those eyes were... Wow.

Pablo grinned, color high. "Yeah. A lot. Did you?"

"Oh, yeah. I did. A lot." He rubbed their noses together, grinning.

Pablo giggled again and pressed their lips together in a soft, quick kiss. "I'm glad you were sitting in my chair yesterday."

"I'm glad you came upstairs to chat today."

Pablo smiled and nodded and leaned against him, head on his shoulder, fingers twined with his. Marc took a deep breath, relaxing, just resting with Pablo. Funny, for the first time since summer, Marc wasn't cold.

Chapter Two

Pablo had to work on Saturday, but when he was finished he called his Mama and told her he had to study and headed to the library. He couldn't wait to see Marc again.

He checked his chair and then the second floor tables and then the first floor and then he went over the first and second floors really thoroughly, but Marc was definitely not there.

Oh.

Well, maybe Marc had been there earlier when he hadn't been. Or maybe Marc didn't want to see him again because he was just a silly boy who'd never even been kissed before last night. He worried his lower lip, looking out the window at the rain coming down, trying to decide if he should just curl up in his chair and read and hope that Marc came by or if he should go to Marc's place. He was pretty sure he could find the warehouse again. Mostly sure.

The library was only open until eight and it was just past six now, so he decided to sit and read about Manet and if Marc hadn't come by before the library closed he'd go get some soft serve and if while he was out walking he happened to go by Marc's warehouse...

He found himself a couple of books and settled in his chair, soon losing himself in the words.

Icy cold fingers tickled over the back of his neck. "Boo."

He jumped, like maybe a foot, and looked up, smiling happily. "Hi, Marc."

"Hey, Pablo man. What're we reading today?" He got a grin and a wink from those watery blue eyes behind the thick glasses.

"About that guy you told me about -- Manet. There's another guy, Monet? Also an impressionist with like almost the same name." Gosh, Marc was cute. And nice. And had tasted really good yesterday.

"Yeah. Pretty cool, huh?" Marc sat on the edge of the chair, grinning down. "You doing anything tonight?"

He shook his head. "I don't have plans. What about you?"

"Nope. No plans. Stopped by to see if you were about."

"I was hoping you'd come by before they closed," he admitted. He got a wide grin, boot rubbing his shin for just a second. "So you wanna hang out together?" God, he sounded like a little kid.

"Yeah. Yeah, I do." Marc didn't look like he minded at all.

He beamed up at Marc. "Cool. We could grab a pizza or something and go back to your place. I'll take these books out and you can show me your favorites."

"Cool. I found a couple blankets so we won't freeze." Marc nodded, stood up.

"Sounds good." He got up and headed for the desk to check the books out. "You want me to check any of the other books out for you?"

"Huh? Nah... Sure as anything somebody'd burn 'em or sell 'em. I'm cool."

"Okay." Pablo checked out his books and put his hat and scarf back on and they headed out. The wind wasn't as biting as yesterday, but the sun was already down and the cold was noticeable. "Are there any good pizza places between here and your place?"

"Uh...Jumping Jack's is pretty good and he gives the burned pies out for a dollar in the back."

"That's nice of him. We could get a couple of sodas, too. Is that the place a few stores down from that art store?"

"Yeah. The little place with the green awning and the grapes? Jack is this big old black dude, real cool."

He nodded, he remembered passing it the night before. "What do you like on your pizza? We can go half and half if we can't agree."

He wasn't going to have onions on his. Not if Marc didn't. Or anchovies. 'Cause those would make his breath smell and he didn't want that. Not when he was hoping for more kisses.

"Like? Oh, green peppers and sausage." Marc grinned. "Or pepperonis and olives."

"Oh, green peppers and sausage sounds good." He took a little skipping step to catch up with Marc. Man, he had long legs.

Marc slowed, hooking one arm with his. "So, what did you do all day?"

He smiled up at Marc. "I worked. Served Jello and played Scrabble and was everyone's grandson for the day."

"Did you win at Scrabble?" Mark pushed his glasses up. "I'm pretty good at Scrabble, believe it or not."

"Really? Cool. Have you got a board? 'Cause if not I could bring mine. I won against Mr. Aguala and Mr. Benito - but they're pretty senile. Mrs. Benito? She's sharp as a tack and beats me all the time."

"I don't, no. I'm not real heavy on the whole material possession, you know?"

He blushed a little -- if he'd been thinking, he'd have known that. "I'll bring mine then. If you want me to come by some more, I mean."

"Hell, yeah. Anytime, man. I got no schedule. Bus tables for my mom for buckage sometimes, nothing serious." Marc squeezed his arm, grinned.

He beamed over at Marc. "Anytime? I'll remember that."

"Cool." The wind picked up, blowing the wild orange curls around. God, Marc was cute.

They got to the pizzeria and picked up a medium and a couple of cokes and took them back to Marc's place. It was a little warmer tonight and the foam was covered in some blankets and looked almost normal. "Went to see Linda this morning, she gave me some candles and some blankets and some smokes."

"Who's Linda again?" Marc had mentioned her yesterday, too.

"My mother-type person. Sorta. I mean, she is, but we don't do the mother-son thing much."

"Really? I can't imagine my Mama not doing the mother-son thing. She does it big time." It seemed kind of sad, especially with Marc having to live in the warehouse.

"I left home a long time ago. She's sort of... busy with her boyfriends and didn't have room in the trailer for a kid."

"I'm sorry, Marc."

"Oh, no sweat. I'm cool. Got this place and shit. I'm good." Marc gave him a wry grin, squeezed his fingers.

"After all, I don't have to go to school or anything."

Pablo gave Marc a wry smile. "I love school, remember?"

"Yeah? I bet you're good at it, too."

"I do okay. I need to get good marks if I'm going to get a scholarship, you know? 'Cause Papi, he works hard, but there's no way we afford me to go to college without help."

"Yeah, I hear you." Marc led him up the stairs. "What college do you want to go to?"

"Yale. Or Harvard. I've started applying around." He giggled. "But I'll settle for a good local place. As long as they have a good writing program, you know?"

"Wow. Cool. I'll be able to say I knew you when."

"I bet I say it about you, first. I'm just learning, man -- you're doing it." The pizza was warm and the cheese was gooey and it tasted good.

"Oh, this? Is heaven." Marc was eating, tongue twining the cheese around and around and around. He nodded, smiling around his own piece; watching Marc's obvious enjoyment was better than any pizza could ever be. "Man, now I owe you two meals. Next time me or Leo scores big? It's my treat."

"Sure. It doesn't matter though does it? I mean friends share, right?" He didn't want to have to feel weird paying for stuff. It wasn't like he didn't have the money saved from working and nothing to spend it on. And he wanted to spend time with Marc, which meant having to eat sometimes and stuff.

"Right." Marc scooted over, knee brushing his own. "So, tell me stuff about you. You got a favorite color?"

He felt something warm in his belly and he thought it wasn't the pizza. "Green. What about you?"

"I go from one to another. I like blues and greens, but red is important, you know?"

Wow, Marc got really animated when he talked about color. "Important how?"

"Well, the blues and greens are softer, flowing and then **bam** red! There's life and fire and creation and heat." Marc kept on, hands waving, eyes lit up and shining. Oh, that definitely wasn't the pizza making him all hot. Marc's words trailed off, the thin cheeks turning red. "Man, I'm sorry, dude. I get sort of into it."

"Oh, no don't apologize, I like the way you light up when you talk about stuff you're passionate about." He blushed, but didn't look away.

"Oh. Oh, cool. Light up? Really?" One of Marc's long-long fingers brushed his jaw, his cheek. He nodded, smiling at Marc, that touch feeling so good. He nuzzled Marc's fingers, pizza forgotten in his hand. "You have great skin, so warm and smooth. I'm going to paint you, one day."

"Me?" Oh, wow, Marc wanted to paint him. God, that made him feel good. Special. "Cool."

"Yeah, you." Long fingers stole a pepper from his pizza. "Yummy." Giggling, he reached over and stole one from Marc's piece. "Oh, that one was mine." Marc grinned, leaning over and licking his lips. "Mmm... Yummy."

"Oh." He gasped a little, that warmth in him exploding at the touch of Marc's lips. "Which other ones are yours?"

Marc picked up another pepper, holding it to his mouth, watching his lips. "This one."

He licked his lips and opened his mouth, leaning in far enough to take the pepper. "Oh, yours taste better than mine," he told Marc, smiling.

"Yeah?" Marc scooted closer, angling for another kiss. "Lemme taste."

"Oh." He nodded, smile growing. "Okay."

He carefully pushed his mouth against Marc's, making a soft sound -- it felt so good. Marc's tongue slid against his lips, pushing in, just a little, the sensation odd and hot and sexy. It made his heart beat so fast, made him gasp, his mouth opening a little. The kiss deepened, Marc's tongue touching his, tasting him.

Oh.

Oh, he was going to burn right up on the spot because this was something else. Something that even his imagination couldn't have possibly got right. He made a small noise, reaching out instinctively to hold onto... something. Onto Marc. Marc didn't seem to mind, skinny body almost rubbing against his hand. He wrapped his hands around Marc's waist, feeling like he was drowning in Marc's kisses. Well, drowning, but in a good way.

Marc's hands slid into his hair, holding his head, and oh. Oh, that was. Oh. The kiss was hot and wet and was making him shiver all over. And Marc tasted like pizza and coke and cigarettes and like something he didn't even have a name for.

Marc backed away, grinning as their noses bumped a little. "I like that."

He took a deep breath, looking up into Marc's eyes. "Yeah. That was." He giggled softly. "Wow."

Marc grinned, rubbed their noses together again. "Better than Scrabble."

That made him giggle again. "Uh-huh."

In fact he was hard pressed to find anything that was better than the kissing had been. Maybe just being with Marc, seeing that smile was pretty close.

Marc?

Was having a stellar day, thank you very much.

He'd worked five shifts in a row washing dishes at Linda's coffee shop and made big buckage -- \$160 -- which got him a whole carton of smokes that he hid in the warehouse and a shower at the truckstop and some toothpaste and cash in his pockets. Then he found a sweet old chair and some wicked stuff at the dumpster by this emptied out house where the people moved. There was a little round piece of wood that he could put on the floor for a table, sort of, and four or five books, too.

Not only that? But Linda let him put his extra pair of jeans and t-shirts in with her laundry. Rocking cool.

The only thing better than all this would be a dose of the Pablo-sweetness, and he was bebopping to the library right now. It was Friday and he hadn't had a kiss or a giggle or a smile or anything since last Saturday.

Pablo was sitting in the big old chair, a book in his lap, three more on the floor next to a backpack. Pablo wasn't reading though, instead he was looking off into space, lips pulled into a soft frown.

"Hey, Pablo-man. Whatcha frowning about?" He settled at Pablo's feet, looking up with a grin. God, he was glad to see those eyes.

Pablo's frown disappeared as soon as he spoke, eyes shinning and a soft blush covering the sweet cheeks. "I figured I wasn't going to see you again. You haven't been in all week."

"Oh, I figured you had school and shit and I got a little work washing dishes." He reached out, one hand circling Pablo's ankle. "'Sides, you know where I live, yeah? You want to visit, you come on up."

"Oh." Pablo gave him a warm smile. "I didn't want to presume. And I come everyday after supper unless I've got a project or work and then I come right after school and I told Mama I had a project all this week to get done."

"Oh, come out whenever." He rubbed Pablo's leg, liking the crisp feel of the dark jeans, the ribs in Pablo's socks. "I found a chair today, so there's somewhere for you to sit now."

"What about for you?" Pablo asked, fingers playing with his hair.

"I'll sit beside you." He actually relaxed, closed his eyes and breathed deep.

"Oh, that sounds good." The fingers in his hair drifted lower, Pablo stroking his face. Oh, man. He hadn't remembered he was tired until just now, leaning into Pablo's touch. "I like the shape of your face," Pablo murmured. "I like the freckles especially."

Pablo touched the freckles on his cheeks, one after another, such a gentle touch.

"That feels so good." He was making a soft noise, like a purr, and God, he felt good.

"Cool." Pablo said the word softly, almost reverently as the gentle touches continued.

"The library lady going to bitch at us for this?" He didn't really give a shit, but he thought Pablo might.

"She won't even know we're here if we're quiet," Pablo murmured. "It's not like we're doing anything."

"I'll be quiet, babe. Just don't stop, 'kay?" Felt so good.

"Yeah, okay." Pablo's fingers slid back through his hair, playing with his curls and then back down to take off his glasses and trace his eyebrows and his eyelids and eyelashes. He dozed a little, relaxing, floating, feeling so damned good. When he woke up, Pablo was reading, hand still stroking idly through his hair.

"Oh, babe. Sorry. I just zoned on you." He blinked, Pablo only a vague blur without his glasses.

He couldn't miss that beaming smile though. "That's okay. This was nice, wasn't it? Being quiet and comfortable together. Makes me nervous if I think I have to be interesting all the time."

"Yeah. I hear you." He reached for his glasses, slid them on. Linda'd noticed that he was having troubles with the menu earlier, told him to go to the welfare clinic and get stronger glasses before it was too late. Fuck that. He was seeing everything he could. Right now.

"It's getting late," Pablo murmured. "You wanna get a bite to eat?"

"Yeah." He grinned up suddenly. "Oh! I worked, man. I got buckage! My treat."

"Yeah? Cool." Pablo giggled. "In that case we should go to Chez Latrope." He could hear the teasing note in Pablo's words.

"Oh, I was thinking the Jade Chicken. \$7.99 all you can eat and fortune cookies to boot." He pushed himself up, stretching tall.

He could feel Pablo's eyes on him, thought he felt the ghost of a touch on his belly as his t-shirt rode up. "That sounds really good, actually."

"Yeah? Cool. Let's go. Oh, whatcha reading today?" He picked up Pablo's backpack and the extra books.

"About Banting and Best, the guys that invented insulin. Well, fake insulin, 'cause your body makes it naturally." Pablo fell into step with him, shoulder brushing his arm.

"Yeah? Science project or just curious?"

"Curious. I finished my project on Tuesday."

It was a little warmer today, the bite of the wind missing.

"What was the project?" He dug out a smoke, lit up.

"Biology stuff. Genetics. Why you have red hair and blue eyes and I have tanned skin and brown eyes. Why I'm short and you're tall. It's all in the genes." Pablo giggled and bumped against him. "It's actually pretty cool stuff."

"Yeah? Linda says I'm a freak of nature. 'Course, God only knows what my sperm donor looked like, yeah?" Linda was short and brown and round and he? So not.

"Your *mom* said that?" Pablo sounded a little shocked. "Even if you don't look like either of them though, stuff skips generations and can be hiding in your genetic background for a long time. And then poof, you've got a cute redheaded baby."

"Wicked. Of course, I do have Linda's nose. The MacAllen ski slope." He winked over, bumping their hips together.

Pablo giggled. "You keep calling it that and I'm going to start planning a skiing vacation."

"Yeah? You gonna ride the bunny slopes?" They started laughing harder, people on the street giving them the eye.

Pablo's hand brushed his and then those brown eyes turned on him, serious. "Can I hold your hand?"

"Yeah. You don't mind people knowing you're with me?" He was sort of not a good catch.

"Because you're a guy?" Pablo shrugged. "My folks don't really know, but I'm going to have to tell them soon. My sisters'll tease me, but they'll be happy for me. And nobody else really matters, do they?"

"Well, I sorta meant because I'm a homeless, unemployed dropout type of guy, but cool." He wrapped his fingers around Pablo's, remembering to slow the fuck down so Pablo could keep up.

"Well nobody's perfect. I mean you're an artist -- how cool is that? Me, I'm just a Latino kid who likes to read a lot. Maybe you should be embarrassed to be seen with me."

"Not a chance. That giggle alone is worth the price of admission. That's not even counting the kisses."

Pablo squeezed his hand and beamed up at him. "The kisses are pretty good."

"Better than Scrabble, babe." That earned him another one of those giggles, Pablo still laughing as they went into the Jade Chicken.

He loved this place with its dim lights and chicken decor and odd bottle top collection. They got a table in the back, big cheesy red menus offered to them. "You can have anything you want, so long as it's the \$7.99 buffet, babe."

"The buffet sounds awesome. That way I can eat all I want and only feel like a pig when I go back for fourths." Pablo grinned at him, patting his belly.

"I like the green beans with bacon best. Oh, and the sweet and sour chicken. And the sesame stuff." He grinned, wandering to the buffet and grabbing a plate.

Pablo trailed him, putting a little bit of everything on his plate, even the stuff that he thought might be a bit dodgy. Pablo gave him a shy smile. "I like to try everything. And I'm hungry."

"I like that. The way you're curious. That's cool. Means you're sort of brave, yeah?" Marc got a lot of green beans; they were a great color.

"Brave? Me?" Pablo giggled. "I don't think so. You are though. I mean living on your own and taking care of yourself? That's... wow, you know?"

"Yeah, well, you sorta do what you have to, you know?" He got a little rice and a little chicken and some watermelon.

Pablo nodded and took two egg rolls and sauced them. "That's what Papi always tells Mama when she complains about him working too hard."

"Where's he work?" They settled back into the booth, digging into the food. Man. Good.

"He works on the line at a factory during the day shift and then does janitor work on the evening shift. We don't see much of him."

"Busy guy, yeah? You got a big family?"

Pablo shrugged. "It depends whose standards you go by. For a Latino family four kids isn't that much, but I know a lot of folks have much smaller families." Pablo smiled. "I've got three sisters. All older. So I'm the baby. They make me crazy, but they're my sisters, you know?"

"I don't have any. I mean, I've had a bunch of steps, but no real ones." He ate a bit of that and this and then stole half of Pablo's egg roll.

"Steps?" Pablo giggled some more and pretended to fight him for the egg roll. "The food is really good here."

"Mm-hmm. I've been here a few times. They're cool because you can get a to go box at the end." He wielded his chopstick. "En garde!"

Giggling madly, Pablo chopstick fought with him, making hack and slash sounds. It didn't last long enough to get them in trouble, but they shared the egg roll, giggling and snorting around the cabbage. Before they went up to get dessert, Pablo touched his hand, keeping him his seat a moment longer. "I really like spending time with you, Marc."

"Yeah?" He blushed, nodded. "I meant it when I said anytime." Like in a serious, serious, anytime, I'm sort of thinking about you a lot wanting you sort of way.

"Even if..." Pablo looked at him, brown eyes serious and soft and so sweet. "If anytime turns out to be a whole lot of time?"

"Even if anytime turns out to be a ton of time, babe." Oh, he was in serious trouble here.

Pablo blushed a little, beamed at him. "I like it when you call me that."

"Oh. Cool, 'cause when I'm having one of those in-my-head-cause-you're-not around talks with you? That's what I call you."

"You talk to me when I'm not there?"

He felt his cheeks heat. "Well, sorta. Yeah. I mean... I'm not crazy or anything."

"I didn't think that," Pablo told him softly. "I thought it was sweet."

"Oh. Oh, cool." He grinned, blushing all the way up to his hair. "You want to get dessert?"

"Can we get it to go?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I bet." He couldn't stop smiling. "You want to go back to my place?"

"Yeah. I do." Pablo blushed hard.

"Cool." He reached out, squeezed Pablo's hand. "Real cool, babe."

New chair, smokes, cash, a nap, hot food and Pablo.

Life? Was so cool.

Chapter Three

Marc was sitting with his legs spread and Pablo was kneeling in front of him. It put them face to face. Pablo liked that, liked being able to play with the red hair and look into the blue eyes.

He liked how those eyes looked without the glasses and he took them off slowly. His hands were trembling and he couldn't stop them. Couldn't stop leaning forward either and gently kissing each eyelid and then the tip of Marc's nose.

He made a little noise because Marc was warm and smelled good underneath the scent of cigarettes and his skin was surprisingly soft. He ran his fingers over the long cheeks and through Marc's hair. Fingertips searching and brushing and his hands were trembling.

He wasn't scared, not really, just nervous and more excited than he'd ever been and it made his breathing heavy. It was all he could hear: his breath and Marc's. Only his was like he'd run for a long time and was out of breath and he just couldn't quite catch his breath and even the fist in his belly was like if he was running too far and too fast but it felt good and it made him tremble harder.

He wanted it to be smooth, wanted himself to be smooth. That was why he'd looked it up, read about it and when he'd imagined doing it he was smooth and easy, and in reality, with Marc's warm skin under his fingers, he wasn't smooth at all.

And then he held Marc's face between his hands and brought their lips together and they'd done this before, kissed like this with their mouths open and wet tongues touching, which felt weird but really, really good, too. And they'd done this before, just like this, but this time they weren't going to stop with just a few kisses and that made him moan and his hips were pressing against Marc.

Oh, he was hard, he hadn't realized just how hard he was and he was rubbing his hard cock against Marc's waist but it was okay because Marc wasn't complaining. No, instead long fingers were wrapping around his hips and pulling him closer, so it was okay with Marc, what he was doing. Which was good because he didn't think he could stop, didn't think he could stop rubbing and kissing and his hands were pushing through Marc's hair, getting tangled in it and it all felt so good.

So good, too good and someone was making funny whimpering noises, like they were in pain, only it was him and he wasn't in pain. Oh, he ached, his cock was so hard and the rubbing was good but not enough and he had to, he wanted to, and then Marc's hand slipped into his jeans, fingers sliding across the top of his cock and he was coming and coming and still shaking and oh, it was so good.

It was so much better than when he touched himself and he was gasping and his forehead was pressed against Marc's and there were tears in his eyes and he couldn't believe he was crying, but he was because it was over now and he didn't want it to be over.

"Marc..." he whispered the name and maybe he explained how he didn't want it to be over, too. He didn't think he had, but instead of pushing him away, Marc was holding him and helping him to take off his clothes and then Marc was taking off his own clothes and suddenly Pablo was hard again and Marc was hard.

He reached out slowly, waiting any minute for Marc to stop him, but Marc didn't and his fingers touched Marc's cock and it was big and it was long and it was hot and soft but hard and Marc's hand covered his, reminded him how to hold a cock and how to stroke and Marc was making the little noises now.

One of Marc's hands slid behind him to grab his ass, pulling him forward until they were pressing against each other and then Marc made him let go of the long cock he was holding and stroking and Marc made their cocks touch and Pablo thought maybe that what they were doing was very, very wrong because things that felt so good, oh, so good, they couldn't be right, there had to be some sort of rule about it about how God would frown down upon it and Mama would be embarrassed if the church ever found out about it. And then Marc wrapped his hand around both their cocks and Pablo forgot all about the church and God and his Mama.

Pablo wanted this never to end and at the same time he thought that if he didn't come soon he was going to explode, his head was going to come right off his shoulders. He couldn't understand how this could feel so good, how it could be so much better with someone else than by himself, than his imagination.

He had a really good imagination, everyone said so, but when he imagined this, it hadn't been like this at all. It hadn't been warm and scary and hot and cold as a breeze blew against his back and over his bared skin. Marc hadn't been real under his fingertips and against him and in his mouth and there hadn't been noises, hot needy, desperate little noises like were filling his head now. He thought maybe they were coming from Marc as well as from himself because he couldn't be the only one making those noises. Marc was moving against him now and pushing him back and the blanket was a cold shock against his back, bringing everything into sharp focus.

Marc was on top of him, rubbing and oh, oh, oh, it was, and it felt, and nothing had prepared him for this, not all the reading he'd done and not all the imagining it happening and it was like time stopped and the world disappeared and there was only his body and Marc's body and Marc was hard under soft, warm skin and the foam was hard under the soft blanket against his back. Marc was pressing him into the makeshift mattress and holding him down and rubbing against him and he could feel Marc's mouth all over him, open and wet and he was jerking now, jerking hard and harder and he was sobbing and big boys didn't cry but he couldn't stop. It couldn't be this good, couldn't feel this good, but it did and Marc's cock was hard and hot and sliding against his and against his belly and, and, and he screamed as everything went white and sparkled and his body was jerking and he was coming and Marc was coming too and even the feeling of the hot come against his stomach made him jerk some more and he thought he was going to explode even though he'd already come.

"Oh..." And he closed his eyes and listened to his breathing and felt the hot hard heat of Marc's long body pressing him into the foam mattress and thought about dragons on skin and ice-cream and the way Marc tasted underneath the taste of cigarettes. And he thought maybe he'd never felt anything quite so good in all his life and he wondered if anyone else had ever felt anything so good.

And he knew he would never forget this, not if he lived to be as old as Mrs. Jensen.

Marc sat in the window, mostly naked, goosepimpled and shivering in the cold, watched Pablo hurry down the dark, downtown street, bouncing a little, floating a little. He could see the happiness from three floors up. So sweet -- it didn't really make sense, how much Pablo felt, how big it all felt when you saw it in those brown eyes.

Sometimes he thought maybe he was Pablo's art. Then he sort of knew better, because lots of that big feeling that he saw in Pablo wasn't him at all; it was that it was new and overwhelming and good. Good. How many firsts weren't good, yeah? How many hurt real bad and he was making it good and that counted for something, didn't it?

It meant maybe some of that happiness belonged to him, too. Maybe some of it counted.

He could still smell Pablo on him, on his hands and skin. It was cool and not all at once. Part of him was happy, warm, sated. Part of him? Was sort of a little sick.

He'd touched Pablo and maybe -- just maybe -- there was something catching about him. Some bit of badness that lingered around him and seeped into the goodness in other people. Pablo was a good kid -- smart and handsome and curious and...

And he wasn't. And he wasn't good enough to tell Pablo to find a rich kid with a car and a future or to just wait until college next year and find a bright-eyed twink to love him or even to just keep it about the screwing.

No. He wanted to be in love, to have someone be in love with him, even if it was never ever going to work.

Oh, maybe if he'd been someone else? Pablo'd be home -- safe, happy, warm. Hell, Pablo could introduce him as a school friend, they could sleep in the same room, pretend to just be friends. Hell, parents liked when their kids had friends. So long at they weren't starving, homeless, smoking, dropout friends with eyes that were sliding down into darkness and taking their future with them, that was.

He didn't blame Pablo, not at all. He'd be ashamed to bring him home, too.

He lit a cigarette, watching until he couldn't even pretend to see Pablo anymore.

Pablo liked to look at Marc's paintings and make up stories about the people in them. Or about how they made him feel.

He liked to look at them by himself, because it made him self-conscious when Marc was there; he figured a painter would want you to tell them what you thought about their paintings, but it was so complicated inside his head and mixed up with how Marc made him feel and he was still a little shy. The thought made him giggle quietly and he wrapped the blanket tighter around his shoulders.

He was barefoot and naked but for a blanket in Marc's home, he'd made love with Marc five times, bodies touching, feeling so good rubbing together; he probably shouldn't be too shy. But Marc looked at him, into him, and really saw him and he wasn't too used to that. Even Mama didn't always see him anymore and Papi was hardly around to even look.

Marc was dozing on the small piece of foam he used as a bed, but Pablo couldn't sleep. There were too many feelings inside him and he just wanted to keep on touching Marc, but he figured Marc needed to sleep, so he'd wrapped himself in a blanket and padded over to look at some of the paintings that he'd wanted to get closer to when Marc had first shown them to him.

The one in front of him wasn't really anything specific, but it reminded him of eating soft serve with Marc, the chocolate and white kind that was swirled together and sometimes you got more chocolate and sometimes you got more vanilla, but you never got a bite or a lick with just one or the other.

"That one's pretty new. I painted it right after we met." Marc's voice was husky, lazy, still mostly asleep.

Pablo turned, cheeks heating at the sound of his lover's voice. Marc was curled up, blinking slowly, head propped up on one arm, thin blanket thrown over his hips and thighs. "Have I slept long?"

He shook his head. "Maybe an hour. I didn't want to wake you."

"Mm... why not? We could have been doing things a lot more fun than sleeping." Marc grinned and winked.

Pablo found himself blushing harder, but he walked back to the mattress and sat down next to Marc. He reached out and ran a gentle finger under Marc's eyes. "You looked tired."

"Come share your blanket with me, lover." Marc lifted the blanket he was using, encouraging Pablo to slide next to him. "I'll never be too tired to want your touch."

He held his blanket tighter for a moment and then let it drop to cover Marc as he slipped in next to his lover. "I like touching you, Marc." His fingers and eyes moved almost automatically to trace over the black ink on Marc's shoulder, fingers brushing against the small nipple as they passed by it. Marc murmured softly, the sound happy and warm. The skin around Marc's nipple tightened, swelled, as if reaching for his fingers. One long leg curled around his hip, pulling him close, sharing their warmth.

He felt himself get hard, heat moving through his whole body and he gasped, palm sliding over the small, hard bit of flesh. He'd lied to Marc -- he didn't like touching Mark, he loved it.

"Feels good." The words were whispered against his hairline, Marc's lips soft on his forehead. One hand stroked along his spine, firm and steady, the other caressed his temple, his cheek.

"Yes," he agreed faintly, a soft shudder moving through his body.

"Mm... Do you know how hard it makes me when you do that? That sweet shudder all through your body?" Marc leaned back, looked at him. "I love knowing I make you feel good."

"You do -- you make me feel good, Marc. So good." He leaned forward impulsively and pressed a kiss to Marc's mouth. Marc's lips met his, open and wet and warm and hungry. The kiss deepened, making him ache, creating more of those delicious shivers. Marc's tongue slid out to trace his lips, sliding alongside his own tongue, tasting him. The hand against his face moved to cup his jaw, holding him. He was trembling again, hands unsteady against Marc's skin as excitement went through him. He started making those soft noises he couldn't control, pressing close to Marc.

Marc kissed him again and again, slow, deep kisses that stole his breath and made him dizzy. He gasped as Marc's lips left his, lungs struggling to remember their job.

"I want to taste you, babe. Let me?" Another soft kiss and Marc whispered against his lips, blue eyes staring at him. "I want to make you feel so good, lover."

"You can do anything you want, Marc." Another shudder went through him as he said the words.

His reward was another deep, hard kiss as Marc rolled him to his back. Marc's lips began moving, sliding over his jaw, his throat. The red hair disappeared beneath the blankets as Marc licked and nibbled down his torso and stomach. He gasped, body jerking as he realized just what Marc had meant by "taste him". He made a soft, keening noise, hips suddenly restless, searching. He reached down beneath the covers, finding Marc's shoulder and clutching it with his hand.

"You okay, babe? Want me to stop?" Something wet and warm slid over the head of his erection as the question floated up from the blankets.

Pablo squeaked, hand tightening, hips surging. It felt like every muscle in his body tightened as he waited for the touch to come again and he couldn't find his voice to answer either question. The slick heat came again, this time tracing down to his sacs. Heat filled his body as Marc took one of his balls in unbelievable warm wetness and sucked gently.

"Oh..." He stared blindly up at the high ceilings, body beginning to shake. "Oh, God, Marc..." He'd never imagined, never thought... he'd seen drawings, read the words. Fellatio. It was called fellatio. But the book he'd read said nothing about how it would make him quiver, how he would forget all about how to breathe.

The heat left his sac, moved back up his shaft in random, teasing motions. Marc's tongue swirled around him and then slid over the slit for a moment before Pablo found himself pulled into Marc's mouth. He screamed, hips driving upward, pushing his cock deeper into the wet heat of Marc's mouth. Marc swallowed around him and he came, sparkles dancing behind his eyes.

Marc's mouth was still on him when his mind stopped whirling, sucking gently at him. A soft pleased humming floated up from the blanket.

"I keep thinking it can't get any better and then you do something like that." His hand was still clutching Marc's shoulder; he needed to touch, to know it was real.

"You taste good." Kisses began to fall on his hips and stomach, Marc's lips warm and soft on his skin.

"What do I taste like?" Marc surged up, covering Pablo's mouth with his own, sharing a bittersweet, salty flavor. He wrapped his arms around Marc's neck, lapping at the warm mouth and the taste he found there.

Marc pressed against him, hips rocking insistently against his thigh. Soft, hungry sounds were caught between their lips, pushed into his mouth beside Marc's tongue. It made him hard again, made him want again and he pushed up against Marc, whimpering in their kiss. Marc nipped at his bottom lip, eyes hot on his face. "Oh... oh, you feel so good."

He watched Marc's face as they moved, fascinated with the way the pleasure grew, with the way his own movements added to it. A low groan filled the air, Marc's eyes growing wide and desperate. The thrusts against him became random and rough before heat splashed against his thigh. He pushed up once more and then bliss moved over him again, slowly making his muscles seize and he came with a soft shudder.

Marc's lips moved on his, soft and easy, drawing out the pleasure, the warmth. The blue eyes never left his face. He licked at Marc's mouth, eager for the sweet taste that sat just below the flavor of the cigarettes Marc smoked.

Without breaking the kiss, Marc settled beside him, one hand smoothing the fluid on his belly into his skin. One leg hooked back over his hip, rubbing gently, the action becoming familiar, comfortable. His hands slid into the orange hair, stroking the surprisingly soft strands, fingers tangling in them. He felt relaxed and sexy without being horny; he was warm and comfortable and happy right where he was.

Marc was watching him, eyes still and focused, almost as if they were memorizing him. "I love your eyes. They're so dark and rich and deep." His cheeks heated at that, but he didn't break Marc's gaze. "I love the way you taste, the way your skin feels."

"I like your skin too, Marc. It's so warm." Pablo lowered his eyelids and buried his face against Marc's neck; it had been a stupid thing to say -- of course Marc's skin was warm.

"Mm... thank you. Come here, babe, and I'll keep you warm." Marc pushed closer, arm wrapping tight around Pablo. His voice sounded pleased, warm, happy.

Pablo pushed closer happily, one hand dropping from Marc's hair to play along his spine, fingertips slowly exploring the path of vertebrae.

"Tell me a story, Pablo. Tell me my future." Marc pulled the blankets up, tucking them both in together.

"Your future?"

"Yes. You listen, you tell stories. Tell me my future." Marc kissed the top of his head. "Then I'll tell you yours."

Pablo bit his lip, worried Marc might not like the future he drew for the painter; what if Marc thought you had to suffer for your art, that the truly great ones were only discovered after they were dead? He pushed away his fears; Marc wanted to hear what he had to say. "One day the penniless but handsome painter was visited by a cold-hearted, but successful agent who took one look at the handsome painter's art and fell instantly in love. He promised to make the painter famous and rich beyond his wildest dreams.

"And he did.

"But then people started to tell the painter what they wanted him to paint next and they didn't like hearing no for an answer. The agent demanded that the painter do as he was told or he would fade back into nothing and his name would soon be forgotten. But the handsome painter laughed at the agent and all the people who told him what they wanted him to do. He locked himself in his studio and painted his heart out -- not the things other people wanted but what he needed to paint.

"Much later, he came out of his studio and tried to stop people from looking at his new paintings, because he knew they just wanted to laugh at his paintings and say they were not good.

"But in the end, he knew he had to show them because they wouldn't be finished unless someone other than the painter got to see them. And the agent gathered all the people around and they wanted to laugh and they wanted to say the paintings weren't good but they couldn't and so Marc was famous all over again and under his own terms."

Another soft kiss fell on Pablo's head. "That sounds like a fabulous future. Thank you." Marc took a deep, almost shaky breath. "Now yours. I see a long future filled with books and pens, reams and reams of white paper, stories pouring all around you. I can see you, in an office lined with full shelves, books of every size and shape. And lots of them have your name on them. I see your eyes, older and wiser and happier and free."

"Oh, I'd love to work in a place full of books." He tilted his head, reaching up for a soft kiss. "But, you know, I'm pretty happy right now, Marc."

"Yeah, me too." Marc's eyes seemed suspiciously bright as he stole another kiss. "Me too."

"You okay, Caro?" The endearment slipped out and Pablo decided he liked it.

"Yeah, I'm fine, babe. Just fine." Marc nuzzled close.

"Okay." He tilted his head back further, giving Marc better access to his skin. Marc took immediate advantage,

brushing soft, teasing kisses over the skin of his throat. He gasped. It seemed like every moment with Marc brought new pleasure.

"You like that?" The kisses traveled up towards his ear, Marc's tongue like a flame against his skin.

"Y-yes... I like everything you do." His voice was breathless and halfway to shaky again and it made him wonder if Marc's touch would always make him shaky.

Marc's lips found his ear, nibbling and licking. "Oh, good. I have so much I want to do with you. So much I want share with you."

"I've... I've read about it. All the things that men do together."

"Have you? What would you like us to do together?" Marc's tongue slid over his ear, voice smoky and rough. "What did you read about that excited you, made you hard?"

"Oh..." He shifted restlessly against Marc, cock beginning to harden again as his mind flashed on all the possibilities. "The fellatio thing looked pretty incredible." He giggled slightly nerves fluttering in his stomach again, he liked the way it made him feel, all excited and still shaky; he had a feeling that whenever he got the shakes, no matter what the reason, it would make him think of Marc.

"And how did it feel? Pretty incredible?" A thin hand began to trail over his stomach, light and gentle on his skin.

He laughed a little breathlessly. "Kissing you is pretty incredible. That was... it was... I don't think I have a word for it."

"Relax, babe. Take a deep breath and just relax. We've got time." Marc kissed along his jaw. "When do you have to be home?"

"It's Friday... I get to sleep in tomorrow. I don't have a curfew on Fridays." He curled tighter into Marc, rubbing against him. "That night we went for ice-cream and I didn't get home until two and I didn't wake anyone."

"Mm... wonderful. I get my lover all evening." He could feel Marc's smile on his cheek, hear the honest pleasure in the low voice.

"I never thought I'd find something I liked so doing so much better than reading."

Marc chuckled. "I never thought I find something that felt better than painting."

Pablo searched out Marc's mouth with his own, trying to express the happiness he couldn't seem to find words for.

The long, lingering kisses lasted until the light was gone, Marc sharing soft moans and careful touches with him. The caresses slid over all of his skin, making him hyperaware of every sensation, every brush of fingertips. His own explorations grew bolder. Hands still trembling softly, he couldn't seem to stop that, he learned the shape of Marc's collarbones and the way his lover would jump when he brushed his fingertips across the pebbled nipples. He discovered that he could feel Marc's ribs, count them if he wanted to, but that it would make Marc laugh if he did it.

It was easier, somehow, with the darkness and the blankets keeping them close and alone in a tiny world. Marc's soft, easy encouragements filled the air between them as Pablo discovered that a kiss to the inside of his elbow made him see stars and that the flesh of his inner thigh could feel Marc even before the touch happened.

He grew bolder and his lips left Marc's mouth, sliding down to lick and suck at Marc's neck. Cigarette smoke, salt, dust and paint were the tastes that filled his mouth and below them something else, somehow familiar, yet he'd never tasted it before, like an undiscovered spice. Marc made a sound, almost a squeak, as he began to suck. It filled him with warmth, knowing that his touch, his lips made Marc make that sound. Pablo knew that sound. He'd made it for Marc again and again.

He was so hard again, aching like before, only not as urgent, like it was okay if they took their time, as long as they didn't stop touching and tasting. He circled his fingers down over the muscles of Marc's belly, moving downward so slowly he didn't know if he'd ever get to Marc's cock. He shuddered again, teeth digging in slightly as the anticipation shook his body, and then went back to sucking, pulling more and more of that new taste into himself.

Marc was beginning to tremble beneath his hand, his lover's hips moving restlessly on the blankets. He could feel Marc's heartbeat beneath his lips, steady and strong. He whimpered against Marc's skin as his hand fumbled and finally found Marc's cock, closing around it. Marc felt different from him, cock long and slender where his own was a little shorter, a little wider.

"Oh." Marc breathed the word out, somehow making it sound like so much more than just one syllable, just one little noise. When Marc said it, it sounded like 'good' and 'please' and 'more' and 'yes.'

So he did what he liked, he began to slowly stroke Marc's cock. Every nerve in his hand was alive, his palm was burning from the heat of Marc's cock and marveling at the softness of his skin. Pablo gasped and began to pant as if he were the one whose cock was being pumped.

"Pablo!" His name was lovely when Marc said it, running those long fingers through his hair.

He pressed his forehead against Marc's collarbone, the hand holding Marc's cock speeding up. His free hand was opening and closing on Marc's waist, his own hips pushing and rubbing against whatever skin he could find.

"Kiss me. Please, babe. Want to taste you when I come." Marc sounded at once hungry and lost, pointed chin nudging against his temple. He raised his head, searching blindly, breathing heavily into Marc's mouth as their lips closed together. Marc's tongue pressed into his mouth, sliding deep, as liquid heat poured over his hand, Marc's body convulsing against his. He gasped into Marc's mouth, shivers going through him, excitement at having made Marc come first this time. Marc's kiss grew sloppy, aftershocks moving through the lean body with every movement of his hand. "Oh, babe. So good. So good."

He smiled and nodded, sliding slickly against Marc's hip now as Marc's come eased his movements. Marc returned his smile, one hand curling over his hip and encouraging his motions.

Trailing soft kisses over his face, Marc's lips slid to his ear. "You feel good against me, babe. I can't wait to feel you inside me, making love to me."

"Oh!" The sound was more a whimper than exclamation and Pablo convulsed, heat splashing between them.

Marc moaned against his neck, pressing close. "You look so... I mean, I could paint you again and again."

"Do you... do you really want to do that?" Pablo asked.

"Yes. I want to paint your eyes, your lips. Try to find the paints that are exactly the color of your skin in sunlight, in candlelight." Marc's voice was a whisper. "I want to capture that moment when you look so loved, so happy and keep it forever. It would be like I was making a part of you mine, so I could always remember."

"Oh..." He pushed himself closer to Marc, trying to sink into the warm skin, to make this moment when he felt loved and happy and make it last forever.

Marc wrapped around him, arms and legs surrounding him. There was silence for a long time and then Marc sighed. "I... I have something I need to tell you, Pablo. I want to tell you before... before I fall for you any harder, you know."

He felt himself stiffen, worry making him frown. He held on tightly to Marc, all sorts of possibilities flashing through his mind, that Marc wanted him to leave among them.

"What?" he asked softly, wishing he didn't sound so scared.

"I... do you remember when you told my future earlier? When you talked about painting and stuff?" At Pablo's nod, Marc sighed. "It's not going to happen. I... I have this thing called Stargardt's disease. It's just starting now, but it's going to get worse."

"Are you going to die?" The question sounded loud and bare, but he had to know, his hands clutching at Marc as if he was going to dissolve into nothing right now.

Marc's laugh was short and bitter. "I'm not so lucky, babe. It's in my eyes, you know? I... I'm going blind, Pablo."

He shuddered with relief, his first reaction purely selfish; Marc wasn't dying. Then the rest of it sunk in and sorrow filled him. "Oh, Marc..."

Pablo's hands slid up over Marc's face, carefully tracing the outline of his jaw, his cheeks, and gently brushing over his eyes.

"Don't worry. I've known for a long time. I... I haven't told anyone else, didn't want anyone to know. But you... oh, Pablo, I could fall so hard for you and you needed to know, so you wouldn't waste your time. I mean, I don't have a pot to piss in now, but in a few years..." Marc shrugged. "You should know if you're wasting your time with a three-legged horse."

"You're falling for me?" As soon as the words were out of his mouth Pablo wished them back, he wasn't usually so self-centered.

Marc stiffened, even as he nodded. "Yeah. I'm sorry. I thought it was pretty obvious."

Pablo's hands wandered nervously over Marc's face, returning again and again to the painter's doomed eyes. "I read books better than people. I kinda figured you liked me, I mean..." he laughed nervously, "...you don't have sex with people you don't like, right?" He took a deep breath to try and keep himself from beginning to shake again. "I thought maybe I liked you a whole lot more than you liked me. I mean you're so... tall and good looking and your skin is so soft and smooth and you've got these awesome tattoos and you're a *painter* and I'm just me." The breathing wasn't working because now he was kind of half gasping and shaking. "But if you're falling for me..." his voice dropped to a whisper. "It would be really nice not to be the only one."

"Pablo, listen to me. I don't have sex with people I don't like." Marc rubbed against Pablo's hands, voice gentle. "And I never make love with people I'm not in love with." A soft kiss brushed over his lips. "You're not the only one, babe. Not at all."

"In that case I think you should know that I really like your three legs." Pablo's hand dropped down to stroke across each of Marc's thighs and over his cock.

Marc laughed, the sound thick and rough. "Shut up and kiss me, you nut."

"I can do that," he whispered, bringing their lips together. Marc's cheeks were damp, he would never have known if he hadn't reached up to touch. Pablo made a soft noise and wrapped his arms around Marc, keeping their mouths together for long moments. He stroked gently along Marc's back. "I won't leave you just because you can't see anymore, Marc, I would never do that."

"How about because I have no money and no future and your mom wants you home for dinner?" Marc's voice was faintly bitter, but still laced with humor. "You know, your life's supposed to be about finding a girl for the homecoming dance and saving up for a car and studying for your SATs, not reassuring your homeless, destitute boyfriend that you won't leave when he goes blind."

"I took my SATs last year, you know, and the homecoming dance was in October. There was never going to be any girl, Marc." The words were soft; he could admit them to himself now. Now that he had made love with Marc and knew how good it made him feel, he could admit that girls had never interested him and never would. Ever. It wasn't just a feeling, it was reality now. "And I don't want to be ordinary, doing all the things that're expected of me. My life's supposed to be about what I want it to be about and if I want it to be about art and beauty and holding you until the light fades out of your eyes and then keeping on holding you because I love you, then that's what it's supposed to be about."

"Oh." Marc shuddered in his arms, soft sobs filling the air. "Oh, Pablo. I love you. I didn't want to tell you. Nobody knows, but I love you and I couldn't keep on lying, even if it meant losing you."

He began to rock slowly, holding Marc and gently petting him. "It's okay, Marc. It's going to be okay."

"No, it won't. It can't be." Marc nestled against his shoulder, leaning on him, taking the comfort he offered.

"We'll figure it out, Caro." He kissed Marc's forehead. "When's the last time you were at the doctor?"

"Wh... when I was nine. So, nine years, I guess? It wasn't at the top of the list of priorities, you know?"

"Marc you've got to go see a doctor. What if the diagnosis is changed? What if you aren't going to go blind after all?" Pablo sat up, getting excited. "There's been so many new advances in medicine, what if they can fix it now? What was it called again? I can look it up, they've got medical journals at the library you know."

"Babe. Babe. Relax." Marc reached for him, petting the skin of his belly lazily. "I'll go to the doctor right after I buy a new pair of running shoes and know where my next meal's coming from, right? I mean, come on. I've got enough dough for two packs of cigarettes and a cup of coffee at Dino's."

"I've got money saved up. We can find a free-clinic and get them to refer you to someone who specializes in it and then go see him." He took a breath, moving into Marc's touches. "That feels nice... You should really see someone, Marc."

"That's your college money and you'll use it for school." Marc's hand continued the easy touches, fingers sliding down to tangle in his curls. "How else are you going to make a fortune and support me in the way in which I'm accustomed?"

He gasped softly, the sensations of Marc's fingers on his body slowly clouding his mind. "I'll look after you, Marc. I promise."

"Sh. Make love to me. We'll deal with it all later, babe." Marc's lips brushed against his, soft and salty. "Right now let's just be together."

"I love you." He whispered the words against Marc's lips, liking the way the words tasted between them.

Marc moaned against his lips, it vibrated against him, inside him, all throughout him. "It sounds so good when you say it."

"Then I'll say it all the time so you can always hear it. I love you. I love you. I love you." The words were swallowed up, turned into murmurs as their mouths merged again. Each time they kissed it seemed different, new. One time slow and deep, the next fierce and hungry. Marc's tongue slid against his, so slick, so hot -- it felt good and necessary and right. They shifted, Marc lying back and Pablo followed him down, half lying on top of the long body, mouths still working together.

Marc's hands moved over his body in long sweep, palms never leaving his skin, never breaking contact. His shoulders, his back, his hips, his ass -- they were all touched and smoothed and stroked and loved and learned.

For long moments he rocked against Marc's body, kissing and touching and being kissed and touched in return. Still, it seemed that in no time at all, he was feeling the need and urgency, body restless and searching. "Marc? Did you mean it about me being inside you?"

"Yes, babe. Yes." Marc was brushing soft, lingering kisses all over his face. "Make love to me?"

"Show me how?" He'd begun to tremble again, nerves firing throughout his body.

"Mm... I need to find some lube and a rubber, babe. Hold on." Marc slid from beneath him, sitting up and wandering over to the familiar faded canvas bag, rustling slightly. In no time, Marc was sliding back beside him, pressing close. "We're good to go. You ever put a rubber on before?"

"Yes -- no -- well, they made us put them on bananas in Health. We had to partner up -- guy/girl, guy/girl... It was so embarrassing." He was babbling just a little, excitement building.

Marc chuckled; it sounded warm and close and shared. "Let me put it on for you? It's much more fun when we work together. Partner up, you know?"

He giggled. "As long as it doesn't include Mrs. Watson squealing, at the top of her lungs, 'now girls, it's your responsibility to make sure the prophylactic is firmly and properly on the peeeeNIS.'" He shuddered. "It didn't seem fun at all."

Marc's laughter filled the area. "Oh, God! That's priceless!" Warm arms hugged him tight; Marc's heat was everywhere. "This should be a little bit more fun than that. I promise."

There was a crinkle of plastic and then those warm hands slid between them, something tight sliding over the tip of his erection. He caught his breath along with his lower lip between his teeth, hands searching out Marc's shoulders, holding warmth.

"See? Isn't this better than bananas?" The tight rubber was rolled down over him, encasing his cock completely. Marc fumbled with something and then Marc was rubbing slick gel over him, making him gasp. "Relax, babe. Don't come yet. It'll be so good inside me."

He took a couple of deep breath's and tried to think about Mrs. Watson and bananas, but his brain kept drifting back to his cock and the sensation of Marc's hands sliding over it. "Hurry," he whispered.

Marc's hands left him, his lover's body twisting for a long moment. When Marc spoke again, the words were rough, voice husky. "Do you want me to ride you or do you want to be on top?" Heat rushed through his body and he squeaked, an honest to goodness squeak, his mind suddenly unable to process anything more than the images Marc's words brought to life. "I'll take that to mean I should decide. On your back, babe. You can be on top next time." Marc nudged him down and straddled him, hips rocking against him. "Take a deep breath. This is going to feel so good, babe."

Then Marc moved and the head of his cock slid into the tightest heat imaginable.

"Oh God!" He jerked, hips shoving up automatically.

"Easy, easy, babe." Marc's hand was hot upon his chest, holding him still. Slowly, Marc's body sank lower and lower. "Breathe, Pablo. Feel me all around you."

"Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God." He repeated the words over and over, trying to breathe, shaking with the effort of holding still, of holding back. He was taking short, shallow gasps and making those soft noises again, only they weren't so soft anymore. His hands found Marc's hips and he held on, held tight as he moaned and gasped.

"Breathe." Marc stroked his chest, his face, his throat. "Feels so good, babe. So good."

"Feels... unbelievable from here." He giggled, the sound becoming a moan and he thought maybe if he lived to be a hundred thousand years old, he'd never feel anything like this ever again.

"Tell me when you're ready, and I'll move." Marc's fingers traced his lips, his jaw.

"Oh. There's more isn't there?" He shivered, body on fire. "I'm... I'm ready."

And maybe he was and maybe he wasn't, but he knew just lying there with Marc squeezing him tight, just holding him inside the long body, was going to make him explode, so something had to give.

"Oh, good." Marc leaned down over him, hips rocking, sliding up and down along his shaft, so tight.

Oh.

Oh, God.

Oh, that made just being inside Marc seem like nothing in comparison.

He keened, hips jerking.

"Yeah." Marc's eyes rolled, starting to move faster, panting above him.

"Oh, Marc. I'm gonna -" before he could even finish his hips jerked up hard again and he was coming and it was better than anything ever and kind of made the whole world grey out just a little bit.

When he was done, Marc was still moving, nice and steady, hand working the long, thin cock. Hand not exactly steady, he reached out and twined his fingers with Marc's, helping. He hoped. Because that had been so amazing

he had to give some back, would have wanted to anyway, but especially with the way the ripples were still going down his spine.

"Oh..." Marc arched, moving a little harder, mouth and eyes open. "Pablo..."

"You're beautiful," he whispered, breath catching. He thought he was going to cry, he felt so good, doing this, helping make Marc come after he came inside Marc.

"Love you." The words sounded almost like they hurt, like they were torn from Marc.

Gasping, squeezing Marc's cock tight, he nodded. "Love you, Marc."

Oh, it felt good. Felt good to hear and to say and he didn't ever want this moment to end. Not ever.

Marc sat up, riding him, head thrown back and giving him a long look at the flat belly, orange curls crowning Marc's cock as come sprayed over his hand. He felt like he could maybe breathe again and he held onto Marc's cock with the one hand, the other sliding on Marc's hip and it was amazing.

Marc's lips slid over his, breathing with him, those sweet eyes staring at him.

It was so good and he didn't know how he'd gotten to be so lucky.

He wasn't going to question it though. No looking gift horses in the mouth and all that. Not that Marc was a horse, but he was a gift and Pablo was going to hold on with both hands and be happy.

Chapter Four

The wind was making Pablo feel like his nose was going to fall off and shatter into a million tiny pieces on the sidewalk and he was glad he'd put the bag of takeout inside his jacket or it would be freezing cold in the time it took him to walk the two blocks from Burger Delights to Marc's warehouse.

He ducked down the alley and slipped through the door, closing it carefully behind him, making sure the lock latched this time and sliding the top bolt home. It seemed a whole lot warmer without the wind, but Pablo knew the building was draughty, in fact his backpack had an old blanket in it, one he'd liberated from the storage boxes in the garage.

He called out as he headed down the corridor to where Marc kept his stuff. "Hey Marc, it's only me. Sorry I'm late -- I got held up at school. If I'd known that organizing the adopt-a-grandparent exchange with the Home was gonna take up so much of my time I wouldn't have suggested it. I brought supper, I hope you're in the mood for double burgers and fries."

"Hey babe." Marc's voice was hoarse, scratchy. The light from the camp lantern sent odd shadows flickering about the room. Marc was crouched against the wall reading, jacket pulled tight around him. "You didn't need to bring food, Pablo man. I'm cool."

"You might be cool, but I'm starving." Pablo shrugged off his backpack and unzipped his jacket, pulling out the take-out bag. "I don't like being the only one eating -- makes me nervous."

"Nervous? Really?" Marc smiled up at him, shutting his book and setting it aside. "Well, I suppose it would be rude to make my lover nervous, wouldn't it? How was school?"

He settled down next to Marc. "Yeah, I sit there thinking I've got mustard on my nose, or something stuck between my teeth, you know? And then I worry that I'm eating too fast, or too slow, 'cause everyone else has nothing to do but watch me eat, you know? I'd rather not get a snack at all at the Home if I have to eat it during bingo." He took out a burger and a cardboard carton of fries that he'd already salted and vinegared. "School was school. I can't wait for graduation."

"Oh, me either, man. This shit of hoping the rats snuggle close to keep you warm gets old." Mark winked, leaning over to brush a kiss on his cheek. "You're so good to me, babe."

Pablo smiled and turned his head, bringing their lips together for a quick kiss. He passed the bag over. "I got your burger all dressed -- I figured you could pick off what you don't want."

"I'll eat anything. I'm easy." Marc unwrapped the burger and began to eat with quick bites, almost finishing half before Pablo had really even began.

Pablo started in on his own burger, eating fries in between his bites. He ate half the fries and two thirds of his burger before putting them down on their wrappers and pushing them toward Marc. "I'm stuffed."

Marc carefully wrapped them up along with his own fries. "I'll save them for tomorrow, okay? Can't afford to lose my girlish figure and stuff."

"You're gonna make me look fat next to you," Pablo teased. "Oh, I forgot, I've got a two-liter of coke in my bag." He dragged his backpack over and pulled out the coke and the blanket, handing them both over.

"Cool." Marc's eyes shot up to his, fingers trailing over the blanket. "What's this?"

"If I'm gonna sleep here with you, even for a few hours, I should kick in my share, you know."

"Pablo..." Marc sighed, reaching over the blanket and squeezing his hand. "You don't have to do this, babe. You don't have to worry about me. I'm cool." Marc's eyes flashed to the blanket and he chuckled suddenly. "Which would make the blanket totally logical, right? Not a word from you, logic boy."

"I just want to get naked with you, Marc and it's too cold to do that without blankets. It's no big deal."

"Oh." Marc reached over, let his fingers play over Pablo's zipper. "Well, it's a fairly big deal, babe..."

Pablo sucked in his breath, cock going hard. He moaned softly, hips shifting. Cold hands slipped beneath his sweatshirt, rubbing against his stomach. Marc pressed close, nuzzling his ear. "Mm... you feel good. Warm."

He slid his own hands into Marc's hair, tugging until their lips joined. His tongue pushed into Marc's mouth, sweeping over teeth and gums and tongue. Marc groaned, moving to straddle his lap, lips opening for him. Marc's fingers moved to work open the button of his jeans, teasing and tempting as they slid against him. Pablo gasped, pushing up into the touches. Marc made him feel so good.

The pop and slide of button and fly giving way before Marc's focused hands sounded loud, but not as loud as their combined gasp when Marc's fingers slid into the elastic of his underwear and found his cock. His fingers knotted into the material of Marc's jacket, holding tight as his hips moved. "Oh, God, Marc."

His mouth searched blindly, returning their lips together, his kiss less focused now, sloppy and wet, just connecting them. Marc's hand moved on him, quick, firm strokes that sent heat all through him. Marc wiggled, pushing the grey sweatpants off thin hips, and then the warmth of fingers was joined by the blazing kiss of Marc's cock. He whimpered, fingers digging in tighter as he pushed up harder, searching for more of Marc's heat. Marc was panting into his mouth, groaning low as they moved together, quick and hungry.

Everything disappeared except for the places Marc touched him and he could feel the tension building, pushed higher by the pleasure surging through him. He bit softly on Marc's lower lip, managing a mumbled "I love you," as he came.

Marc's hips moved against him for a few seconds before he felt the answering splash of heat between them. "Oh, love you, babe."

He hugged Marc tightly, arms sliding around the slender back, holding him close. "You make me feel so good," he whispered.

"I try." Marc snuggled close, breath hot against his throat. "I try, babe."

Pablo reached for the blanket and pulled it over Marc's back before wriggling and settling more comfortably back against the wall. One hand carded through Marc's hair, lazily smoothing out tangles.

"Mm..." Marc sighed, almost purring in his arms. "'s good."

He slid open Marc's jacket, fingers sliding up under the tight t-shirt to explore; he loved touching Marc. Marc's skin was smooth, soft and silky over hard, spare muscles and bone.

"I love you." The words brushed over his skin, Marc's lips soft and damp. "One day, we'll make love in our own bed, hold each other all night long." It sounded like a promise, a wish, a prayer.

"Yeah," he agreed softly, hand continuing to map Marc's skin, learning it beneath his fingertips. He could feel Marc's eyelashes as they brushed against him, feel the soft exhalations of breath, feel the tiny scars and moles and imperfections of Marc's skin. "I kind of like this place though, you know? It's like our secret hideaway or something."

Marc nodded. "It's not bad. I was glad when I found it. It's warmer in here than on the street and no one ever really bothers things."

"You should have your own space for your paintings." Pablo kissed Marc's nose. "Something with lots of light."

"Oh, yeah. And electricity and working plumbing, too." Marc grinned, then shook his head. "Man, I need to go get another job. I bet my mom will let me bus tables for her for a while."

Pablo chewed on his lip a moment. "You know, we could get a place together, share on expenses and stuff."

"Your folks would shit a gold brick, babe." Marc chuckled. "Christ, I keep expecting to hear someone's coming after me with a shovel."

"They don't even know I'm seeing someone," Pablo admitted, guilt going through him. "It's not that I'm ashamed of you -- it's just easier if they think I'm still spending my evenings at the library."

"Relax, babe. No guilt here. Last I checked I was not the kind of guy anyone takes home to Momma." Marc kissed him softly. "I'm glad you want to spend your time with me."

"I wish I could tell them. I wish I could take your hand and go to them and say, this is my boyfriend Marc. I love him. And they'd welcome you in and Mama would sit you down and say 'you're so thin! Eat!' and she'd feed you until you were chubby like me and they'd let you stay on the couch in the basement because it's so cold and they'd be so happy for me that I found someone to love." He squeezed Marc tight. "It isn't fair that I can't do that. If you were a chick, I could do that."

"If I were a chick, you wouldn't want me." Marc rubbed their noses together. "And if I were I'd be too tall, too poor, not smart enough. You know how moms are. You ought to come over to the diner sometime and meet my mom."

Pablo laughed. "Are you sure I wouldn't be too short, too chubby, not artistic enough?"

"Nah. She'll like you, babe. Probably offer you a smoke and a cup of coffee -- the ultimate stamp of Linda's approval."

"I'd like that, Marc. I want to know everything about you."

Marc grinned. "You don't know enough already? Okay. What do you want to know? Ask away. Oh, wait!" He winked. "Let's get naked and curled up first. And I get to ask questions back, too."

Pablo giggled. "You think I'm gonna be talking if we're naked together?"

"You said you wanted to know all about me." Mark stood up and started undressing. "How better to have all of me right in front of you?"

"Oh, I'm not complaining -- I like it when we're naked..." His voice trailed away as Marc's skin was revealed. Going to his knees, Pablo nuzzled into Marc's belly, hands sliding up over his chest. "God, I want you."

"Oh, babe." Marc's hands tangled in his hair, a tremor rolling up the thin belly. "I love you."

He kissed Marc's navel, tongue sliding into the soft indent, rubbing himself against Marc's legs. Marc made him so hard, he always seemed to have an erection when they were together. It felt good; it made him feel sexy.

Marc was making tiny sounds, body trembling beneath his touches. "You make me ache, Pablo. Make me so hungry."

He knew -- he could feel Marc's cock, hot and hard against his neck. He rubbed his cheek against it, loving the sensation of soft and hard at the same time, and the heat of it.

"Oh..." The sound was sweet and needy and happy and just pure Marc -- low and long and full.

"You feel so amazing." Pablo looked up, smiling as Marc's hair fell around his face like a red halo. "I want to spend the rest of my life not doing anything but touching you."

"Okay. You're hired." Marc cupped his face, fingers soft against his cheeks. "Starting now, you can touch me forever."

He turned his face, taking Marc's thumb into his mouth, sucking and then slowly letting it slide from his mouth. "I love you."

"I love you." Marc's voice was husky and rough. "Come to bed with me, lover? Keep me warm?"

He nodded and placed another kiss on Marc's stomach and one on the tip of his cock. As he stood, he could still feel the heat of Marc's erection where it had lain against his neck. He quickly got out of his clothes, shivering as the cool air hit his skin.

Marc grabbed up the blanket he'd brought and grabbed his hand. "Come on, babe. Bed. 's fucking cold."

They ran together to the bed, Marc spreading the extra blanket out over the ones already there. When they slid into the bed though, the sheets were cold and he wrapped his legs and arms around Marc, clinging to his heat.

"Mmm..." Marc shivered and wriggled against him. "Can't wait for spring, babe."

"I don't know, I kind of like this having to make our own heat thing." He found Marc's mouth with his own, moaning softly at the taste: hamburger and pickles and cigarettes and something just Marc all mixed together.

"Mmm..." Marc moaned into his mouth, hands moving restlessly over his skin, pulling him close. Hard and needy, Marc rubbed against him, moving steadily. "Want you."

It was amazing how quickly he could go from shivering with cold to shivering for an entirely different reason, one that involved a lot of heat and a lot of friction. "Yes, want you."

Marc wiggled and shifted, head disappearing beneath the blankets, leaving Pablo staring at Marc's shifting belly as a warm, wet heat surrounded his cock.

"Oh..." He moaned softly, hips jerking him deeper into Marc's mouth.

Marc's erection nudged against his nose and he raised his head, licking at the tip before taking it into his mouth. Marc shivered, a short barking cry sounding from beneath the blankets.

Pablo felt Marc's hair tickling his legs, hands curling around his hips, pulling him deep into tight, sucking heat. It felt so good he almost forgot he was sucking on Marc, too. He tried to remember, tried to make it good for Marc, but what Marc was doing felt so good and made him cry out and made him forget everything but the feeling of fucking Marc's mouth.

Marc pulled and suckled and licked, driving him slowly mad. The lips caressing him were hot, silky; the tongue a brand as it wrapped around him. He sucked blindly at Marc's cock, hands holding onto Marc's hips just to have something to hold onto. He was whimpering around the flesh in his mouth, body beginning to tremble as the pleasure surged. The sensation flared as Marc took him deep, throat swallowing tight around the head of his cock, Marc's nose buried in the dark curls at his groin. He gasped and cried out, hips snapping as he came.

Marc's mouth gentled, tongue becoming soft and easy as he shuddered and shook. He was panting, still holding Marc's cock in his mouth as he tried to catch his breath. As his orgasm faded he began to suck on Marc again, trying to imitate what Marc had done to him. Marc was shivering, cock throbbing between his lips. It made him warm all through, to know his pleasure excited his lover so much. He pulled as much of Marc's cock into his mouth as he could, sucking and licking and humming happily, his fingers stroking Marc's hips.

He could feel Marc's harsh little sobs against his inner thigh, feel the soft tongue become unfocused in its caresses, feel the tremors in the hands that trailed over his legs. It made him hard again, Marc's pleasure and his own wrapping together, becoming joined, and he sucked a little harder, took Marc in a little further. The lips around him tightened, Marc's cheek pillowed on his thigh, fingers stroking against his balls. He pressed his own hand between Marc's legs, trembling fingers stroking over the sensitive skin, an imperfect mirror. Marc shifted and twisted, moaning softly, the sound vibrating against Pablo's cock. Gasping, hips beginning to move once more, he started humming again. Marc's hips began doing a strange, hungry, hiccupping motion -- pressing stiltedly, as if begging for more and yet wanting it to last longer.

Forcing himself not to gag, Pablo pulled on Marc's hips, encouraging him to push further in. A low keening started -- Pablo could hear it, feel it on his skin, almost taste it on the bitter drops that slid from Marc's cock. He was trembling hard now, fingers sliding over tight balls, humming around Marc's cock, pulling Marc's hips to him, taking Marc in, swallowing him down. Marc began to suck on Pablo's cock fiercely, pulling in time with the thrusts of his own hips, almost frantic, harsh cries pouring through the air. It was a closed circle of heat and sucking and pleasure and feeling sound and Pablo knew he was going to come again and he sucked Marc harder and harder.

His cock slid deep into Marc's throat as seed hit his tongue, hot and bitter. It was like he was tasting his own orgasm and he swallowed greedily, sucking and swallowing and humming and feeling the same sensations on his own cock. Overwhelming and sweet and hot and them -- they rocked together beneath the blankets for long minutes sated and connected and warm.

He sucked Marc's cock until it was flaccid and then let it slip from his mouth. His fingers remained busy, one tracing over the line of Marc's hip, the other sliding along the soft skin of his lover's inner thigh.

"Oh, god, babe. That was..." A soft kiss landed on his hip. "Wow."

He smiled against Marc's skin, loving the sound of his own incoherence in Marc's voice. "Love you," he whispered.

Marc turned, somehow managing to move and stay beneath the covers. Pablo found himself thoroughly kissed before Marc settled into his arms. "I love you too, babe. So much."

"Good." He hugged Marc fiercely, holding on with all his might before gentling his hold and enjoying the silky warmth of their skin settling together.

"Mm..." Marc nuzzled against his throat. "Can you stay?" The words were whispered, heavy with hope.

"For awhile."

"Cool." He could feel the brush of Marc's eyelashes against his shoulder, feel the rough bristles on Marc's cheeks.

"Tired, Caro?" He pressed a kiss against Marc's forehead.

"Mm... food, great sex, my lover with me -- my body's convinced it's a dream."

"Go to sleep, Marc -- I'll still be here when you wake up from your dream."

"I love you, babe. So much that it hurts." Marc's voice was soft, dreamy, body lax and sweet against him.

Pablo felt tears prickle his eyes, and the heavy feeling of love too big inside him rushed through him. "I know. I love you, too."

"One day, one day it'll be our bed and our life, I promise." Marc's sigh felt like a kiss. "I promise."

"I'm going to make you keep that promise." He whispered the words against Marc's hair, hand sliding over one warm shoulder.

"Good."

"Sleep, Caro." He started to sing softly, one of the lullabies his mother used to sing him when he was little. His hands slid slowly along Marc's skin, still learning, memorizing.

Marc murmured softly, face lovely and relaxed in his arms. Pablo watched someone, his lover, sleep -- happy and peaceful and trusting -- in his arms for the first time.

He was still watching when, hours later, Marc woke.

Chapter Five

Maybe it was the feel of spring in the air. Maybe it was Pablo's cologne. Maybe it was that his lover had been on spring break with the family for six days. Maybe it was the way those jeans cupped Pablo's ass. Whatever the reason, all that had mattered since Pablo walked up the stairs was getting them both less-dressed and a hell of a lot closer than across the room.

Marc nuzzled Pablo's ear, nipping as his fingers found his lover's nipples. So far, so good. "Want you."

Pablo laughed, but there was a catch in the sound. "What, no hellos, nice to see yas?" Despite the words of protest, Pablo's hands were sliding around his waist, fingers splayed wide.

"Hello, babe. Fucking wonderful to see you." Marc's lips traveled down his neck. "Missed you. Love you. Need you."

The new jeans fit beautifully, but new buttonholes really sucked.

"Yes. Me, too." One of Pablo's hands tangled in his hair, pressing him tight against the warm skin of his lover's neck, the other began to pull his t-shirt out of his jeans, fingers raking over skin.

His groan was loud, even smothered against Pablo's skin. The button popped free, zipper sliding down, giving his hands access to the hot silk-skin covered hardness he'd been dreaming of.

"Oh, God!" Pablo's voice was rough, raw, and he was clinging and rubbing. One of Pablo's legs slid up, hooking around his, just above the knee, as Pablo pushed up into his grip. "Oh, yes, please, Marc."

"Missed you. Dreamed about you -- about making love to you, touching you, tasting you." He pumped quickly, loving the feel and weight of Pablo in his hand, the taste of salt on his lips. Pablo was trembling and gasping, making the little noises at the back of his throat that Marc had fallen in love with the very first time they'd made love.

"Oh, babe." He pushed down his sweatpants, groaning harshly as the air hit him. Then he pushed against Pablo, hips thrusting as he buried his fingers in the silky dark hair and took a kiss. Pablo's mouth was open and eager, tongue meeting his. A soft groan vibrated from Pablo's mouth to his own and then a thump as Pablo leaned back into the support of the wall. He let one hand slide down, cup one of those well-presented, denim-covered cheeks and pull Pablo closer. Pablo tasted so right -- sweet and rich and eager.

Pablo's warm, square hands were clutching at his back, opening and closing; Pablo was going to come soon. Any moment now the trembling body in his arms was going to freeze and jerk and shake and Pablo was going to make sweet, sweet noises.

Marc lifted his head, breath coming in harsh pants. "God, I want you, want to feel you hot and tight around me."

Pablo made a soft sound and the hands on Marc's back clutched tightly, almost pinching and then suddenly Pablo

was letting go, the leg wrapped around him sliding away. Pablo shimmied out of his jeans and turned to face the wall. "Hurry."

He slicked himself quickly, moaning at the feel of his spit-slick palm on his cock. Then Marc pressed close, bending his knees so he could rub against Pablo's cleft. "Now? Please, babe?"

Whimpering, Pablo pressed back against him, fingers scrabbling against the wall. "Yes, need you. Need you."

He reached up with one hand, grabbed Pablo's fingers. "Love you."

Then he pressed inside perfect tight heat, sobbing against his lover's nape. Pablo's fingers tightened around his, a low hiss accompanying hips pushing back, urging him further in. "Marc. Oh, God, Marc."

"Yes..." He was flame and steam, gasping as their bodies moved instinctively, flesh slapping, hands entwined, the smell of Pablo's sweat filling him. The noises Pablo was making were louder now, more desperate and needy. The almost-sobs increased in volume as he shifted, finding his lover's prostate and hitting it with every thrust.

He pulled one hand free, reaching to slid his palm over Pablo's hardness, pulling and pumping -- he was aching and close and needed to not be alone, to have Pablo with him in pleasure. Body growing stiff for a moment, Pablo called out, his name or "God" or just a sound, and then Pablo was jerking in his arms, body shivering as seed splashed over his hand, soft noises filling the air.

He arched with a cry, flashes of light exploding behind his eyes as his body responded to the heat and pressure and pleasure around him. "Love you. Oh, fuck, babe. I love you."

"I love you, too, Marc." Pablo's voice was soft, a little rough, edged with tears. "I missed you so much, Caro."

"Oh, God. I know. This whole family vacation shit is murder." He kissed the salt away from Pablo's skin, slowly pulling out of the warm body. "It's good to have you home, babe."

Pablo squirmed around and wrapped his arms around Marc's neck. His kiss was sweet, satiation laced with hunger. "We picked fruit fresh off the trees and ate in ritzy restaurants, but nothing tasted as good as you. And I kept seeing stuff that I wanted to share; I kept imagining how things would look if you were there to paint them." Pablo rubbed his cheek against Marc's. "It was like a part of me was missing."

"Mm... I just moped and worked." Marc nuzzled close. "And, yes, I found a job. And, yes, there is even quite possibly a paycheck involved." Marc kissed beneath Pablo's ear, breathing him in. "And part of you was missing... you kept coming to me in my dreams."

Pablo giggled. "You're always coming in my dreams, Marc." The giggles faded with another kiss and then Pablo was pushing him away and taking his hand, leading him to the bed. "A job? That's great, Marc! Doing something with your art? Did you work on anything new while I was gone? Have you stuck to the no-smoking? Did you remember to eat? Sleep?"

Marc followed along, stopping to pull off his sweats and wipe himself clean, before handing them to Pablo. "I like the jeans." He crawled onto the mattress with a grin. "Let's see. The job's at Azel – forty percent discount on supplies, money's not great, but it's enough to find a little apartment in a few months if I can keep it. Finished the foresty piece you liked; started one with water. Only smoked once. Slept a lot. Does that cover it?"

"I think you've covered everything but me," said Pablo as he slipped between the blankets, pressing close.

Marc chuckled, even as he snuggled close. "So, everything went okay for the clan outing? No fussing, no drama?"

Pablo laughed. "Marc, we're Hispanic, there was plenty of fussing and drama." His hands were moving over Marc's skin in long, slow sweeps, like he was relearning him. "But nothing awful or unexpected."

"Mm... missed your hands." Marc nuzzled, licking a soft line along Pablo's jaw. "Missed your lips. Missed **you**."

"Yes." Pablo's answer was simple agreement, simple joy.

He sighed, wrapping one leg over his lover, keeping him close. This was what he'd been needing since Pablo left, this warmth and touch and peace.

Pablo shifted, moving closer, his skin warm against Marc's as his hands continued to trace the outlines of muscles and ligaments and bones. "I love you."

"I love you." Marc dropped kisses randomly along Pablo's skin, warm and happy. "So, how long until you graduate and I can have you everyday?"

"Too long."

"Yeah." Marc sighed. "But at least we'll always have Paris. Or the wall that could at one point have a painting of Paris on it."

Pablo giggled and pushed him over onto his back. "God, I've missed you."

Any reply he might have made was devoured by his lover's sweet hunger.

Pablo crept in and took his shoes off at the door, hung his jacket up in the closet. He was halfway down the hall when a throat cleared in the living room, making him jump out of his skin.

Heart pounding, he went into the living room. His father was sitting there in the dark, just the light from the street lamp shinning in. "Papi."

"Tu madre said you'd been coming home late a lot. Later even than me tonight, mi hijo. You doing the drugs?" His father wasn't around a lot, but when Mama told him there was something to take care of, he always did.

Pablo shook his head and met Papi's eyes. "No, no drugs Papi."

"Hanging with the gangs?"

"No, nothing like that. I swear, Papi."

Papi actually smiled then and was that a twinkle in his eye? "No? A girlfriend then? You're using condoms, si?"

He blushed hard. God, his Papi saying that word? Oh man, this was too weird. "I'm using condoms, Papi. I..." He took a deep breath and swallowed his fear and couldn't think of any fancy way to say it so he was just going to say it.

"It's dangerous walking the streets at night though, Pablito. You're at her place for, you know, the sex?"

"Yes, Papi, but-"

"Then you stay overnight, si? As long as tu madre knows where you are, that you're safe, she doesn't worry, si?"

Stay overnight? Sleep with Marc until morning and wake up with him? Oh, Pablo couldn't think of anything more wonderful and it was his Papi's suggestion he... Only Papi thought Marc was a girl and he bet his Papi would think different if he knew. Pablo could just not tell Papi. After all, Papi'd just assumed. He could just leave it like that.

Papi patted his knee and stood with a bit of a groan. "I'll tell tu madre what we talked about. She'll want to talk to you about marriage and God. You listen. And you tell her when you aren't coming home so she doesn't worry. No walking the streets after midnight." Papi patted his head and smiled at him, looking... proud. "Buenes Noches, mi hijo."

Pablo could just let Papi go to bed. It would be so easy. Papi would just keep walking out of the room and down the hall and then he could keep seeing Marc and Papi'd continue to be proud that he was a stud and Mama's biggest worry would be him having pre-marital sex.

"Papi?"

His father stopped at the door to the living room and turned back. "Pablito?"

"Maybe you should sit again a minute. I have something I need to tell you."

Papi grunted and came back to sit next to him again. Pablo wished he could be the kind of person who could just let it be, but he'd been looking for a time to tell this anyway and it would be just lying if he didn't say it now.

"Papi, I don't have a girlfriend."

"Que? But you said..."

"No. I said I was using condoms."

"No comprende, Pablo."

"The person I'm seeing. It's a guy." His father didn't say anything after that so he kept going, words tumbling out, one after another and he was glad it was the middle of the night and only the street lamp from outside lighting the place. "A boy. His name is Marc and he's an artist and I love him and he's tall and beautiful and he loves me."

His father still didn't say anything and he looked up and Papi was just looking at him. Just looking.

"Papi?"

"No comprende, Pablo. A boy? Why?"

"Because I love him."

"But a boy. Pablito. It isn't right."

"But I love him, Papi."

"Your sisters. They have nice friends. They'll introduce you to some nice girls and you'll have the sex with one of them and we'll fix this."

"No, Papi. There's nothing to fix. I don't like girls like that. I like boys." He looked up at his father, but he couldn't tell whether Papi was mad or sad or what.

"I'm going to bed. I have to work in a few hours."

"Si, Papi."

He watched as his father got up and moved to the door. And it might have been his imagination, but he thought his father was walking slower, looked a little older and he thought that he'd done that. Just before Papi turned into the hall he turned again.

"Pablito."

"Si, Papi?"

"You be safe. It's important, si?"

He bit his lip, blinking back sudden tears. "Si, Papi."

He watched as his father shuffled out and whispered. "Te amo, Papi."

Marc spent more and more time in the building and less and less time on the streets as things got heavy between him and Pablo. He didn't want them to, not really. He wanted shit to be lightweight, easy, friends, you know? It didn't seem to be working out that way, though, because, besides his painting? Pablo was beginning to be sort of his focus.

Leo and K, they noticed, because he wasn't out drawing pictures on the street with chalk and doing portraits and stuff. And Linda noticed because he never came around on the night shift anymore.

Then he'd have a night where he was alone and cold and Leo'd come up with some ganja and things were a little more blurry than they'd been the day before and they'd hold each other and he'd feel bad because, if Pablo knew? It'd break the kid's heart and he didn't want that.

Really.

Marc sat in the broken window, watching the sun rise, hands and glasses and clothes covered with paint, eyes and belly aching. The new canvasses were done - Birth, he thought he'd call them - raw and red and bloody and maybe a little scary, maybe a little wrong, a little scared, but it was his birthday and he thought -- sometimes when he really stopped to think about it, to understand about it -- that he really was a mistake of nature.

An error.

He heard Leo's steps coming up the rickety stairs -- he'd know that rhythm anywhere, the clomp-clomp-shuffle. He wasn't in love with Leo -- he might have been once, at least with the broad shoulders and the starting to be long blond hair, but he really didn't think so. He thought it felt a lot more like in need and sort of in like, but not really anymore because Leo was about selling stuff and eating and smoking and he was about the paint and Pablo.

"Hey, Marcus. I got a proposition for you."

He turned and blinked, eyes going wide as he saw Leo in new jeans, a real jacket, Nikes. Wow. "I hate when you call me Marcus."

Leo rolled his eyes, tossed his hair back. "I got a guy who's shooting movies. Paying me good. Giving me a place to crash in Las Vegas. He's looking for somebody else. Somebody tall and stuff."

"Tall?" Marc pulled off his glass, rubbed the paint off, squinting as Leo went dull and fuzzy. "I can't act, man."

"Don't have to. Just have to get it up." Leo winked. "Come on, Marcu... Marc. I know you can manage that."

"Pornos? Dude. That's sorta sleazy..."

"Sleazier than freezing on the corner and hoping the cops don't bust you?" Leo snorted. "He paid me \$500 last week, man. \$500. And a real place with windows and air conditioning and furniture and blow. You even get a choice -- chicks, guys, bottom, top. Whatever. It's easy."

He put his glasses back on, frowned. "Can... do I have to go to Las Vegas?"

"Yeah, man. That's where the cameras are."

Oh. Oh, man. \$500. A week. A place to paint. And Las Vegas, too. Lights and excitement and no one would know he was an error, not for a long time.

He nodded and stood, wiping his hands on his sweatshirt and heading over to grab his smokes and his bag. On his way, he passed his latest work in progress - that stupid fucking chair in the library - all ratty and worn and ugly and shit, with Pablo's hand there on it, just resting easy.

Resting easy.

Resting easy and sort of waiting for him to come and take a walk through the gardens and listen to Pablo tell him all about the flowers and the trees. Waiting for him to tell about the differences between Monet and Manet and why he painted so hard, so fast, so much. Waiting.

Oh, man.

"Come on, man. The dude's waiting, he's got a caddy and a bunch of beer and we're going on a ride. It's the chance of a lifetime." He knew that wheedling voice - 'come on, man, try it,' 'come on, Marc, I need it,' 'it's so cold.'

'One more time.'

'You only live once.'

'Come on.'

Marc sighed, ran his hand through his hair, wincing at the tugs, the pulls. "I can't."

"Why the fuck not?" Leo started sliding for wheedling to pissed quick when he was buzzed.

"I got my art, you know?" I got a guy, he's out of my league and stuff, so sweet, so pretty.

"You'll starve. What? Your new boy a sugar daddy?"

"No. No, I just can't up and go..." He sat down on the beanbag, the little innards of it rustling.

"Why not? That's what losers like you do, Marcus. That's what you're made for. The kid? He'll have to learn soon enough. You'll up and leave on him. It's what we do."

He shook his head, ignoring the whole Marcus-thing. Jackass. "He's a good guy, man. He deserves better than that."

"Then he deserves better than you."

Well, yeah. And ow. But yeah. Yeah, Pablo did, but damn it, he wasn't asking for forever because he didn't believe in it. He just wanted a little bit.

He wanted a minute to rest easy.

"I'm not going. I got things to do here."

"You're a loser."

Marc nodded. "Yeah. I know. Enjoy the lights, man, I hear they're rocking cool."

"Go to hell, MacAllen. I hope you starve." Leo's cheeks were red, eyes shining.

He nodded, chuckled. "It's either that or go blind, Leo. I'm easy."

His brushes were still wet when he picked them up to work on Pablo's hand, the cadence of Leo's boots walking out a whole lot like the sound of them walking in.

Chapter Six

Pablo sat on the edge of the bed and bounced nervously. He checked his watch again. Marc was late and he was beginning to feel a little weird in the hotel room all by himself. He'd told his parents he was staying at Marc's after work, which gave him from when he'd finished at five today until when he had to be in at one o'clock tomorrow afternoon, to be with Marc.

He'd taken some money from his savings account and rented a hotel room. He wanted to make love with Marc in a place with a proper bed and a shower that they could play in together, room service and (he even blushed just thinking about it) a mirror to make love in front of -- he loved watching Marc move.

But it was twenty past six now and Marc still wasn't here.

Worrying, he chewed on his lower lip. What if Marc had been insulted by his plan? It wasn't even that he was so picky, Pablo just wanted a night that was the whole night where nobody shivered from a breeze or sweated until they were nauseated -- not once.

Another ten minutes passed and he had just about decided that he would go looking for Marc when the doorknob rattled.

A soft knock came and Marc's voice sounded, barely audible. "Pablo, man? You in there?" Another quick, light knock made Pablo grin as he pulled the door open. Marc was there, bouncing lightly on his toes. "Hey, babe. They said this was the room but wouldn't give me a key or anything and I thought maybe that chick at the desk was yanking my chain."

Pablo slid two fingers through one of Marc's belt loops and tugged him into the room. "No way, that's my job."

The door had barely closed before he leaned up, seeking the heat of Marc's mouth.

"Mm... hey babe." The words were whispered against his lips before Marc kissed him, tongue sliding deep into his mouth.

He moaned, hands grabbing onto Marc's waist as his mouth was plundered. He was breathing quickly when the kiss finally ended, gazing a little dazedly up into blue eyes. "Are you hungry?"

"Always. Why are you still dressed?" Marc grinned, backing him up towards the bed, hands tugging at his t-shirt. "I've been waiting for you all day."

He laughed, the sound becoming muffled as his shirt went over his face. "I meant for food. We could call room service."

"Later. Later, babe." His shirt was thrown across the room and Marc began working on his jeans. Marc's mouth slid down his chest, sucking as the tall body folded down onto the ground.

Pablo gasped, sitting down hard as his jeans were pulled down over his hips and off. In seconds Marc had him breathless and stripped down to his socks.

Marc's lips slid over his cock, pulling strongly, hands wrapping around his waist and holding tight. He whimpered, fingers sliding into Marc's hair. Marc's head began to move slowly, lips dragging each time his head lifted, sucking firmly at the head and then dropping back down to engulf him.

"Oh god!" He pushed his hips up into Marc's mouth, unable to stop himself. The hum vibrated from Marc's lips through his groin, Marc's hands sliding to cup his ass and pull him deeper. Helpless to stop the soft noises of pleasure he was making, he spread his legs, pushing deeper still. The things Marc did to him, the way he could push him over the edge so fast...

Marc swallowed hard around his cock, nose buried in the curls at his groin.

He cried out, hips jerking as he came, body curling around Marc's head.

The sweet sucking continued until he was almost too sensitive to bear it. Then Marc let his flesh slip free and began dropping hot kisses along his belly. "Mm... you taste good, babe."

"And you feel good, Marc." He slid his hands under Marc's arms and tugged. "Want to kiss you."

Marc crawled up beside him, one long leg draping over his thighs, blue eyes twinkling behind thick glasses. "So kiss me, lover."

Grinning, he wrapped his arms around Marc's neck and brought their mouths together. Marc opened to him, sharing their mingled tastes, making him whimper and press close. Marc's lips were swollen, hot, full from sucking him and the thought of that made him shudder, tongue pushing deep into Marc's mouth.

He pushed Marc over, following to lie on top of him. One hand tangled in the carrot hair, the other slid down to tug at the bottom of Marc's t-shirt, seeking skin. Marc arched up against him, rubbing and sighing into his mouth and generally not helping out with the getting naked project. He didn't really mind that much, he loved making Marc writhe, making him make noises; he liked knowing he was giving back as good as he got.

One long hand grabbed his wrist, pressed his hand against the hard bulge in Marc's worn jeans. Marc moaned, body shaking. "Please, Pablo. Please. I need you."

He gasped, hand sliding over the heat beneath the denim. Breaking their kiss, he slid down Marc's body, mouthing the obvious budge until Marc's jeans were wet. Marc was taking deep, sobbing breaths, thighs spread wide for him, for his touch. He let his hands slide down, pressing firmly along Marc's inner thighs, scratching with his nails as he bit gently through the jeans. They'd always undressed each other quickly in the past; there was something very sexy about loving Marc through his clothing.

"Oh, babe. Oh..." Marc rocked into each touch, eyes fastened on him. It made him feel so attractive, so sexy -- the fascination in Marc's eyes. He moved to suck at Marc's balls, the faded jeans frayed here and his questing tongue found a small opening and slid against the soft, hot flesh there. One hand slid up, pushing into Marc's waistband and teasing across the top of his cock.

"Pablo!" Heat splashed against his fingers, Marc's hips jerking gracelessly. "Oh, god. Oh..." Marc settled back onto the mattress, moaning softly.

He let his tongue drag up along Marc's jeans, sniffing at he got to the waistband. Marc smelled good and Pablo licked at Marc's come, taking the flavor into himself.

Marc rumbled softly, the sound warm and sated. "Oh, babe. Your tongue feels so good."

It made him smile, the feeling of pleasure settling deep inside him. Carefully, he undid the top button and slid down the zipper, lapping at the fluid there. The soft sighs and moans that colored the air were sweet. Marc's hands brushed through his hair, just barely trembling. He licked Marc clean and then pushed the jeans completely away, Marc kicking them and his runners off onto the floor.

Rising to his knees, Pablo grabbed the bottom of Marc's shirt. "Off."

Marc grinned, leaning up to strip his shirt off and then flopping back onto the bed. "Better?"

"Yes." Pablo straddled Marc, sitting on his lover's groin. Leaning forward, he nuzzled against Marc's chest, tongue flicking out to pick up the salt and cigarette flavor of his lover.

Marc whimpered softly, shifting beneath him. "Looks like I wasn't the only one hungry."

He shook his head, letting his nose and his lips slide across Marc's skin. "No, you weren't the only one."

"Oh, good." Marc's hands stroked through his hair. "That feels so good, babe. I was going crazy, waiting to see you, make love to you, shower with you."

"I know -- which one do you want to do first?"

"This is on your dime, babe. I'm just here to molest your beautiful body and let you molest in kind." Marc grinned at him, thrusting his hips obscenely. "Wanna molest me, lover boy?"

"Oh yes." He bent to kiss Marc, open-mouthed and hungry, sliding back against his lover's hips. Marc wrapped around him, soft cries filling the air. Marc's passion filled him, the sounds of his lover's pleasure like the stroke of a hand along his cock, making him hard and needy. His hands moved over Marc's body, trembling from the strength of his emotions.

"Love you." Marc arched up beneath him, pushing and rubbing restlessly. The dragons inked into Marc's skin seemed to flutter and writhe as they moved together. "Want you, babe."

He nodded and murmured yes, attention caught by the green dragon on Marc's arm. He followed it with his eyes and then slid his tongue along the tail.

"Pablo..." Marc shuddered, voice rough and hungry, skin shifting beneath his tongue. He bit at the dragon's haunches and mouthed the muzzle, as if kissing the beast. "God, you're so sexy, babe. You make me ache." Marc panted, leg wrapped over his hips, pulling them together.

He laughed and moved against Marc, still nuzzling the tattoo, as fascinated with it today as he had been when they met. "You're the sexy one."

"Me? I'm too-tall and too-skinny and have fuzzy hair. You've got these amazing eyes and dark skin and a great ass."

Pablo grinned and propped his head up on Marc's chest, gazing into the blue eyes. "I'm short and pudgy and ordinary. You're exotic and your hair is amazing and have this really beautiful cock."

"You're mine." Marc reached down and cupped his chin, smiling widely. "And I love you. And I'm sorry, but my cock is... just a cock, babe."

Pablo slid his hand down and curled it around Marc's cock. "Feels beautiful to me: hot and soft and hard and bumpy and just perfect."

"Oh." Marc bit his bottom lip, cock twitching in Pablo's grip. "Thank you, babe."

He grinned and leaned forward to lick at Marc's bottom lip. "You aren't laughing at me, are you?"

"No. I'm laughing with you." Marc pushed close for a long, hot kiss.

He lay against Marc, one kiss flowing into the next and the next, the fire quickly building between them again.

"How many times do you think we'll make love before morning?" Marc nipped at his lips, eyes shining up. The question was breathless and teasing and full of warmth. "Three? Four? Thirty-seven?"

"Somewhere in between the last two." He bent and rubbed his nose along Marc's before nuzzling along Marc's jaw and back to his ear, licking at his lover's skin.

He was hard again already, rubbing his hips against Marc's.

"Mmm... thirty-three then." Marc's hands slid over his back, cupping his ass and pulling him close. "Feels good."

He nodded, biting down on Marc's earlobe and then sucking the skin in between his lips. "You make me so hot."

"Oh!" Marc's hands tightened around him, shuddering. "God, that's... oh, babe."

"You like that?" he whispered, hips moving more urgently. "I love touching you, doing things to you, licking you. Oh..."

"Yes, yes... love your mouth, love you." Mark's hand slid between them, wrapping around their cocks. "Oh, fuck, 'm gonna come, babe."

"Uh-huh," he agreed, shivers running through him as his cock slid through Marc's hand and against Marc's erection. He bit down again on Marc's earlobe as he came. Marc cried out as he convulsed against Pablo, more heat spreading between them.

He let his weight drop against Marc, lying on his lover. He loved the feeling of skin on skin, loved to lie on Marc and touch him, fingers searching out interesting nooks and secret dips.

Warm arms came around and held him tight, Marc relaxed and quiet beneath him. "This was a fabulous idea, babe. Thank you."

He smiled and pressed a kiss against the closest skin which was Marc's shoulder. "It's fun, isn't it?" He chuckled at himself, at the eager feeling that was making his stomach feel funny. "I can't wait to try everything."

"Mm... what do you want, babe? We can do anything you want." Marc chuckled. "Assuming I can ever get it up again, of course."

"I have faith." He put another kiss on the warm skin and raised his head, to look into Marc's eyes. "Wanna eat? I've never had room service before. And then we can check out the shower. Oh! and I rented... well..." he blushed and forced himself to continue, "porn."

"Cool! I know a guy who does pornos. He says it's lots of work." Marc leaned up and kissed him. "Room service, huh? Sounds perfect. Oh, and babe?" Marc grinned and offered another kiss, this one long and deep. "I can't wait to make love to you in the shower."

"Oh." Small shivers went through him and his cock began to harden again.

"Let's eat, first though. Then we can play some more." Marc wiggled out from beneath him, getting up and wandering towards the bathroom. "So, what's on the menu, babe?"

"You mean besides me?" He giggled and climbed over the bed to the side table. The room service menu was beneath the phone; he'd glanced through it while he'd been waiting, but hadn't really paid too much attention to what was on it. "They say their specialty is steak. Oh, surf and turf -- I always thought that sounded so cool. You want steak and shrimps, Marc?"

"No shrimp for me, babe. I'm allergic." The toilet flushed and Marc wandered back. "They have just steak?"

"Allergic to shrimp? Oh, man, that's a shame -- it's awesome." He read through the menu again. "They've got three different steaks that come with salad and choice of potato. I'm gonna have the filet mignon -- it's the most expensive and we're splurging, right?"

"Mm... sounds good. Just pick for me. Make sure the meat's cooked, though, 'kay?" Marc crawled up behind him, nibbling on his neck.

He leaned back with a happy sigh. "You like rice? What else are you allergic to?"

"Broccoli and spinach and I love rice."

"Okay, so no spinach salad or beef with broccoli. How does chocolate thunder sound for dessert?"

"Decadent." A long lick slid up his nape. "Not as good as you."

"Mm. You want me to order the food now, or wait?" he asked breathlessly, body reacting predictably to Marc's attentions.

"Order the food. I'll just have sexy well-loved Latino as appetizer."

He giggled and then shivered as Marc's tongue found his skin again. He got off the bed and got the phone, sitting in the chair. "I can't concentrate when you do that," he apologized.

Marc pouted, the look on his face patently false. "Are you saying I'm bad for your concentration?"

"Depends what I'm concentrating on." He gave Marc a grin and then dialed the number for room service, Marc's laughter ringing in his ears. He ordered them both the fillet mignon, well done, with rice and house salad with a

garlic vinaigrette and the chocolate thunder cake for dessert, along with some cokes. He got a little thrill when he told them to put in on the room bill.

"You're spoiling me, babe." Marc was curled up on the bed, smiling warmly at him, one hand curled against his groin.

"This is for both of us." He stayed where he was, looking his fill.

Marc's grin widened, hand sliding seductively over his own hips. "Yes. Both of us."

"Yeah..." He licked his lips.

"You like to watch?" Marc's cock began to fill, growing heavy on his thigh.

"Oh!" His own cock responded, quickly becoming full and he leaned forward, torn between watching and touching.

"Mm. You do." Marc stretched out, cupping his balls and letting his thighs fall open.

He grabbed onto the arms of the chair to keep his hands from reaching for Marc, his gaze glued to Marc's groin. "Marc..."

"Yeah, babe?" Marc's cock was hard, curving up towards the thin belly, hips beginning to rock.

Pablo licked his lips again, his own hips moving with Marc's. "Are you going to...?"

"Mm... I could, but then we couldn't have fun in the shower." Marc pushed up into his hand, groaning slightly. "Then again..."

"We were going to eat before we showered anyway." His voice sounded so breathless, he was surprised by how much it turned him on, watching Marc touching himself.

"We were?" Marc's belly rippled, dark pink tongue coming out to slide over open lips.

He whimpered, hands tightening on the chair arms, making the wood creak. He could smell Marc, see the shiny slickness as Marc's hand slid. "You see... your cock is beautiful."

"Is it?" Marc sucked two of his fingers into his mouth, removing them so they could slide into his crease. "I think you're beautiful, babe. Love the feel of you. Dream about you."

He might have blushed at that, except that all of his blood had run into his cock at Marc's movements. He felt light-headed and his cock ached and oh, God, he was going to come just from watching this.

Marc was rocking back and forth, panting as he fucked himself slowly. "Do this at night... thinking about you... wanting you."

"Oh, God! Marc!" Pablo's hips were rocking right along with Marc's, humping the air, little sounds, half whimpers, half sobs filling the air.

"...imagining you inside me, fucking me... oh, babe..." Marc's eyes were hot, needy, focused on him.

"I'm gonna come," he whispered, half in warning, half in amazement.

"Yeah. Oh, fuck, yes." Marc gasped, hips thrusting as seed sprayed over his stomach. Pablo whimpered and came; he hadn't even touched himself. He moved over to the bed, burying his face against Marc's stomach and breathing in the scent of Marc and sex. He began to lick the sweet stomach clean.

"Oh, Pablo." Marc sighed and wrapped around Pablo. "Love you."

He beamed and shifted up, sharing a long kiss with Marc. Marc's lips were soft, the kiss sloppy and sweet. The knock on the door made him jump about a foot and he found himself giggling as he scrambled up, looking wildly for his clothes.

Marc chuckled and leaned down, tossing Pablo his jeans. "Tell them to leave it outside the door, babe."

"Leave it outside the door, please." His voice squeaked on the last word and he pulled on his jeans, nearly injuring himself as he yanked up the zipper.

"Careful, Pablo! That's mine! Don't damage it over supper." He looked down with a frown; he couldn't possibly even begin to fit into Marc's jeans. Realizing it wasn't the jeans Marc was referring to, Pablo began to giggle, nerves dissipating. He went to the door and opened it a crack, peeking to make sure the corridor was clear before opening it all the way and pulling in the room service table.

"Smells good." Marc sat up with a grin. "Really, really good."

"I knew you were hungry!" Pablo laughed and shut the door. "Wanna eat in bed?"

"Hell yes." Marc sat cross-legged, grinning wide, rubbing his belly.

He took the lids off the plates and put them on the bed, the smell of the steaks making his mouth water. "I've had this once before. At a wedding reception. It was awesome."

"Yeah? Whose wedding?" Marc ate a bite of salad and moaned. "Oh, this? Good stuff."

"Anna Lucia -- one of my cousins." He giggled, watching Marc happily. "I have a lot of cousins."

His stomach growled and he cut himself a piece of meat, nodding happily at the way it kind of melted in his mouth and tasted so good. They shared bites of this and that, relaxed and easy and well, naked together.

He pretended it wasn't a hotel, but their own place, the two of them living together. He could get used to this. He wanted to get used to it. Grinning, he reached for the chocolate cakes. Yeah, he wanted this.

Chapter Seven

The dust swirled in the late afternoon light, golden and soft and pleasant. Not too hot, not too cold -- it was a lovely day and Marc was enjoying it to the fullest. First sleeping, then painting, then Pablo. Dipping his brush into a bit of the lightest cream acrylic, he added the last bit of light in the dark eyes, making them large and bright and happy. There. Lovely.

Pablo's graduation was coming and this was the present Marc knew he could afford. It was a good-sized canvas and the work was solid, the laughter and love and hope he shared with his lover obvious.

Pablo would blush and stammer and love it.

He turned to clean out his brushes and get ready for Pablo's visit -- it was Saturday and there was a good chance they could spend the night together -- when the quiet voice almost made him drop everything in his hands.

"You are Marc?"

The accent was Hispanic, the inflection of his name so much like the way it sounded in Pablo's mouth, but so different -- dread filled his stomach like lead weight, making him swallow as he nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"I am Pablo's Mama." She walked in, a sheaf of paper crinkled in her head. "I came to meet you, to see the man that ruins my boy's life."

A half-dozen denials rose to his lips, but he didn't give them voice, just stood, brushes in hand. She wasn't a big woman, but her jaw was stubborn, her eyes flashing and somehow hot. He could see Pablo's passion in the flutter of her hands and the arch of her brow.

She must have been lovely once.

"He told me about you. Told me he loves you. Told me you love him. Is this true? This thing that he tells me?"

"Yes." He had been hungry, before, watching the dust. He had been hungry and waiting for Pablo. He had a paycheck in his pocket -- enough for burgers and sodas and ice cream.

His Pablo loved ice cream.

"He tells me you are sick, your eyes don't work so well. That you'll be blind one day. This is true, too?" She was like a little dog, mouth full of sharp, snapping teeth.

"Yes." One day -- the doctor at the public clinic thought he had a year or two, more if his living conditions changed, if he quit smoking.

He'd not had a cigarette in four weeks.

"Do you know what this is?" She held up the papers, shaking them, making them crackle and sing. "This is a chance for Pablo to go to a big school on scholarship, to go in August, after graduation. I ask Pablo, 'Gonna go to the big school, mijito? Gonna make your mama proud?' He tells me, 'I want to stay with Marc, Mama. We need to see about his eyes, Mama. I love him, Mama. I wanna go where he'll be happy, Mama.'"

More like a harpy than a dog, really, shrill and painful and drilling into his head.

"I find this in the trash, Marc. Instead in the mail I find the letter to the little school here, saying, 'Yes, I will go.' Who are you to steal away my boy's life?" She pressed forward, paper held like a wrinkled, crackling sword. The letterhead was embossed, the paper heavy and expensive. Every step she took disturbed the dust on the floor,

sending it swirling. "I came to see if you loved him, because I do love him. He is my boy, my son, my soul. When you love someone, you give them what is best for them. You have no money, no schooling, no future. My Pablo, he is not like you, he is a good boy."

Marc winced. He'd never hurt Pablo. Not on purpose. Never. He loved him.

Loved him.

His own mother had told him once that fools could starve on love.

She came up close -- she smelled like tortillas and lilies of the valley and Lysol and tears. "Please, if you love him, go away and let him have a life. He deserves a big school and football games and a future where he does not take care of a blind man. He works so hard, his Papi works so hard. Please, Marc. Let him go. Go away and don't come back here. Go away and let us take care of him, love him like he deserves."

She did love him, Marc could hear it like a bell tone in her voice. It reflected in her tears.

His arms hurt, deep inside where the vessels fed the bones and he could taste the dust in his throat. "Let him be, about the queer thing. Promise me you'll accept him, love him, don't make him cry again."

She nodded, "Yes, anything."

He nodded back. The light was fading and it was getting chilly.

"You'll go?"

"Yes."

"You swear on Jesus' name?"

"Yes."

"Thank you." The fatal blow dealt, she was no longer an animal or a monster from myth -- just a mother. "You won't tell him I came?"

"No." The cream paint had stiffened on the brushes by the time she left and he tossed the brushes away beneath the sink, gathering his extra pair of jeans and his book and throwing them in his bag. When he took Pablo to dinner he'd buy brown paper and string. The bus ticket would wait until the morning.

He found his last pack of cigarettes and added them to the pile. That could wait until the morning, too.

Then he sat and watched the night come and waited for Pablo.

Chapter Eight

His eyes were so brown, sepia and stone and chocolate -- always alight, always smiling, always so focused. His nose was straight, cheeks full and soft against the lips. He had a little scar above his eyebrow, right there. He had a widow's peak and a cleft chin and a sweet bowed upper lip. He had heavy eyelashes and a wide, strong neck and a little hollow just made for...

"Who's that Marc?" Marc looked up into blurry blue eyes, blinking hard to focus, chalk stuttering on the sidewalk. Marge, no, Marge -- the lady from the shelter. If he was lucky, she'd have a wax-paper wrapped bologna sandwich in her bag.

"My muse."

"It's really well done." She bent with a groan, her old, wide body protesting as she crouched beside him on the pavement. "I... I'd like you to meet someone, my sister. She runs a gallery and is doing a show using art from the homeless. I think you'd be a good addition. She's over at the coffee shop, willing to spring for a burger, I'd bet."

Marc shook his head. "I don't... not anymore."

"There's a company donating supplies -- paints, canvas, clay, paper -- whatever you'd need." Her voice sounded concerned and honest and she'd never lied to him, not yet. "Come on, son, there's a storm brewing. You'll face it better with food in you."

He nodded and stood, helping Marge to her feet, looking down onto the sidewalk, Pablo's face laughing, singing, reading. Colorful empty chalk drawings just waiting for the rain.

He was home for the summer, volunteering, and Sr. Aduante asked Pablo to drive him to the beach. The old man was too old to drive himself and the home wouldn't let him leave unaccompanied. It was a three-hour trip each way, but Sr. Aduante had explained that he wanted to see the waves against the sand, just once in his life. He and Senora Aduante had always wanted to go, but they never had and now she was dead.

"Don't let your life get full of I-wish-I-hads," Sr. Aduante had said.

That was why he'd agreed to do it. Sr. Aduante would probably have been surprised, but he knew all about regrets and wish-I-hads. It was almost two years since he'd woken up, Marc gone, his paintings wrapped in plain brown paper with Pablo's name written on them in Marc's odd, spidery writing. There were a lot of things he wished he'd had a chance to do with Marc.

Looking out over the sand to the water and the way the sunlight danced on the waves, Pablo knew he'd found yet another wish-I-had. One of the paintings Marc left behind was of an underground, watery world. It needed a companion piece, one that explored the way the light and water worked together above the surface.

Marc's eyes saw things so uniquely. Or at least they used to. Pablo couldn't help but wonder if his lover had left because his eyes were fading or if it was the way he looked in Marc's eyes that was fading. Two years later and Pablo still had no answers.

The waves tossed the sunlight back at him, so bright his eyes watered. He watched for a long time, the sand wet and cool beneath his bared feet, the waves like a heartbeat against the shore. The wind blew through his hair, making him think of Mama and her eternal complaint, "Pablo, your hair is so long. Be a good boy and get it cut."

Sr. Aduante shuffled up from further down the beach, the bottom of his pants wet, the knees covered in sand. There were tears in the old man's eyes.

"Everything okay?" Pablo asked.

The old man nodded. "It's bright. Marinda would have loved it."

"Are you ready to go?"

"Yes, thank you, Pablo."

"You're welcome, Sr. Aduante."

Pablo looked once more out over the water and knew; the next time Marc's absence overwhelmed his life and someone asked if he was all right, he'd tell them it was just the sunshine on the water.

God, he loved this - loved the rush and the heat and the colors.

Real colors.

Reds and greens and blues and browns and it didn't hurt, it didn't. It felt fine, like a million rainbows were pouring into him and making his nerves flame.

Anything. He'd give anything to stay right here, drowning in light, in colors. In hope.

The dull ache in his arm was hope.

"You want more, kid?" Low, rough, Tony (Timmy, Tommy, Tammy, something, who cared)'s voice cut through the high, the smell of piss and vomit everywhere, something moving under his spine.

He nodded, whimpering as the colors faded. "Yeah. Yeah."

"There's an old broad in the other room. Asked for you. Says she'll pay."

"Gimme a hit first?"

Tony-Timmy-Tommy laughed, smacked him hard enough his world rocked. "No credit. You put out, you get paid, you get high. That's how it works."

He stood, only falling a few times before the laughter and the yelled direction helped his cheek find the doorknob.

The soft gasp that met him wasn't one woman, it was two, odd, distorted, familiar. "Oh, Marc. Get him, Bev. He needs a hospital."

"You're sure this is him?"

"Yes. Get his arm." One hand stroked his head, a soft sob sounding. "You should have come to us, son. We would have helped."

He wasn't sure where he was going, just that he remembered that voice, remembered that someone, somewhere cared.

Pablo took off his jacket and hung it carefully on its hook, putting his keys on the one beside it. He wandered over to the single window the small bachelor apartment boasted and stared out into the night. There was no moon and the clouds kept the stars from adding their light to the night sky. It suited his mood.

He was lonely. Lonely and horny. And he'd passed up the chance to take care of both at once because the moment the sweet kisses had turned urgent, Jason pressing him back into the passenger door, Pablo had panicked.

It just didn't feel right, jumping into bed with someone he barely knew. The guy before that it was because they'd been dating for months and obviously there was no passion there, so what was the point.

It wasn't because he was still pining for Marc. Oh, no. It wasn't that.

The truth lay somewhere in between pining and wanting something more than a quick fuck.

Marc had spoiled him; with Marc he'd learned that, together, sex and love were a heady combination.

Marc... He was out there somewhere.

Pablo wondered if Marc ever looked up into the same sky, the same moon and stars and the same lack thereof on nights like tonight. Or had Marc already gone blind, the blue eyes unseeing? He didn't know, but he should. He'd wanted to be there for Marc, to help him adapt and adjust and live and instead he didn't even know if Marc's eyesight had gone yet. He didn't even know where Marc was.

He missed his lover.

Leaning against the sill, Pablo touched himself. He imagined that it was long, slender fingers that touched him. Paint-splattered and gentle, Marc's fingers would explore his face, linger over his lips and dance along his neck. Marc liked to take his time, liked to make Pablo tremble and moan and beg for more.

Unbuttoning his shirt, his fingers -- Marc's fingers -- slid over his skin, two moving to wrap around his nipple and tug it into life.

Pablo gasped, hips pushing forward into air, searching for his lover's heat to rub against.

He opened his jeans and wrapped a hand around his cock, trying for the loose, lazy grip that Marc teased him with. For a moment he found it, his hips pushing into the hand that held him, fingers trailing along his belly, exploring his skin with fascination. He always felt so alive and special beneath Marc's touch; he wasn't just someone to fuck and have fun with, he was someone to love, to be loved by in return.

He could remember how it felt making love with Marc, all he had to do was think about it and there it was, like a movie behind his eyes, like a sense-memory across his skin, nerves reacting as if it were happening now. It felt so good with Marc.

Pablo cried out, Marc's name on his lips as he came.

And if, when he was done, there was more wetness to wipe from his cheeks than his hand, he pretended they were tears of joy.

"I don't want to go to a school, Marge. Tell her."

"Marc, son, you need to. You aren't going to get your sight back. You have to learn to cope. You can't sit in this house for the rest of your life." Bev's voice was firm and, for a second, he hated her.

"I won't go."

"Yes, you will, Marc. You'll go and learn Braille and get a cane and a guide-dog and get over this whole, 'I'll see again' nonsense and then you can get back to work."

He stood, shaking, scared, hands out. It wasn't Bev who came to him, though, it was Marge. "Come on, son. You can do this. I know you're scared. You can call everyday. They have a sculpture garden, a studio. We'll come visit. We won't leave you there, son. I promise you."

Marc felt the tears, pressing into the arms of the closest thing to a mother he'd ever had. "Promise?"

"I promise, son. Bevvie and I won't leave you behind."

Pablo came out of the student gallery all fired up. He'd gone in wanting to feel closer to Marc. He'd been maudlin and sad, feeling sorry for himself. But the art had moved him, especially the stuff by a kid named Sorgenson. The paintings were bold and wild and made him excited, woken him up.

A gaggle of art critics had been standing together, eating the free food and drinking the free wine. They were so cynical and blasé and, it seemed to Pablo, so into the sound of their own voices. The one guy admitted his review was already written and sitting at home on his laptop. The students had never even had a chance.

Pablo went back around the gallery again, taking notes, making sure he spelled the names right. Then he went home and start to write.

The next day he turned the review in to the college newspaper and bought his favorite of the Sorgenson paintings. It wasn't the best of the lot, but the bold splashes of green reminded him of Marc and the painting fit in nicely with ones on the walls of his small one-room efficiency.

Two days later the editor of the paper called him and suggested he not only do a few more reviews for them, but that he think about offering them to some of the national papers that accepted freelance reviews.

It seemed like a good idea.

"You did it, son. The Times critic called you 'brilliant and breath-taking, the most promising new artist in a decade.'"

"Yeah? Me?"

Bev chuckled. "Mac Allen's work has a purity that echoes the light, the lines of sculpture resonating with beauty."

"Wow." He grinned against the phone, hand reaching down to stroke Sally's fur, the shepherd snuggled up next to bed. "It doesn't feel real."

"The money will, I think. 'The Act' sold for fifteen."

"Hundred?" Damn, one of his pieces? Fifteen hundred dollars? Really? Too fucking cool.

"No, son. Fifteen thousand."

He stilled, fingers tangled in Sally's ruff. "Dollars?"

"No. Rubles. Of course dollars." Bev's voice, husky and rough from ten thousand cigarettes and glasses of gin, teased him, laughed at him. "I told you you were one of the best, son. Stunning. You're going to make me a very wealthy woman."

Marc laughed, excitement like sparkles in his belly, his chest. "Fifteen thousand dollars. For one piece. Oh. Oh, God."

"You okay, son? You sound stunned. You want me to let you go?"

"No. No, I don't want to be alone, Bev." He didn't want to be alone anymore.

Pablo danced with his two year old niece, making her laugh and giggle as he swung her around. All around him were smiling faces. His sisters with their husbands, his Mama and Papi, so proud now that his baby sister was married.

Pablo knew Papi was proud because his Mama had told him. Just that morning. Which had been her opener for asking when he was going to get married, bring her more grandchildren, keep the family name going.

He must have explained her to her a dozen times that he didn't like girls like that. Maybe two dozen. Every time there was a wedding and he danced with his sisters and his cousins and she asked didn't he want to have a girl of his own to dance with. Every time she had one of his sisters set him up with a friend.

"I'm just trying to help, you look so lonely," she would say.

"I'm fine, Mama. Besides. I don't want a *girl*/friend," he'd reply. And then the next time they'd do it all over again. But now that his baby sister was married, maybe she'd stop.

He could hope anyway, because every time she mentioned him being alone it made him think of Marc and that always made his heart ache.

The music changed to something fast and he shook his head, grinning at little Lucia as he danced her around and around, making them both dizzy.

Chapter Nine

Holy Mother of God and all the little saints that attend her.

Pablo stared at the sculpture in shock. His own face, years younger, innocent, happy and full of joy, but *his* face stared back at him. The bronze gave the piece a glow, animating it so that it looked alive.

He hadn't put it together until just now. Mac Allen was Marc MacAllen.

His world narrowed, the party and lights and people fading until there was only himself and... himself. He reached out with a trembling hand. He was surprised to find the sculpture was cold beneath his fingers -- it looked so real. Marc was good. Very good.

Memories flooded through him, memories he lived with every day that he had just recently decided had to be let go of for his own sanity because Marc was gone; he wasn't going to find him again.

"I'm sorry, sir, but the gallery prefers that you don't touch the sculptures." The words broke him out of his reveries and he turned to look at her. The woman was wearing a tag that identified her as a part of the showing team. All he could think was that she must know Marc, she must have seen him, seen the man he loved, the man who left him.

Everything seemed to be running in slow motion, the sounds of the party coming back, but not making any sense, sort of still in the distance and he wondered briefly if he was going to faint.

He kind of wished he would faint as recognition dawned slowly across her face and she gasped. Her eyes moved from his face to the statue and then back again. Her mouth opened and she was speaking again, saying something to him, but he couldn't hear her over the sudden roar in his ears. He didn't know if it was the party noise again or his own blood or just the shock.

She was pointing vaguely and he turned automatically, catching a glimpse of a tall, lanky form in the crowd, close cropped red hair and wide, dark glasses, hiding what he knew were blue eyes.

He couldn't do this.

He couldn't do this with all these people here. Not after deciding to stop wasting his money on private detectives. Not while he was in a room full of strangers, all there to see the statues of the hopeful, innocent boy in love that he'd been. Not with his soul laid bare for them.

He turned back to the statue, his fingers still stroking a cheek gone warm from his touch. He yanked his hand away and looked up. A lady was looking at him, pointing him out to the man beside her. The gallery woman's hand landed on his arm, but he still couldn't hear anything.

He couldn't do this.

Not here.

Not now.

He wasn't ready.

He fled.

There were people at the elevator and he pushed past them, going through the door to the stairwell instead. The dull roar disappeared, leaving a blank, loud silence behind as he ran down the stairs. He had no idea how many flights he'd gone, how many he had left to go before his hearing came back, the sound of his feet stumbling down the stairs matched by the awkward gasps of his breath. Tripping down onto a landing between floors, he caught himself on the wall, the grey, colorless, dull wall. It was lifeless and plain and he wondered if anyone would be able to see him if they passed by him, or if he blended in with the wall. Sliding down until his bottom hit the floor, he wrapped his arms around his legs and began to rock slowly.

It was quiet. All he could hear was his breathing. There was a funny little hitch in it, like maybe he was crying.

He'd found Marc. Over thirteen years later and he'd found Marc. Blind, yes, but successful, too -- this wasn't Mac Allen's first showing, though it was first Pablo had covered. It looked like Marc had finally gotten his act together, found a way to make art even blind, made his art pay, made a life for himself. A life without Pablo.

He wasn't exactly hiding -- Marc could have found him if he wanted. Pablo wasn't the one who'd run away, wasn't the one hiding. Hell, his parents still lived in the same house.

He'd told himself all these years that Marc had left him because Marc believed he would be a burden on Pablo, that Marc had left out of some misguided sense of saving Pablo from himself. But Marc was successful now, Marc had figured out how to survive without seeing, and still, Marc hadn't come back.

Pablo buried his head in his knees and sobbed.

The banister was satin-smooth, metallic and cold -- no nicks, no carvings, not even any pigeon shit. He'd walked the balcony for the last half-hour, listening to the squawking, rustling, nails-on-chalkboard bird-chatter of the cocktail party inside.

His feet stayed near the edge, tracing the icy steel bars with his bare ankle, the too-smooth concrete with his callused feet. It was driving Piet to madness, the need to protect battling with the command to sit and stay. The dog's low, scared whine flavored the martini glass, gin-soaked clatter, a bright spray of vermouth, hold the olive.

His big toe found a crack along the edge.

He'd never considered that Pablo would find him, never even thought about it -- okay, that was a lie. He'd fantasized a hundred thousand times about it. About when and where and what they would say and the tears and the welcomebackgodI'vemissedyou kisses.

But he never thought they would be real.

They hadn't been real.

No tears. No questions. No kisses. Just a dull, empty feeling -- sort of like the ache after being hit or dry-fucked or

waking up to your fourth morning without food. He'd almost forgotten those particular sensations.

Almost.

The wind blew hard and ice-cold up here. Marc imagined the building as silvery and sleek, swaying ever so slightly beneath his feet. He couldn't even smell the rotted fish, pissy old man's pants scent of the city from this high. What had Bev told him? Fifteen stories? Thirty? Thirty-five?

More?

It hadn't felt real. He hadn't even known Pablo was there at first. Bev kept the list of people with press passes and he really didn't care much who came, who asked the endless questions. It was just a little tease -- a showing of particular pieces of his newer series. It was easy -- drinks and snacks and chat with the reporters, Bev had said. Look handsome, she said. Be talented, bright, witty Mac Allen and leave rumbly, nervous, skinny Marc MacAllen at home. It was supposed to be fun. It was supposed to be easy.

It wasn't supposed to tear a gash down the center of his life.

He slipped, wristwatch banging against the rail, barking out the ridiculously early time in the emotionless programmed voice that belonged on a spaceship or a computer or a commercial for men's razors. Piet barked and moved to push between him and the threat of open, empty sky, love overcoming obedience yet again.

Marc let Piet move him towards the building, kneeling down to pet the soft, silken fur gently. Piet groaned softly, wet tongue licking his chin, tail swishing against the concrete as it wagged.

It occurred to him that he didn't know what Pablo looked like, anymore than he could know the color of Piet's fur or Marge's eyes. That's when he knew the whole thing had been real, that Pablo had found him and gone again without even a handful of dead words.

When he fantasized about Pablo, he could see.

Piet's shoulders were steady and strong and supported him as he sobbed, his soft sounds drowned by the sounds of clinking glasses and dry laughter.

Eventually the tears ended and he was left with wet-kneed slacks, scratchy eyes and a headache.

Standing, Pablo pushed the heels of his hands into his eyes and wiped at his cheeks. He needed to find a bathroom, splash some cold water on his face and decide what to do. He followed the stairs down until he came to a door with the number six on it. There was a hall on the other side, the elevators and a sign at the other end with a man and a woman and an arrow. The bathroom.

His footsteps were silent on the carpet and it all seemed a bit unreal.

The bathroom was clean, like they were in high rises, and he splashed cold water on his face again and again and again until the sudden cold no longer made him gasp.

It was only then that he looked up, catching sight of his face in the mirror. Reaching out, he touched his reflection, the cold mirror like the bronze statue, except it was flat.

That was when he knew what he had to do. He had to go back and talk to Marc.

A glance at his watch told him the reception should pretty much be over and he decided he could risk running into a few people who might recognize him as the boy of the sculptures. He needed to hear it straight from Marc, needed to know why he'd been left, why Marc had never come back for him.

He had to go back anyway, he'd promised the editor of The New York Journal of Art that he'd have the review in by morning and he'd hardly even looked at any of the pieces. Just that one.

It was ironic, really, that their paths hadn't crossed earlier. He was garnering quite the reputation for himself as a fair and balanced art critic, freelancing for a number of art magazines. He'd even had a couple of by-lines in the New York Times as well as some of the other large newspapers. Of course Marc couldn't read, so it really shouldn't surprise him that his former lover hadn't seen his name. But other Mac Allen showings had crossed his path and he'd never been able to make it. Until today.

The elevator was empty and he had it on his own all the way back up to the 33rd floor. There wasn't a thirteenth floor on this building; he never quite understood that -- didn't the people on the fourteenth floor know that they were really the thirteenth floor?

And thirty-three was really thirty-two.

He jumped when the soft bell sounded, announcing his stop. He watched the doors slide open.

He watched them close again.

Shaking himself, he took a deep breath and pressed the button for thirty-three again. The elevator made the same ding and then the doors opened again. This time he went out. The hall had seemed so long when he'd been running away, but it took him no time at all to reach the gallery. The room was empty except for the sculptures and Pablo walked over to the one he'd been looking at earlier.

It was him, captured in bronze and time, fourteen years ago. He was laughing, book in hand, buttons open on his shirt. One of the buttons was chipped, a little v knocked out of it. He still had that shirt in a box up in Mama's attic.

There were five others, one bust and four full figures -- all with his smile and his nose and his cheekbones. He wandered slowly, there he was in the chair, that damned library chair, bent over and reading, hair falling down into his forehead. Then eating an ice cream without a shirt on, jeans half unzipped, a drop of ice cream sliding down his belly.

Another figure sat low to the ground, sheet draped over the waist, arms open and calling. He was there, every childhood scar, the bitten fingernails, even the frayed edges of the goodwill sheet -- it had been blue with steel grey trim and soft, so soft.

The bust was simple, straight forward and close up and peaceful, quiet, focused on something that no one else could see. Pablo shook his head in wonder, the title of this piece was "Inspiracion".

The final image stretched out along a corner and one glance had Pablo trembling.

"Lamento"

I regret.

He'd fallen asleep on that bed happy and warm and safe. He'd woken to a nightmare. The look on the statue's face

spoke of sated pleasure, of joy. The folded, tear-streaked letter on the empty pillow beside seeming so innocent, so harmless. He knew if he could reach down and open the note, if it were real and not bronze, it would say, "I'm sorry. I love you. Goodbye. M." in the spidery scrawl that he'd found scrawled across miles of brown-paper wrapped canvasses.

He had those paintings hanging in his home, making the small apartment bright and warm and full of memories. For so long they were his only connection to Marc. And now...

Now there was a roomful of proof that Marc had been thinking of him, too.

He didn't understand.

There was the sound of a door opening and then he saw a heavy-hipped woman leading a tall, thin man across the room, a good-sized black lab in a harness walking along beside.

The wonderful full carrot-colored hair was cut close to the scalp, the dark glasses covered the amazing eyes, there was a close trimmed beard and mustache on what had once been a smooth, clean-shaven face, and the slim form was a little fuller than he remembered in the boy who'd left him. There was, however, no doubting who he was. "Marc..."

Marc stumbled slightly and then stopped, entire body stuttering at the sound of his voice. Marc's head dipped, nodding. One hand reached up and pushed up the dark glasses in a painfully familiar move. "Yeah. Hey Pablo."

The woman stepped away, patting Marc's arm gently. Her eyes were swollen and red, mascara smudged. "I'm going to take Marge down for coffee, honey. You call me and I'm here. You're okay?"

Marc nodded and swallowed. "Yeah, Bev. I'll be okay."

Bev nodded again, her too-bright auburn curls bobbing around her face. She smiled at Pablo as she left, patting his arm gently in passing. Then they were alone.

He stared, still not quite believing. He knew it was Marc in front of him. Despite the differences, he looked just the same. Not to mention the sculptures -- no one else could have done them. And yet... he'd dreamed of finding Marc for so long, had practiced what he would say, a thousand different variations.

And here he stood, unable to think of one.

"I... Bev says you were covering the show." Marc's voice was deeper than he remembered, almost husky.

"Yeah, I uh... didn't know. Mac. Allen. You know?" He put his hands in his pockets and bit his lip. God, he was making a fool of himself.

Marc chuckled, the sound weak, and shrugged. "Bev thought it was classier and it left me a little privacy." He stopped, tilted his head. "Do you like them?"

"Do I... Oh, god, Marc -- why?"

"Why what? Why do I ask, or why you?"

"Why did you leave? I mean it's obvious from this room that you still love me. Why did you just up and leave like that? Why did you never contact me? Why?" He closed his mouth, biting his lip to keep the words from continuing to tumble out, one after the other.

Marc was trembling, mouth opening and closing again and again. "They didn't... I mean... No one ever told you... Oh God, Pablo... I was sure they'd tell you..." He took a step back, the dog following immediately, head shaking slightly. "I need some air."

"What?" Thirteen years of hurt went into the word. "I haven't seen you since you walked out on me and the best you can do is stammer and say you need some air? I didn't deserve what you did then, and I don't deserve this, Marc. I want it to stop hurting, I want you to stop hurting me. Please don't walk out on me again."

Marc took another step, bumping lightly into the stand with the bust on it. Long, thin fingers moved over the metal with quick, practiced motions. A long, deep breath and the thin body seemed to relax, to settle.

"I don't know what to say, Pablo. It... it was a long time ago, we were kids. I mean, people move on, right?" The words would have been more believable without the hitching tightness, the ducked head that screamed of lies.

"Yeah, they do. Only..." He looked around the room and took a step toward Marc. "It doesn't look like you've moved on."

"I... I couldn't." Marc shifted, Pablo noticed for the first time that Marc was barefooted, long toes curling into the grey carpet.

"Then why did you go?" he asked, voice barely more than a whisper as he watched Marc's feet.

"Because they were right. She... she brought the acceptance letter from the university; she showed it to me, all crumpled up from the trash. She said they'd leave you alone about being gay, about everything, if I left." Marc shrugged again, toes curling and releasing again and again. "She loved you too much to see you waste your life. So did I."

Pablo frowned. "She? Acceptance le -- oh my god!"

Mama. His Mama had... He was going to be sick. He was going to throw up all over the plain grey, thick, expensive carpet. She'd asked Marc to go and he had.

"Did I mean so little to you?" Even as he said it he knew it wasn't true, but he couldn't think, he couldn't breathe and it hurt. It hurt almost as much as losing Marc had.

"So little..." Marc turned around, shaking his head, an utterly shocked look upon the ashen face. "I gave up everything -- my art, my home, my whole world. Just left it there so that you would have a chance to succeed without a weight around your neck. If it hadn't been for..." Marc stopped, biting down hard enough on his lip that Pablo saw the skin break. "It doesn't matter now, does it? This is ancient fucking history. There's nothing I can say now that'll change what I did at nineteen."

"A weight around my neck? I never ever treated you like you were a burden, Marc -- I never thought you were one. I wanted to be there for you when you... Oh God." Marc's words suddenly sank in: 'If it hadn't been for'.

"I'm sorry. It should have occurred to me there'd be someone else after all this time. Okay. You're right. Ancient history. Can't change anything. Close the book on it already, Cervantes." That sick feeling was back and he was pretty sure he was actually going to throw up this time.

"Someone else? There's no one... You've lost me, man." Marc pushed his glasses up again, eyebrows frowning above the hidden eyes.

"God, I can't believe how badly I'm screwing this up." He laughed, though there was very little humor in the sound. "I've been looking for you so long and imagining this moment so often and I'm always eloquent and persuasive and you're always available and still in love with me and we usually wind up in bed together."

Marc's jaw dropped open and Pablo knew without a shadow of a doubt that those blue eyes were wide open with shock. Then Marc began to chuckle, entire body shaking. "Damn, I've missed you."

"And God knows how much I've missed you." He took a tentative step forward. "Can we just pretend that I've already been eloquent and persuasive and you're available and still in love with me?"

Marc stopped laughing and Pablo's heart sank when he shook his head. "No. No, I can't. I won't pretend, Pablo. I lost years dying and then spent years putting something resembling a life back together. I... I'm not big on playing games. And I'm too old to pretend that how I feel about you is fake."

The shrug came again, Pablo couldn't help wondering where it came from, when it had become habit. "I know it's stupid but... I'd rather keep my memories from when you loved me rather than do the one last fling, old boyfriend closure fuck."

Pablo licked his lips. "I don't want to live with the memories anymore, Marc." He started to shake, trembling as he laid himself on the line. "Oh, yeah, I want to 'fuck' you, but I don't want closure. The truth is that I never stopped looking for you and I never stopped loving you and no matter what else you leave here with today, I want you to know that I love you."

"How? You don't even know me anymore, babe. What if I'm an axe murderer? What if I'm a royal shithead? What if I'm straight?" Marc's hands flew up and smoothed over non-existent hair, the untucked dress shirt giving Pablo a glimpse of a tanned, flat belly.

He giggled, just a single, soft flutter of air. "I'm not sure which is more ridiculous, that you'd be an axe murderer, or straight." Sobering, he looked over the room again. "I can see how much you loved me in every line of your work. Do you really expect me to believe you're so different today than you were then? I'm not. Older. Hopefully wiser. Still in love with the skinny tall artist with more talent than money."

"Can I..." Marc's hand fluttered between them, palms up. "I need to... Let me see you?"

"Oh..." Butterflies started to dance in his stomach. He'd taken for granted that he could see Marc, see the changes that time had wrought, see what time hadn't changed; Marc couldn't.

He stepped closer, electricity moving through him as his hand closed over Marc's and raised it to his face. "Of course."

Marc's fingers slid over his skin, fingertips moving slowly, tracing his jaw line, his lips, his nose. By the time they reached his eyes, carefully tracing the tiny lines added by sun and time, they were shuddering, tremors that vibrated over his temples. His eyes closed, allowing Marc to pass along his lids and he had to squeeze his hands into fists to avoid reaching out, but he couldn't stop the whisper that left him. "Marc..."

"You're beautiful. Still." The hands moved over his forehead, into his hairline, and Marc smiled. "You've lost a little roundness in your cheeks, but you look like you." The grin widened as the fingers slid to ghost over his ears. "You still have your hair."

"You don't," he replied, voice thick with tears. Without thinking he tilted his head, nuzzling into the almost touches.

Marc's nose wrinkled. "Too much trouble and once it started thinning, I just kept it short. I figure it makes me look dignified, that and the goatee. Artsy, but intellectual, Marge says."

The hands continued moving, learning and searching, stopping to investigate every now and again.

"Who's Marge?" Pablo asked quietly as he continued to stand still beneath Marc's touch. If he thought it would work, he would stay still for the rest of his life so that Marc would just keep on touching him.

"One half of my pair of guardian angels." Those hands found his jaw, his neck, stroking softly. Marc's voice was distracted, focused on the touch. "Marge is my personal assistant, I guess. She keeps my life moving, keeps me in food and clothes and reads me my mail. Her sister, Bev, she's my manager, does all the money, the work stuff." Marc's smile softened. "They saved my life. They're my family, now."

It was bittersweet, knowing that Marc had found someone to love and take care of him and to know that it wasn't him.

One fingertip trailed over the hollow of his throat and then the touch fell away. "Thank you. I... I needed that. To see you again, to *know* it was you."

"And now that you know it is?"

"Now?" Marc shrugged helplessly. "Honestly? I want to take you to a little coffee shop and drink dark coffee and listen to you tell me every single thing that's happened to you in the last thirteen years. I want to find some clay and capture what I just saw before I lose it again. I want...I've wanted this for so long that I don't know what I want anymore."

"The coffee shop sounds like a nice place to start." It would keep them together and talking. Pablo had a feeling that as long as they managed that, the rest would fall into place.

"Really?" Marc straightened up, smiling in his direction, a little hitch in his chest. "There's a little place in the lobby or an all-night diner at the corner of the block. Piet and I are buying."

There was a tear in the velvet seat, about as long as his pinkie finger, ragged edged and crooked. He couldn't keep from touching it, his hand running over it again and again. It kept him grounded, kept him assured that he wasn't dreaming, wasn't hallucinating, wasn't dead. Nothing so perfectly normal ever showed up in dreams.

If he wasn't dreaming, then it was Pablo sitting across the table from him, drinking coffee.

Marc couldn't decide if that was the most wonderful or most terrifying thing that had ever happened to him.

Maybe both.

From the time Bev had come to get him from the balcony, her hand hot on his arm, and whispered, "Marc, son, he's here. He came back," Marc's head had been spinning, world shattered and altered and twisted one too many times for one day.

He stroked the velvet again, tracing the tear.

"I've been looking for you, you know." Pablo's voice was calm and quiet, the stronger emotions he'd displayed earlier banked.

"Have you?" Marc sighed, hand sliding down to stroke Piet's head for a second, a mixture of shame and regret filling him. "I don't exactly have a trail behind me. I... Bev had my name changed years ago, got me a social security card. Marc MacAllen never held a job, owned anything. He... he died a long time ago."

"Yeah, I searched all through the streets, hit everyone I knew, went to all the shelters, put up signs. I was pretty sure you left the city, but I had to try, you know?"

"I badgered all the bus drivers, even went back every few days to talk to the guys just getting in, but none of them remembered seeing you. Then I switched to a private detective, but I had no clue where you'd gone. He used to ask around and look for you though, anytime a job took him somewhere new. I guess by then though you were probably already under a new name."

"I'm sorry." He found the ceramic coffee cup, traced it. "I thought... I thought you would just..." Marc sighed, ducking his head as he drank the hot, bitter liquid. What had he thought? That Pablo would move on, go on, find another lover and then another -- laugh and live and see and not have a blind, uneducated obstacle to live with. "I thought I was doing the right thing, the best thing for you."

Pablo sighed. "You never gave me a choice."

"No. You wouldn't have agreed and I couldn't have argued." He almost stopped there, stopped the drama and the painful baring of ancient old emotions that needed to stay buried, but Pablo wanted the truth, deserved it. "It was the hardest thing I've ever done, leaving you in that bed."

"But you did." Pablo's voice was thick and it hurt that he couldn't tell if it was hurt or anger that made it so.

"I did." He lifted his chin. He hadn't survived this long to shy away from the truth now. He'd lived through the pain of leaving and losing; there was nothing he couldn't face. "I made a promise."

"That promise belonged to *me*." Now the thickness was definitely tears held at bay. "I was ready to make promises to you, Marc. Hell, I was making promises to you and I meant every one of them. I can't believe you let my mother talk you into leaving me."

"I'm not sure what you want to hear, Pablo. What do you need to hear? That I regret? You want reasons, details? What?" Piet sat up, chain rattling, nose pushing into Marc's hand and he soothed automatically, humming softly.

"I want..." He heard Pablo swallow, heard the coffee cup being carefully set on the table. He could feel the weight of Pablo's gaze. "I want to hear that there's still a place for me in your life."

He closed his eyes, his chest hurt -- not ached, not throbbed, nothing so fancy or wonderful -- it just hurt. Everything he had wanted, everything he had dreamed of, and Pablo was offering it.

It couldn't be real.

"Why? Why would you still want me? It's been years, I hurt you, I *left* you, and now I'm a middle-aged, bald blind man. You should hate me."

"I don't hate you, Marc. I can't. There were times when I wanted to, but I never could. I'm pissed off at you, I'll grant you that. You robbed me -- hell you robbed both of us -- out of the years we could have been together. I wanted to be there as you turned into a middle-aged bald blind man. But I wasn't. And I have to tell you that you're the best looking middle-aged, bald blind man I've ever seen." Pablo laughed and while it wasn't a fully happy sound, there was humor in it. "And I hate to be the one to break it to you, but you aren't bald and I'm

middle-aged as well."

Marc's hand went to his head, stroking over the short-short hair, blushing dark. Good-looking, Pablo thought he was good-looking... "Well, I'm really close to bald."

"Bald would be if you had no hair -- you just have short hair. I bet it feels really neat."

He brushed his hand over his head, shrugging at the familiar, bristly feel. "Feels a bit tickly, a bit rough. Want to touch?" Without considering the ramifications of what he was offering -- or why he was offering -- Marc ducked his head, leaning towards Pablo.

Pablo's swift inhalation was almost but not quite a gasp and then he could feel the heat of Pablo's hand draw near. The touch was so gentle, an almost ghostly pass from the front of his head to the back and then the caress was repeated, firmer this time.

On the third pass, Pablo's hand slid around the side of his head and moved to cup his cheek, thumb stroking the bone just below his glasses. "I've missed touching you. The feeling of your skin under my fingers. There's nothing else like that."

Pablo's fingers were soft, comfortable, easy upon his skin. The sensation was an odd mixture of unique and painfully familiar. There was a statue in his bedroom, in his little house on the lake. Pablo kneeling, half-dressed, reaching out to touch him. When things were bad, when the guilt and the ache couldn't be borne, Marc would rest his cheek upon the bronze until it was no longer cold. Until he could pretend, for a minute, that he was loved.

He found himself nuzzling into the touch, pushing into it, taking comfort where he had no right to.

He pulled back, biting his lip. "I'm sorry, Pablo. I... I don't usually act like a love-struck idiot in coffee shops."

One of Pablo's fingers followed his retreat, stroking one last time along his cheek, down his nose and across his lips.

"Is that what you are?" Pablo asked, voice barely above a whisper. "A love-struck idiot?"

"I..." Marc shivered, fingers sliding over the edge of the table, jittering. "I... God damn it, Pablo, yes, I'm an idiot. Yes, I'm sick -- my God, I'm sitting here talking to the great love of my life, the one, Mr. Right -- all those stupid romantic bullshit things -- and all I can think is 'he touched me'."

Pablo giggled, the sound achingly familiar, even if he hadn't heard it for thirteen years. "You do still love me." He didn't have to touch Pablo's face to know there was a huge smile on it.

"I... we don't know each other anymore. I don't know if your favorite food is still ice cream, where you went to college, where you live, whether you're still married, if you listen to opera or rock or bluegrass music." Marc wanted Pablo to touch him again, to feel the warmth, soft fingers. "How can I still be in love with you?"

"Wait a minute. Still married? What makes you think I'm married?"

"They told me... I mean, I called once and..." Marc shook his head, trying to rearrange his thoughts. He'd called four, almost five years ago -- partly to see if he remembered the number, partly because his first solo show had been a success, partly just because. It had been the first and last time he'd done it, from Bev's cell phone, in the bathroom stall of the gallery. "I thought you were married."

"You... you called for me." Pablo's breaths were sharp, short. "And they told you I was married?" The words were

as much wounded cry as question.

"I didn't... Oh, God, Pablo. I didn't mean to hurt you again. I swear." Marc shook his head, blinking hard. Surely they hadn't lied, not after so long. Why would they have lied? Was he that bad, that despised that they would lie after so long? "Please. I... Should I just go? I don't want to hurt you again, Pablo. If I had known..."

Pablo's hands grabbed his, holding on tightly, squeezing. "No! No, please, don't go."

"I've never been married, Marc. Never. I can't believe... Oh, God, I can't believe... first you tell me she came to see you and made you leave and now..." Pablo's hands tightened further around his fingers. "I can't believe they would do this to me -- I thought they loved me. I thought they accepted me for who I am. I've never been married, Marc, never."

"They do love you, Pablo. Come on, think about it." Marc turned his hands over, twined his fingers with Pablo's. "I'm not a solid bet and I'm sure she was trying to avoid getting caught. She didn't want to hurt you, babe."

He was trying to be so thoughtful, so good, so fucking understanding, but the little voice inside him screamed, "No, she wanted *me* to hurt you."

Pablo brought his hands up and kissed them, one and then the other, and then rubbed a soft cheek against his knuckles. "It seems to me she was thinking more about herself and what she wanted for me than whether or not I was gonna get hurt." A deep shuddering breath followed the words. "God, I wish... well it doesn't matter what I wish, does it? It happened. We can't change it what happened. But we can decide where we go from here. My family isn't here, Marc. It's just you and me and we can walk out of here and never see each other again or we can walk out of here together. I still love you, Marc. I knew it the minute I saw you across the room. I think we should start making up for lost time."

"Just like that? Just start again? Just go from empty to full in one evening?" Marc shook his head and held on tight, all at once. "I don't live here, you know. I mean, I just came in for the show. Oh God, Pablo, it's like someone came down and said, 'here's your sight back, take it.' Like a dream, a miracle."

"Yes, just like that -- don't you know you have to take your dreams in both hands and hold on as tight as you can? I don't care if you want to exchange phone numbers and talk, date, jump right into bed, whatever, but I am not letting go of you again, Marc. I'm not losing another minute."

Pulling one of his hands free, Marc pulled out his wallet, found a business card, and scribbled his number on the back, pushing the flat card across the table. "My number at home. I... I'll be here until Sunday evening, then I'm going back to the studio."

He bent his head and swallowed hard, holding onto one of Pablo's hand as he leapt. "If... if you want my hotel room number, you'll have to walk back with me, because I don't know it."

"I was worried you weren't going to offer." Pablo's hand squeezed his again. "And it's probably going to take awhile before I'm willing to let go of your hand."

Marc squeezed back, tears filling his eyes. He blinked them back, knowing Pablo couldn't see them behind the glasses. "So, do you still like ice cream?"

Chapter Ten

It was a standard hotel room, the hotel a couple of stars up from the place Pablo was staying at, but with that bland sameness that all hotels boasted. He'd had to let go of Marc's hand to let him open the door and now Marc was settling Piet, making sure he had food and water.

Pablo shoved his hands in his pockets and went to the window, looking out over the city, trying to calm his nerves. Marc had invited him up "to talk," but Pablo was hoping they could do more than just talk. Thirteen years was a long time to do without, a long time to pine for the touch of an absent lover. And now that lover was so close...

Marc stood, the sound of him brushing off his hands loud. Pablo turned, watching Marc slowly find his way through the main room, hands sliding along the doorframe, along the beige-papered wall. "You still here, Pablo?"

"Yeah, just taking in your view." He stepped forward, taking Marc's hand again. "Of course the one I'm looking at now beats the one out the window any day."

Marc chuckled. "Flatterer. Come sit and talk with me? I mean, if you have time..."

The long fingers pushed those dark glasses up again, this time the memory it invoked wasn't so agonizing.

"I have the time." There wasn't anywhere else he wanted to be. It still felt like a bit of a dream, like if he pinched himself or thought about it too hard, he'd wake up.

"Uh... there's only one chair? Or are there two?" Marc blushed. "I only got in this morning and usually Marge or Bev sort of walk me through the room."

He squeezed Marc's hand reassuringly. "I could do that if you want. Walk you through it, I mean. If they didn't already. And you probably just want me to tell you that yeah, there's only one chair but we can sit on the bed." Pablo found himself suddenly nervous about pushing himself into Marc's life like this.

Would Marc resent the sudden intrusion?

Marc grinned at him, the first easy, real smile he'd gotten. "Well, if you're determined to hold my hand until we're both old, you're going to have to learn the ins and outs of being with a blind guy." Marc stopped, squeezing Pablo's hand. "I'm sorry, babe. I keep jumping ahead of myself, trying to just tuck you into a life you don't know anything about."

He reached up with his free hand, cupping Marc's cheek. "Tuck away, Caro -- I want to fit."

"Oh." A single tear slid from beneath Marc's glasses. "Oh, God."

Stepping closer, he wiped the tear away with his thumb. "Sh. Sh. It's all right. It's going to be just fine."

"If I kiss you, if I learn how you taste again, I'll be lost." Marc's voice was quiet, serious. "If we just stop here, then tomorrow I can pretend this never happened and get on with my life."

Pablo shook his head; he was already lost and he wasn't about to pretend his fondest and most long-held wish hadn't just come true. "I'm not letting go of your hand, Marc. We can be lost together."

"Together." Marc bit his lip and nodded. "Can we sit down? I... I want to see you, look at you again."

Pablo nodded before remembering that Marc couldn't see him. "Yes. The bed's a couple of feet to our right." He giggled a little, nerves making him giddy. "I hope you don't mind if I enjoy it as more than just an exercise in you seeing me. I love the way your fingers feel on my skin."

Marc chuckled and stepped over to the bed, toeing off his loafers before sliding into the brown bedspread. "I... I want to touch you. I mean, I touch you every day, touch the statues, the brass." He held out his arms. "Please, Pablo. I need to see you."

Pablo slipped off his dress shoes and climbed onto the bed, sitting cross-legged across from Marc. He took Marc's hands in his own, squeezed them gently and brought them up to his face. "Look as much as you want."

Warm fingers traveled over his face -- chin, lips, nose, forehead -- sliding and searching. Marc made tiny, little moans of pleasure and need, chewing restlessly on the full lower lip.

He forced himself not to turn his head and capture the questing fingers with his mouth; he'd promised Marc he could look for as long as he wanted. Instead, Pablo reached out and rested his hands on Marc's legs, rubbing them gently.

Marc's fingers slid over his head, down to the nape of his neck and around. Marc moved closer, almost close enough to be in his lap, measuring his neck, tracing the hollow of his throat. "So beautiful. Strong, smooth... I've missed you so..."

Pablo bit back his cry, leaning forward slowly, unable to stop himself as he moved toward their first kiss in thirteen years.

Marc's hands slowed, keeping them separate for just a moment before curling over his shoulders and holding on. "Yes, please. Kiss me."

He stopped long enough to remove Marc's glasses, needing to see the blue eyes instead of his own reflected back at him.

Marc looked down, eyes half-closing. "I... It's hard for me to focus them, to keep them still. It's... I mean, it makes people nervous."

"Sh. I just need to see them, just like," he slid one of his hands against the back of Marc's hand, where it still rested against his throat. "I know what you're seeing, I know you aren't doing that with your eyes."

"You always wanted to see all of me." Marc's eyelids raised, chin tilted, the blue eyes unfocused and wavering, but familiar and bright.

"That's because I love all of you." Leaning forward again, he brought their lips together. Marc's lips were warm against his own, the goatee a funny sort of ticklish sensation against his chin, but then he slid his tongue out to move along Marc's lips and everything else flew from his mind as the familiar taste exploded through him. Marc's groan was harsh, almost pained, but the soft lips opened to him, offered him exactly what he wanted, what he

needed. His tongue pressed forward, moving into Marc's mouth and exploring the familiar but long denied warmth.

He was trembling, just like he had the very first time they made love, just like every time they made love. And he might have been making small, soft noises. Marc moved closer, thighs brushing against him. Long fingers cradled his head, holding him as Marc deepened the kiss, fed from him. He hadn't felt like this in thirteen years. It was overwhelming and he couldn't catch his breath and he whimpered into Marc's mouth, hands shaking so hard.

The kiss eased, the pressure of Marc's lips fading and then slowly disappearing as the weight on his lap backed away. "Wow."

His hands moved to Marc's shoulders, clutching. "Yeah," he agreed a little breathlessly. Then he grinned and gave a little half-giggle. "Wanna do it again?"

"Yeah." Marc's hands were tracing over his own bottom lip, as if convincing himself this was real. Then Marc scooted forward again. "Yeah, I want to do it again."

That's all he needed and Pablo brought their lips together again, mouth opening, tongue sliding gently into Marc's mouth, becoming more aggressive and urgent as soon as he encountered the familiar flavor again. Marc groaned, pushing close with a soft sob. Hot and sweet and just touched with coffee and laced straight through with hunger, the flavor of Marc's kiss moved through him -- easing some aches and creating new ones.

Oh, he was hard already, hips moving restlessly, an urgency filling him. Whimpering he let himself fall back, hands keeping hold of Marc's shoulders, pulling Marc down on top of him. Marc's cock pressed against his thigh - - hot and hard -- Marc's hips shifting. His legs spread automatically to cradle Marc, his own erection pressing against hot skin, rubbing and oh, god, he was going to come in his pants like he was fifteen again.

Marc's lips left his, brushing against the corner of his mouth. "We... we're not taking it slow and easy here, babe. Are you sure this is what you want?" Marc was pressing against him, their bodies enthusiastic and moving rhythmically.

"I don't want to stop. Please, Marc, don't make me stop." His hands moved to slide along Marc's features, to rub against the short bristles of hair. He brought their lips together again, the kiss rough, urgent as his hips pushed up harder. He didn't want slow or easy, he wanted Marc.

He could taste it, feel it when Marc stopped thinking and slipped beneath sensation. A soft gasp and Marc met his passion with an equal need. One hand slipped between them, cupping his groin as he thrust, hot and firm.

It had been so long, so long since it was Marc touching him, so long since anyone else had touched him to bring him pleasure and he shouted into Marc's mouth, smooth thrusts becoming jerky and frantic and then he was coming. Shaking and shuddering and whimpering and sweet pleasure filling his body, kept alive along his nerves by Marc's weight on him.

"Oh, God... Oh, Pablo... I've missed you..." Marc's face buried in his neck, soft sobs shaking thin shoulders.

"I know." His hands slid around Marc and stroked along his lover's back, relearning it. He shuddered. "I missed you, too."

"I'm sorry."

"I am, too, but you said it yourself, we can't change what happened thirteen years ago, we can only go on with our lives."

He slid his hand down to Marc's ass and pressed him down. "Did you...?"

Marc nodded; Pablo could feel the heat of a flush against his throat. "I'm as bad as a teenager, huh?"

He giggled. "At least you have a change of pants nearby."

"Well, depending on how long you're staying, we could make the hotel clean yours." The careful question was so-gently presented, Marc's face still hidden.

He froze, a sob caught in his throat. He swallowed, working to breathe. "You want me to stay?"

"If you want to." Marc took a deep breath, shivered. "We don't have to do anything -- kiss, talk, sleep, eat -- I'm easy. I just don't want you to go yet."

"I'd love to stay." He pressed a kiss to Marc's scalp, giggling as the small hairs tickled.

"I love that sound."

That made him giggle again. "You always did. I always sorta wished I'd outgrow it -- but I never did."

"I'm glad. It's so true, you can't fake that sound." Marc brushed a soft kiss against the hollow of his throat. "Pure and simple and you."

"You always were a romantic." Pablo squeezed with his arms and legs, holding Marc close for a moment and then let go with a grimace. "I could really use a shower about now."

"A romantic? Me?" Marc rolled off him and sat up, the big black dog coming up immediately, pushing his nose against Marc's hand. Marc leaned down, crooning softly as his hands moved through the shiny fur. "Hey, pretty boy. We're not going out again for a while, you can just relax, my good boy."

"So how long have you had... Pete?"

"Piet." Marc tilted his head. "Let's see... my eyes finally gave up eleven years ago and I got Sally right at Christmas of 1991. Sally and I were together for a little over eight years before I lost her. That was February, 2000. Piet moved in Easter weekend that year. So, what? Just over two years, I guess."

He pushed away the pang of regret at the mention of the milestones in Marc's life. He should have been there, but he wasn't. His best bet was to focus on making sure he didn't miss any others.

"Do I need a formal introduction? I mean, he's going to have to get used to me being around. Right?"

A sweet, wondering smile lit up Marc's face. "Yes. Yes."

Marc bent down again, murmuring just loud enough for Pablo to hear. "Piet, pretty boy? I want you to meet someone. If we're really good and really lucky, we'll lure him home with us someday. His name is Pablo. He's the man I love."

Pablo swallowed down his sob, the sound turning into something more like a hiccup, and he reached out to stroke Marc's arm before offering the hand to the dog, fingers turned down out of harm's way. "Hey there, Piet. It's good to meet you."

To his surprise, Piet raised his own paw to shake, waiting for Pablo to release it before sniffing and licking his hand, tail thumping hard against the carpet.

He giggled, delighted. "Oh, Marc, he's great!"

Marc rubbed his cheek against the dark head. "Isn't he? He's a good boy. So smart and so friendly. He's one of my very best friends. I couldn't function without him."

Pablo let his hand rub over the dog's head until he reached Marc's cheek and then he let his fingers curl around the warm skin. The luxury of touch was overwhelming and unbelievably arousing. He could remember hours and hours spent lying together, simply touching Marc's smooth skin, feeling the bone and muscle beneath the surface.

"I love you." His voice was thick, strange but welcome in his own ears.

"I love you, too. I always have."

Pablo brought their mouths together, this kiss warm and exploring. The potential for passion was there, singing just beneath his skin. It had been so long. He repeated the words aloud in apology for the desperation and quickness of earlier. "It's been so long..."

Marc smiled against his lips. "Yeah, I think the rubber in my wallet's as least five years old, maybe six."

Pablo chuckled. "I don't even bother to carry them around with me." The sound was only slightly bitter as he chuckled again. "In fact I'm not sure I ever bought a package since..."

Marc backed away, a confused frown crossing his face. "Since?"

He shrugged, sorry now he'd brought it up -- it sounded pretty pathetic and pathetic was the last thing he wanted Marc to associate with him. "Well, basically since... you left."

"What? Pablo? Are you saying? Thirteen years, you didn't... *Why?*" Marc's eyes were wide, shocked and confused, voice simply stunned.

Pablo hunched in on himself, pushing his hands into his pockets and trying to pull the material away from his groin. He was suddenly extremely aware of the sticky mess and how it made him smell.

"It's not like I made a conscious choice about it or anything, there just never was anyone who... I wanted to do that with."

"Oh God. I thought -- I wanted you to be happy, to live, to love. I wanted you... I ruined everything." Pablo caught a glimpse of tear-filled eyes before Marc's face was hidden in Piet's fur.

His own discomfort forgotten, he moved to Marc and wrapped around him, holding his lover.

"Is this your way of telling me you haven't been celibate the last thirteen years?" he teased gently; he had never regretted holding each potential lover up to Marc, he had no intention of letting it ruin their reunion.

"Celibate? No." The words were almost-sobs, muffled against Piet's shoulder. "One three month affair, a handful of one-night stands, a really good friend who's willing to be a fuckbuddy sometimes -- you must hate me... Why don't you hate me?"

"Because I don't want to spend the next thirteen years without you. God, Marc, I don't want to spend the next day

without you." He kissed the back of Marc's neck. "You aren't responsible for my choices, you know. Only for your own." He winced. "I didn't mean..."

"Well, at least I can say I never lied to you. I never said I was a good man. I never said I was anything more than a poor artist."

Pablo kissed the back of Marc's neck again. "If you weren't a good man, you would have stayed and told me what my mother did. Instead you did what you thought was best. I totally disagree with what you did, I still think I should have had a say, I still wish you had trusted me to stay by you as your eyesight failed, but I can see that you did what you did because you loved me."

"I still love you, still want you."

"Yeah, Caro. I feel the same." Standing, he took Marc's hand and tugged gently. "I seem to remember taking a shower together once. It's always been a fantasy of mine that we could repeat the experience." He chuckled. "We're even in a hotel again, too."

Marc let Pablo pull him up, a soft chuckle leaving him. "I bet the hot water lasts longer this time."

Marc began to unfasten his shirt, fingers sliding the beige buttons free. Pablo reached over to stop him. "Let me? Please?"

The long fingers stopped, stuttered. "Oh, I'd like that."

"Me, too," he told Marc, smiling as he let his hands slide up the long chest. Still thin, but harder, more muscles running under the lightly tanned skin. Marc's chest was smooth, just a few coppery curls and a sweet, dark line leading into his waistband. Unable to resist, he leaned forward, eager to taste. His mouth closed over one dusky nipple, tongue teasing the tip as his lips closed over it, tugging gently.

"Oh!" Hands found the back of his head, holding him close. "Oh, Pablo..."

He moaned against the flesh in his mouth, body melting against his lover. Oh, he'd missed this so much, the warmth and texture and taste and feeling of Marc in his life; under his tongue, under his hand, the soft voice rumbling through him in pleasure, in happiness, in anger. He'd missed it all and he wanted it all now.

"Fuck, babe. You keep this up and we won't make it to the shower." Marc was gasping, voice husky and hungry.

"We'll eventually get there." Pablo licked his way across to Marc's other nipple, fingers working on the belt at Marc's waist. He could smell Marc, smell sex and desire and need -- he hadn't known he'd forgotten.

Marc's neglected nipple was hard and ready, waiting for his touch. He took it into his mouth, reveling in the way the hard flesh felt beneath his tongue, between his lips. Each time he tugged upon it, he could feel the throb of his own heartbeat in his cock. His hands were trembling as they finally managed to open Marc's trousers, sliding them past the slim hips, pushing Marc's boxers with them. Marc stepped out of the pants, kicking them aside and finally Marc -- his Marc, oh Saints above, his Marc -- was standing before him, nude and trembling and hard.

"God, Caro, you're beautiful." He stepped forward, mouth and hands searching for skin, moving automatically to find the places that used to make Marc squirm.

Marc's hands plucked at his shirt, soft shivers rocketing beneath the soft skin. "Too many clothes."

Mouth leaving Marc's skin for only the time it took him to pull his shirt over his head, Pablo returned quickly to

what he was doing, hands rediscovering favorite places. There was the long plane of Marc's belly, the muscles softly delineated, the sharp hips with their oh-so-soft skin right before Marc's curls began, the ticklish feeling of the bright curls so different from the sensation of the short hair atop Marc's head.

He slid his hands behind Marc, searching out the globes of his lover's ass, testing to see if they fit in his hands the way they once had. Marc pressed back into his touch, gasping against his shoulder. It wasn't like it used to be, not exactly -- they had different fears and different pains and Marc wasn't looking down his back at his ass -- but it was good.

Loathe to completely lose his hold on Marc's buttocks, he tried to wrestle off his pants one-handed, succeeding only in teasing them both as his hand brushed against both Marc's and his own erection.

"Pablo..." Marc nipped his shoulder with a groan. "Please, babe. Lose the pants. Want to feel you."

"I'm trying -- 's been a while since I last did this, k?" With great reluctance he finally let go of Marc's ass and used both hands to undo his pants, pushing them down impatiently and moving closer to Marc as he stepped out of them.

Marc chuckled. "I'll buy that you haven't gotten laid, but I *know* you've undressed yourself a few time in the last thirt... oh, God!" When their skin touched, Marc's eyes popped open, head falling back as he gasped. Whimpering, Pablo rubbed against Marc. It felt so unbelievably good to be making love to this man again. He was trembling, and making small, needy noises, unable to stop. Marc began to kiss his way down Pablo's torso. "Love the way you taste. Those sounds. Want to hear you in my bed."

His hands found Marc's head, stroking along the short hair, missing the longer hair until Marc's mouth found his nipple and then he didn't care about anything except the way Marc's mouth felt on his skin.

Teeth and lips played against his flesh for a too-brief moment, then Marc sank to his knees. "Dreamed of you. Need you. God forgive me, I love you."

"Oh, God, Marc..." His hands cupped the shorn head, his erection bumping against Marc's chin and then his lips.

"Yes, babe. Yes." Then the world went white as Marc's lips pulled him in.

It was good, unbelievably good. It had been so long since he'd fucked anything but his hand and Pablo shook and whimpered and his hands tightened on Marc's head and he started to thrust, unable to stop, hips moving and moving and moving without thought, without meaning. There was nothing but the hot, slick passage that caressed his cock. Heat ghosted over his ass, tickling and teasing, coming to rest on the small of his back.

"Oh, Caro, I'm gonna come, Marc."

Marc hummed, burying his nose in Pablo's curls and swallowing hard, hands clutching and hot.

"Marc!" He called out to his lover as he came, body shaking, cock jerking within the hot tunnel of Marc's mouth.

Held close, Marc's tongue slid over him, cleaning him, tasting him, bringing little shocks of sensation to make him moan and shiver. At last his legs could hold him up no longer and he slid down, lips finding Marc's for a long kiss.

"I love you," he whispered, rubbing idly against Marc's warmth.

"You still taste good." Marc's lips slid over his cheekbone, his temple.

Pablo nuzzled into the touches. "I bet you do, too." He let his hand slide slowly down along Marc's chest.

"Pablo..." Marc hissed, pushing up into Pablo's hand. "Oh, God, please."

Pablo kissed him and then pulled away. "Bed."

Marc's body leaned towards him for a moment, before falling back with a chuckle. "No, Pablo. My name's Marc."

Standing, Pablo giggled as he grabbed at his lover's hand. "Marc. I think I can remember that."

"Oh, good." Marc pulled himself up. "I'd hate for you to call out random household furnishings in the throes of passion."

That made him giggle all the harder and he pulled Marc over to the bed. He'd forgotten this, the way sex could be fun and playful as well as hot and needy.

Marc stumbled along with him, bouncing on the mattress with a happy laugh. "Come here, babe. I'm getting cold."

He climbed up between Marc's legs and let his cheek rub against Marc's erection. "You feel pretty hot to me, Caro."

"Mmm... soft. So soft." Marc stroked his hair.

"Love you, Marc." He nuzzled the warm flesh once more and then began to lick at it like it was an ice-cream cone, savoring it slowly. Marc's hands were soft on his face, moving restlessly as he curled around Pablo, staying in as close contact as possible.

Sliding his hands around to Marc's buttocks, Pablo took the tip of his lover's cock into his mouth and began to suck. The strong flavor of Marc's pre-come filled his mouth and nose and head with Marc and he moaned, sucking eagerly for more. Marc shuddered, sobbing his name, hands trembling against him.

Oh, this felt good and tasted good and sounded good and it was good, and right. He took more of Marc into his mouth, eager to bring Marc pleasure.

"Oh, God." Marc leaned back, spreading his legs with a cry. He pressed up slowly, hips pulsing gently. "So good."

Pablo looked up along the long body, moaning softly at the sight of his lover lost in passion. He opened his mouth wide and relaxed his throat as well as he could remember and used his hands on Marc's buttocks to encourage his lover to pump up into his mouth.

Marc groaned, arching up into Pablo's lips and then sinking back against his hands. As Pablo watched, Marc's fingers slid to pluck his own nipples, pulling and pinching. The air was full of passionate, needy sounds. It made him moan, to watch it, to be a part of it, to have Marc's cock in his mouth and Marc's ass in his hands, to be giving pleasure to the man he loved.

"Pablo, babe... please." Marc twisted, pressing deep, hands reaching down for him. "Love you."

He let Marc's flesh slide from his mouth and slid up along Marc's body, bringing their mouths together. "Do you want to make love to me?" he asked against his lover's lips.

"It's been too long, babe and I don't have anything." Marc reached down, stroking Pablo's shaft gently. "But I'd love to feel you inside me." Marc grinned suddenly, leaning forward for a kiss. "And then tomorrow morning we go buy lube."

He groaned, pushing into Marc's hand. "But we don't have anything for you either..."

Marc's free hand slid down Pablo's arm, drawing one hand up to his lips and sucking in two fingers, wetting them thoroughly. "Sure we do, babe."

Groaning again, Pablo watched Marc suck on his fingers. He was torn between wanting to make love to Marc and wanting Marc to make love to him. Marc suckled and nipped, all the while stroking Pablo's flesh. Finally, he pulled back, fingers leaving his lips with a pop. "Touch me?"

"Yes." His fingers slid between Marc's legs and he whimpered when Marc spread his legs, holding them open for him. Pushing gently against Marc's entrance, his fingers breached the tight ring and slid slowly in.

"Pablo." Marc reached up, hands sliding over his face. "Love you."

"I love you, too, Marc." He watched Marc's face, shuddering at the sensation of Marc's body drawing him in, squeezing around his fingers. So hot, so tight, how could he have forgotten what this felt like?

Marc rode his fingers slowly, body clenching tight, stomach muscles rippling.

"God, you're beautiful. I could watch you do this all night." And he could have. He loved touching Marc, watching Marc, doing both was all that much better.

"Kiss me?" Marc tugged at his shoulder, body curving toward him, muscles clenching as Marc moved.

Groaning, he leaned forward, mouth closing over Marc's. The beard still tickled a little, but it felt good, too, so different from the softness of Marc's lips and tongue and mouth. Marc's body tightened around his fingers as their lips met, their tongues sliding together.

Marc was whimpering for him, hungry, insistent sounds that grew with each hot rocking motion of the slim hips. "Soon? Please, babe? Need you."

Marc was so hot and so tight around his fingers. "You gonna be okay with me not having anything? I don't want to hurt you, Marc."

"Please, Pablo. God, I want you." Marc's lips traveled over his cheek, found his ear. "Don't you want to be inside me? Feel me all around you? Make love to me, babe. Make me yours again."

Oh, God, how was he supposed to resist? How could he possibly be expected to hold back while Marc begged him to do something he wanted so badly to do? He pressed another hard kiss against Marc's lips and let his fingers slide from Marc's body. Moving to kneel between Marc's legs, he took a moment to watch Marc breathe, watch him writhe in need. Marc was waiting to be filled, wanting to be filled. By him.

One hand on Marc's belly, the other guided his own erection to the tight opening.

"Yes. Love me." One of Marc's hands reached down to cover his, fingers sliding over his skin. Then Marc bore down against him with a soft moan. Pablo whimpered and pushed in, sobbing as Marc's body took him in, welcomed him, held him tight.

"Pablo..." Marc panted softly, body clenching and relaxing around his cock, the muscles tightening and fluttering around him maddeningly.

"Yeah, Caro. It's me," he gasped. "Oh, God, it's so good."

He started moving then, long, slow strokes in and out of Marc's body. Marc went still, fingers stuttering over Pablo's hands, lips parted on a low cry. "Oh! Oh, I can feel you -- tell me it's real? Tell me I'm not dreaming?"

"It's real, Marc. I'm no dream." He shuddered as he thrust again. "I've never dreamed anything this good."

Marc's legs lifted, hips tilting and he sank deeper, fascinated by the clutch of Marc's body, the sharp cry of pleasure. He thrust again, searching for more of the sweet sounds that had haunted his dreams. Marc called for him, the cries heavy with bliss and warmth and need and love, echoes of his name in every sound. Pablo kept thrusting; he never wanted this to end.

Marc's hand traveled down, wrapped around his own cock, began to pull in time with Pablo's thrusts, moaning and twisting beneath Pablo's gaze. He'd never seen anything so beautiful and with a final, graceless jerk he came, Marc's name on his lips. His lover -- his lover -- followed close behind, hot seed splashing between them, Pablo's spent cock held tight in Marc's body. He collapsed onto Marc with a sob, hands finding skin and holding on tight.

"Pablo. Love you. God, love you, babe." Marc's hands slid over him, clutching.

Whimpering as his cock slid out of Marc's body, Pablo turned his head and opened his mouth on Marc's skin, licking and tasting lazily. His heart skipped a beat as one long leg curled over the back of his thigh, the move achingly familiar.

A shudder moved through him, and he could feel the tears, heavy and wet, as they gathered in his eyes. "Marc..."

"Right here, babe." Marc grabbed Pablo's hand, brought it to his face. "Right here."

He was half-laughing, half-sobbing and his hand was trembling as it moved over Marc's face, seeing as his lover saw. Sharp nose, lips moving over his palm, eyelashes brushing against his skin -- Marc nuzzled and pressed close.

"Forgive me? Say you'll let me make it up to you, that you'll let me try?"

"Every day for the rest of your life. I promise." Pablo pulled himself up, dragging along Marc's skin and rubbed their noses together and then kissed Marc's mouth. "I love you, Caro. Forever."

"What's next, babe? What do we do next?" Marc's tongue swiped over his lips. "Do we have a torrid three day affair and then run up our phone bills?"

"I don't want to leave you." He laid his head on Marc's shoulder, one hand sliding over the warm skin, tracing the muscles and bone beneath the skin. "I don't want to leave you."

"I know. I don't want to be left." Marc chuckled, the sound almost sad. "This is like a bad romance novel -- you find me, we end up making love and having the best orgasms any two men ever had, and then we live happily ever after. Real life doesn't ever work that way."

"Why not? Who says we can't make it work that way." He giggled. "I hate to be the one to break it to you, Marc, but those romance novels aren't usually about two guys. So we're already breaking the rules, so lets just keep on

breaking them and live happily ever after."

"Not about two guys?" Marc blinked comically. "Damn! Those books on tape salesmen have been lying to me!"

He giggled again, nuzzling into Marc's neck. "God, I love you."

"I love you." A kiss brushed over his temple. "Tomorrow, we'll have laundry done and have a long shower and eat pancakes in bed. Then we'll work out ever after. You can take notes. My handwriting still sucks."

"It's a deal."

He reached over and turned off the light before settling more heavily against Marc's warmth.

Marc shifted slightly, arms and legs finding well-remembered places. "See you in the morning, babe."

Pablo closed his eyes and whispered a silent prayer of thanks. "Yes, Caro. Yes."

His face was sharper than Pablo remembered. His cheeks were angles, his nose, the beard on that chin. He wasn't as thin as he used to be though, tall and thin but no longer desperately skinny.

When Pablo touched Marc, his skin was smooth and soft and warm. That he remembered. He remembered spending hours just touching Marc, fingertips mapping his body by touch. Like Pablo was doing now.

Pablo's fingers had always known Marc's body the way Marc now had to see his.

He still couldn't quite believe it. He'd imagined this so many times, closed his eyes and pretended his cheek rested on warm skin, his fingers tracing the rises and dips of Marc's body, in his mind seeing the paths his fingers were taking. And here he was tonight, eyes open wide really seeing Marc's body take form beneath his touch, real skin under his cheek. He could hear Marc's breath leaving his body, see the matching rise and fall of his chest.

Pablo didn't know what tomorrow was going to bring. He didn't know what was going to happen when his three days were up and he went home. All he knew was Marc.

It was enough.

Marc woke with a start, gasping and shivering his way out of a dream filled with paint that became blood that became water that dripped from his fingers into nothing as the light faded.

Someone was in bed with him.

Marc stilled, hands caught in mid-air, memory sinking through him.

It was Pablo.

His Pablo.

Pablo with the laughing eyes and strong neck and warm, soft skin.

Wasn't it?

What if it wasn't true? What if he'd imagined it, gotten really, really drunk and there was some stranger sleeping beside him. Except he didn't do that, didn't let one-night stands sleep over. He never did that. His eyes were open and straining uselessly, reflexively trying to focus and *look*, prove that the soft breathing was who he wanted it to be and not a stranger or an axe murderer or a figment of his imagination.

Biting his lip hard, he reached out, hands connecting with a warm shoulder. His fingers wandered up.

Strong chin. Full lips. Tiny bump on the top of the nose. Scar on the forehead. Widow's peak.

Pablo.

His Pablo.

Warm fingers grabbed his hands, brought them down for a soft kiss. "It's still me, Caro. I'm here. It's early. Sleep."

"Oh." He almost cried when Pablo pulled him close, settled him against the soft shoulder, almost because it would be a shame to cry now, when things were right. "Night, babe. I... I love you."

"I know. I love you, too. Sleep."

So he did.

Chapter Eleven

"Oh, man, Piet. I'm tired." Marc slumped in his favorite chair, soft and stuffed and comfortable, the remote for the stereo and the phone within arm's reach. He heard Piet's snuffle, the thump of the heavy tail on the ground.

"Marc? Son? I'm about to go for the day. There's sandwiches and coleslaw in the fridge." Marge sounded worried, tense. "Bev said... Bev said you had company at the show."

He nodded, grinned. Yeah. Yeah, he had company. He had Pablo. Over and over. His cock was probably raw.

"Are you going to be okay?" She was closer now, he could smell her perfume -- vanilla and roses.

"I'm good, Marge. Better than good. I... He's it, you know? The one."

"The one? Oh. Oh, Marc, be careful, son, okay? Y'all were babies back then."

"I know. I know. Just..." He took a breath, sighed. "Let me have my fantasy right now. The reality will come soon enough."

The phone rang and he heard Marge move, answer it. "Mr. MacAllen's residence."

"May I tell him who's calling? Oh, I see. Just a moment." The phone was pressed into his hand. "It's him."

"Pablo?" He grinned, almost bouncing. "See you tomorrow, Marge. Have a great night!" He brought the phone to his ear, "Babe?"

"Caro." Pablo's voice was warm and happy. "Was that... Marge? right? The housekeeper?"

"Yeah. My own personal guardian angel. She runs my life." He settled, slumping and shifting as the door closed. "How was your drive home?"

"Really long and really short at the same time, you know? All I could think about was you."

"Yeah." The kiss goodbye this morning was the hardest thing he'd done in years. "Two nights wasn't enough time to catch up."

Pablo sighed softly. "No. I don't think two years would be." Then there was a giggle, a little forced but there. "I promised myself I wasn't going to be sad when I called you."

"Oh, don't be sad, babe. I mean, four days ago? I couldn't do this. Couldn't sit in my house and talk to you." He grinned, pushing his glasses up. "I have a house now, you know? All mine. Paid for and everything. It has heat and plumbing."

"Oh, Marc. That's great! I used to think about you a lot, imagine what had happened to you. Is the house near trees? I always pictured you near trees. Because of the green."

"I live on a lake. If you walk out the kitchen door, there's a deck and then the water. Piet and I swim all the time." He chuckled as Piet nuzzled him, hearing his name.

"You swim? Is there a lifeguard? You shouldn't swim alone you know."

"I swim every day it's above freezing. Piet is my lifeguard, he always comes in with me." He and Piet had learned to work together there, both learning to trust each other in the water. "You'll have to come and see."

"I'd like that," Pablo said quietly, wistfully. "Oh, Marc, I miss you. You looked so good."

"Me? I'm just old and tall." Marc rubbed his hand down along his belly. "Not so skinny though, yeah?"

"No, you looked good. Really, really good." A little breathless quality had entered Pablo's voice.

He chuckled. "Really, really? Are you being wicked, Mr. Cervantes?"

He spread his legs a little, settling.

"It's just the truth, Marc. Caro. God, I can't believe you're sexier now than when we were kids." Pablo swallowed. "I want you so bad. I want to be there touching you."

"I'll unlock the door. There's sandwich stuff in the fridge." He didn't want to sound so fucking needy, but he was.

"I've got a couple of reviews to do. It'll really screw me up if I don't go to them. But I could come visit after. Ten days." He couldn't be sure but it sounded like Pablo was maybe crying. "That's not so long, right? Not compared to thirteen years."

"Oh. Oh, babe." He was stroking the phone, humming low, rocking on his chair. "It's no time at all. Promise."

"Can I call you every night?" Pablo asked.

"Only if I can call you in the morning and there are periodic emails." Marc was itching to get to the studio, suddenly, to recreate what his fingers remembered before they forgot.

"You do email? Does your housekeeper lady read them, or does your computer talk to you? I mean," Pablo giggled a little breathlessly. "Can I write naughty stuff?"

"I have a voice program. I call him Mike. He reads me online porn." Marc cleared his throat. "'Fuck me harder', the strong blond said. 'My hole aches for it.'"

Pablo's giggles filled the airways between them. "Oh, God, that's bad."

"Now, now. Don't bad-mouth Mike. Besides a periodic visit from a friend, he's been my most constant lover." He grinned, chuckled. "Well, up 'til now."

"Oh." There was a silence for a moment and then Pablo spoke again, voice warm and so full of need. "God, I want you."

"Yeah? I can't get you out of my mind. I want to touch you."

Pablo took a deep, shaky breath. "Yeah. Yeah."

"Tell me what you're doing?"

"Oh." Pablo giggled, the sound a little nervous. "A... adjusting myself. My pants are too tight."

"Tight?" He licked his lips. "If I was there, I'd adjust you."

"Oh. Oh, Marc. That would be..." Pablo's breath hitched. "I undid them."

"Oh, babe. I want you. Want to taste you." He shifted, hand dropping to his pants, rubbing.

"Yes. Yes. Tell me what you're doing. Your voice went all funny."

"Feeling myself, wishing it was you, touching me." He shivered, unzipped.

"Oh... I wish it was, too." Pablo gasped softly. "Is it okay if I pretend it's your hand instead of mine?"

"Fuck, babe. My hand, my ass, my mouth..." His voice sounded raw, rough.

"Marc... Oh, Caro." Pablo made one of those sweet, whimpering sounds he loved. "God, I want you. Want to do that, to feel your hand on me. And your mouth and your ass."

"I want you in my bed. I want to smell you on my sheets, babe." He was breathing hard, panting.

"Oh God, you sound like you're close. Like if I were there and I touched your slit with my tongue you'd come all over me." Pablo was breathless, too, voice thready.

"Shit." Oh. Oh, fuck. He had a new kink. "Yes. Pablo. Love. Please."

"Oh, God, I'm going to come, Marc. All over you. All over you." The last words were whispered and then Pablo cried out.

"Fuck. Fuck, yes." He gasped, arching, come pouring over his hand, his belly.

Pablo moaned sweetly in his ear. "Oh, Caro. God. I want to taste that. Taste you. God. This is going to be the longest ten days ever."

"Yeah. Yeah." He whimpered, fingers stroking the phone.

"I love you," whispered Pablo.

"Love you, babe. Promise me..." He swallowed hard. "This is real, right? Because I need it to be."

"Oh God, Marc, I've been looking for you for thirteen years. Now that I've found you again? I'm not letting you go. I'm not."

"Thank you." He whispered the words. "I love you."

"I love you, too, Marc." Pablo sniffed. "I miss you."

"Yeah. I mean, before it was this dull, old thing, sort of distant. Now? Ow." He grinned. "Still, we can talk and you'll be here... next Wednesday?"

"Yeah. I'll check the flights out tomorrow and let you know when I've booked something, k?" He could hear pages turning. "I'll have almost a week after that before I have to be back in New York."

"Yeah? I'll clear my schedule then." Whatever Bev had set up could wait.

"Oh, cool. Then it's a date. And I'll call. A lot." Pablo giggled. "We could start our own 1-900 number."

Marc laughed, loving that sound more than ever. "I'm going to the studio now, babe. I need to get you in clay before my fingers forget."

"Oh. Okay. I love you, Marc. I'll talk to you tomorrow night."

"I'll call you in the morning, babe." He grinned, stretched. "I love you."

"Oh, right." Pablo giggled. "Love you."

There was a short pause and then Pablo whispered the words again, "love you," and the connection clicked closed.

He sighed and hung up the phone, listening to the waves, the wind for a few minutes before heading to the studio to work. Ten days.

He could do that.

The taxi turned off the main road onto a smaller one lined with trees and dotted with houses. It was a pretty area, the houses quite far apart, but not so much that you couldn't walk to your neighbors. Now and then between the trees Pablo could see the lake Marc had spoken of. He tried to get a better look, but then they were pulling up in front of a single story bungalow and he was there.

All thoughts fled from his mind except that he was here. At Marc's place. After ten of the longest days of his life. It should have been easy after thirteen years of waiting, of searching, but having touched Marc again, his fingers relearning the shape of his lover, his body relearning pleasure... it had been hard to be apart.

He paid the driver, grabbed his bag and went up the stairs, knocking on the door.

He heard a bright bark, then an older woman in jeans and a sweater answered the door, short gray hair tousled and wind-blown. "Oh. I would know you anywhere. I've seen your face a thousand times. I'm Marge. Come on in."

He tried hard not to blush, thinking his face wasn't all that Marge had seen. He followed her in, looking for Marc, butterflies starting to dance in his stomach, anticipation trying to cover up a deep fear that Marc wouldn't be here. It was stupid, but he couldn't quite quell that voice.

The house opened into a front room -- open and sparse and for a moment he couldn't figure out why it looked strange, then it hit him. There were no pictures, no posters, no decorations on the walls at all. Instead the curtains, the furniture were all textured and there were shelves of CDs, of DVDs.

"He's having his swim. It's too cold already, but he'll keep it up until mid-October. Stubborn boy." Marge gave him a smile. "Would you like a drink, a tour, or would you like to see the lake first?"

"I'd like to see Marc first." He did blush then. "I mean, the lake, please."

"Okay, it's this way." She led him through a huge, bright kitchen, the clock on the wall announcing that it was 2 pm in a deep baritone voice. There were French doors leading out onto a huge patio and a fabulous view of the lake. "Marc? Lovely? Your company's here."

Marc's shorn head appeared about twenty feet out, Piet beside him. "Thanks, Marge. Pablo? That you? What do you think?"

He swallowed his apprehension at seeing Marc in the middle of all that water all by himself except for the dog. God, if anything happened to Marc, it would be too late by the time Piet had alerted Marge and...

"I think ten days is too long to go in between seeing you."

Marc laughed and nodded, swimming towards the deck, Piet pressing against his side as he drifted. "I meant the house, babe."

"Oh! Well what I saw of it looks great. I like that it's out of the city a little. I like all the trees." He walked out to the deck but stayed on shore, waiting eagerly for Marc to be out of the water and in his arms.

The beard was still a surprise.

Marc swam up to the ladder, helped Piet up, then climbed up himself, taking a towel from the edge of the deck to dry off, shivering a little. "Thanks. The short bus picks me up and takes me into town and I've got the studio and the lake."

"Are you cold? Come here and I'll warm you up and then you can show me the place properly." Marc nearly naked and so close was almost enough to entice him out onto the deck, but he really didn't want to be out over the water. That deck didn't look all that steady.

Marc nodded, smile going ear-to-ear. "It's almost too cold to be out there and..."

Marc stepped forward, grinning as Marge's voice sounded from in the house. "Piet! No! You're wet! Marc! You are supposed to dry him off first!"

"New doggie door," murmured Marc.

He giggled and wrapped his arms around Marc. "Oh. Oh, you *are* real."

Marc was clammy and wet and oh, god, it felt so good with those long arms wrapped around him. "Yeah, babe. And you're here. Oh, I've been wanting this."

"Yeah." He reached up and tugged on Marc's neck, head turned up for a kiss. He moaned softly as their lips came together, pressing close and not caring if Marc's shorts were soaking the front of his pants. Marc's tongue pushed right into his lips, hand cupping the back of his head. Oh God, it was so good. Like magic and every wonderful thing he could think of all wrapped up into one.

The kiss went on and on until the back door opened, Marge clearing her throat. "You're the only blind person around here Marc MacAllen. Don't be indecent."

Marc snorted, forehead resting against his. "Yes, mother."

He giggled, hands sliding on Marc's back. God, it felt amazing to be able to touch. "You've got a bedroom, right? I bet it's on the five cent tour."

"Yep. It's got a bed and everything. Come in, let me show you around." They went in, Marc grabbing a bottle of water and a Dr. Pepper from the fridge. "This is the kitchen. Almost everything talks, don't let it wig you out."

"Yeah, I heard the clock earlier. I thought all that talking stuff was usually a female voice?" He held onto Marc's hand, amazed by how easily Marc moved through the house. Like he could really see.

"The microwave's a girl, the remotes sound like guys, though." Marc pointed to the dishwasher. "The sign in front says clean and dirty. Marge is good about checking it."

Marge chuckled. "After the last time you got a dirty glass and screamed, yeah."

Marc stuck his tongue out at her.

Pablo giggled and tried not to feel jealous. The inside jokes and easiness between them hurt -- that should be his. Would have been if he'd been given the chance. He squeezed Marc's hand, pushing away those feelings. He had his chance now and he wasn't going to fritter it away with should have beens.

There was a large calendar on the wall, in Braille and print, along with a dangling recorder on a string. "Pablo's coming" was printed on there in Marc's scrawl. Pablo grinned and tugged on Marc's hand. "You were going to show me the whole place?"

Marc nodded, taking him through the front door and down a long hall, opening the door to a sparse room with a desk and a computer. "This is the office, but I'm never really in there and this next room used to be Marge's, but she bought her own house and now it's a guestroom."

That room was bright yellow and done in daisies and roses.

Pablo giggled. "I think I would have guessed that. It's very yellow and flowery."

"Yeah? I never go in there. I keep saying one day someone will come along and want to redecorate it." Marc pinked, pushed the dark glasses up. "Here's the second bath and this is the studio."

The door was pushed open, a huge studio with floor to ceiling windows looked like you could just step out into the lake. There was an old couch, some chairs, sinks, stacks of clay wrapped in plastic. There was a bust of him -- him now -- sitting on the table in the center of the room.

He blushed and squeezed Marc's hand again, still a little shy about his likeness being reproduced for everyone to see and amazed at how much like him it looked. Marc couldn't see and yet... "You're really good, Marc."

"Yeah? Thanks. It took a long time before it was as good as painting." Marc moved toward the table, fingers sliding over the bust. "Now it's better."

He moved to stand beside Marc. "You could do that to the real thing."

He'd been patient. Really patient and he just wanted to make love to Marc and then hold him.

"Oh." Marc grinned wide, nodded. "Bedroom first, yeah? So we don't have to go anywhere else after for a while."

He nodded, realizing Marc couldn't see him doing that. "Yeah, that sounds good." He was pretty excited. Horny. He giggled. "I want you."

"Yeah." Marc led him to one more door, the room warm and lived-in, the king-sized bed still holding the jeans and sweater Marc wore earlier in the day. "There's a full bath through here and..."

His eyes landed on the sculpture before the window and Marc's words faded out. Him. It was him leaning, holding out one hand as if to hold someone, draw them near. He went over to it, hand automatically going to the hand that was worn smooth and shiny, as were the lips, one cheek and the hair on top of the statue's head, as if worked through the ages by a hand.

"It's me," he said softly.

Marc stopped, turned a deep, dark red. "Yeah. I... Yeah, it is."

"It looks... well loved." He blinked back tears. It should have been him, not a statue of him getting the touches from those long fingers.

"It helped on some really dark nights." Marc pushed his dark glasses up again, pushing the wet swim trunks off and wrapping the towel around his waist.

Turning, he pushed into Marc's arms. He knew all about dark nights, missing the other half of his soul, of his heart and life. Corny as it sounded. He looked up, the beard and glasses disconcerting, but it was Marc nonetheless, he could see that, could feel it in the way their bodies fit together.

Marc sobbed, head dipping to brush their lips together. "You're here."

"I'm here, Marc." He reached up and touched Marc's glasses. "Can I take these off?"

"You won't forget I'm blind, right?" Marc gave him a half-grin, nodded.

"We'll pull the blinds and not turn on the lights and then it won't matter." He took Marc's glasses off and made a soft noise. There were the blue eyes he loved so much.

"Are they ugly?" Marc's fingers started working his shirt open.

"Are what ugly?" he asked, looking around to see what Marc could be talking about.

"My eyes." His shirt was opened, pushed off his shoulders.

"Oh! No, they aren't ugly at all. They're beautiful. So blue. Just like I remembered." He stroked Marc's cheeks above the beard, shivering as Marc's hands touched him.

"Oh. Oh, good." Marc's voice was distracted, lips sliding along his wrist, fingers at his waistband.

He whimpered, pushing against Marc, free hand sliding the towel away from Marc's hips. "Marc... Oh, Caro."

"Yeah." Marc got his jeans open, hands pushing in to cup his ass. "We have a week, right? Days and days to do this?"

He nodded, breathing the word "yes" into Marc's mouth, pushing back into Marc's hands.

"Good." Marc walked them back toward the big bed, tongue slipping into his mouth. He moaned, fingers sliding down to find Marc's nipples. He loved that groan, that needy, surprised, hungry sound. Marc's skin was cool from swimming, but it was warming up fast beneath his fingertips. Breaking the kiss, he wrapped his lips around one of Marc's nipples.

"Oh. Oh, babe..." Marc's fingers pushed through his hair, lean body arching.

He wrapped his arms around Marc's body, fingers sliding along the knobby spine.

"Need you so bad." Marc's cry was deep, body moving, uninhibited.

"Yeah. Want you. Please." He pushed Marc onto the bed and his pants down, climbing up and rubbing against Marc as he brought their mouths back together again. God, this was so good, to be able to touch Marc, to kiss him and make love to him...

Marc's hands were exploring, the look in the blank eyes focused, intent, Marc looking at him. He shuddered and rubbed harder, their cocks sliding together, making their bellies wet as they leaked. Marc's hands wrapped around his hips, drew him up along the thin body until his cock was pressing into Marc's lips.

"Oh, God!" With a whimper, he pushed in, watching the bliss on Marc's face. Marc sucked and pulled, hands on his hips, eyes closed, happy moans vibrating his cock. Pablo wrapped his hands around the headboard and held on with all his might, shivers running up and down along his spine. His hips jerked, but he reigned them in, kept from sinking into Marc's mouth like he wanted to. He didn't want to hurt his lover.

"All of you, babe. Waited for thirteen years." Marc licked the tip of his cock, teasing him, testing him.

He shuddered. "Marc. Caro..." With a sob, he pushed into Marc's mouth, hips setting up a rhythm, sliding his prick in and out as he fucked Marc's face. Marc's hands encouraged him, mouth pulling hard, cries surrounding his prick.

"Oh, God, Marc. Soon. Oh!" He cried out, pushing in deep as he came, body just shaking.

Marc swallowed him down, breathing hard, sucking hard. He shook through aftershocks, Marc making it last so long. Marc stroked his spine, his hips, his belly. Taking a shaky breath, he pulled out and slowly moved back down Marc's body.

"I love you, Caro," he murmured against Marc's lips, hand moving down to wrap around Marc's cock.

"Love..." Marc arched, bowing into his touch. "Oh..."

"Do you want to fuck me?" he asked, hand sliding. God, Marc was hot.

"Oh..." Marc jerked, tongue pushing into his lips, flavored with him. That cock pushed into his hand, hips jerking wildly. He whimpered, squeezing Marc's prick, opening his mouth wide. Marc was crying out, cock hot as a brand in his hand, kiss wild. He didn't think Marc was gonna last long enough to fuck him, but that was okay, because they had almost a week. He slid his free hand across Marc's chest, finding those sweet little nipples and pinching.

Marc came with a loud cry, jerking against him, body convulsing. He moaned, nuzzled and cuddling against Marc. "Sorry. Sorry, I couldn't wait. I needed..."

"S'okay, Caro. We've got lots of time, right?"

"Yeah." Marc pressed against him, licking his skin.

"I love you, Marc."

"Mmm... You're here. Real. In my bed. I can taste you, smell you..."

"Touch me. Hear me." He giggled.

Marc nipped his shoulder. "Now if I could only go five for five? I'd be set."

He yelped softly and ran his hand over Marc's hair, missing the curls. "I'd give you my eyes if I could."

"I'd give the rest of my life for a day. Just a day to see you again."

"Oh, no, Marc!" He shook his head. "I just found you again, I'm not giving you up, not for anything. I'm sorry." He buried his face in Marc's neck. "That makes me pretty selfish. I'm sorry."

"I..." Marc swallowed, hand petting his head. "Makes you sound like a man in love."

"Yeah? That's okay then. Because I am." He pushed himself up and looked at Marc. Looked at the trim beard and the short hair, the sightless blue eyes with wrinkles around them. The same, but different. "I do love you, Marc."

Long hands reached up for him, looking at him. Seeing him. "I love you."

He smiled and kissed Marc's fingertips. "Cool."

"It's going to get harder and harder, letting you go."

Pain bloomed in his belly, bringing him down. "I know. Do we have to talk about it now? We've got it almost a whole week, do we have to talk about me leaving for New York again now?"

"No. I'm sorry." Marc blushed dark, eyes closing, fingers petting him.

"I just... I just want to enjoy being here. With you." He let his own eyes close, hands wandering over Marc's skin. "I don't care about anything else. I just want to be with you. It's all I ever wanted."

Marc nodded. "Then we'll have to find a way to make that happen."

"Yeah? Really?" Oh, that would be. So cool.

"Yeah. Really." Marc settled in, stroking his belly. "We just need to work the logistics, like which side of the bed is yours."

"That's easy." Giggling, he shifted until he was lying on top of Marc. "This side."

"Oh, that works." Marc stretched, shifting beneath him. "Perfect, even."

He nodded, rubbing his cheek against Marc's chest. "Yeah, perfect."

Marc wandered through the bedroom, listening to Pablo snore. Piet was whining by the door, either wanting in or for him to go out.

"Shh... He's sleeping. You want out?" Piet licked his palm, toenails clicking on the floor, heading for the kitchen.

He checked his watch as he scooped Piet some food. "Eleven eighteen pm." Wow they'd napped hard.

He checked Marge's messages -- stroganoff and lasagnas in the fridge, she was taking a few days off, don't neck on the patio, the neighbors would complain.

He chuckled, grabbed the phone and pressed the number for the pizza joint open 'til midnight. "Marty? Hey! It's Mac. I need a large with everything, some breadsticks, and a 2-Liter of Dr. Pepper. Oh, do you have cheesecake?"

He loved cappuccino cheesecake.

Marty chuckled. "Cheesecake? You been working 72 hours straight again? I've got cheesecake. I can fix you up with cherry, blueberry or cappuccino."

"Ooh... one cherry and one cappuccino." He grinned, leaning against the wall. "No, man, not working. My lover's in town and I'm working all my calories off."

"Oh, you dog." More chuckles came down the line and Marty yelled at the guys in the back. "Okay, you're looking at almost an hour -- Joe'll deliver it on his way home and I'll throw in the cheesecakes for free for making you wait."

"Thanks, man. Just put it on my card, yeah? Oh, I don't suppose Lucia has any cinnamon rolls left over that we could have for breakfast?"

"Mac, you're going to ruin what's left of your reputation. And Lucia finds out she's going to insist on meeting this lover of yours who warrants not only cheesecake but her cinnamon rolls."

"I have a reputation?" He chuckled, nodded. "Tell Lucia I'm done with the bust of little Erica."

"Ah, Mac, she'll be over the moon. Ten to one she bakes you and that lover of yours something special. Aye, I gotta go, the movie's just let out. Large with everything. I'll put it on last so it's still hot when it gets there. Don't be a stranger, Mac, we'll serve you in house."

"Thanks, man." He hung up, grinning. He loved it here, loved the people, loved the lake. He didn't know what he'd do if Pablo asked him to move to the city.

He made his way to the back door, twelve steps to his deck. Eighteen to the lake.

"Marc?" By the sound of it, Pablo was by the back door. "Marc?"

"Out here." He turned and grinned. "Piet woke me."

"Is there a light?" He could hear Pablo fumbling for a minute. "Oh there! That's better." Pablo's bare feet slapped on the wood toward him.

He headed toward the sound, arms open. "I ordered some food. Are you hungry?"

"Yeah. I could eat." Pablo giggled, his lover's warmth pressing against him. "In case you didn't notice, I like my food."

"I ordered pizza and breadsticks and cheesecake." He snuggled close, hands mapping Pablo's skin. "God, this is heaven."

"Yeah. It is." Pablo's hands slid down to grab his ass. "How long do they take to deliver out here?"

"Normally fifteen minutes, but Marty's sending Joe at closing, so it'll be an hour." He wiggled, rubbing against those hands.

"Oh. We could kill an hour."

"You think?" He grinned, leaning down to nuzzle Pablo's lips. "Scrabble?"

Pablo giggled. "I was thinking making love again."

"Hungry lover." He walked them into the kitchen. "Marge fusses when I wander naked outside."

Pablo giggled harder. "Do you do it a lot?"

"Yeah. Lots. I like swimming at night."

More giggles filled the air. "I suppose she'd fuss if we did it on the kitchen table."

"Fuck, yes, but I paid for the sofa..." He winked, laughed.

"Oh, we should try it out then. Make sure you got your money's worth."

"Lead the way, babe." He cupped Pablo's cock, squeezed. "I'm all yours."

Pablo gasped softly. "Oh, I like the sound of that."

"Which part? The I'm yours part?" He stroked Pablo's cock nice and easy, humming low.

"Uh-huh." Pablo moved into his touch, sounding breathless and needy.

"Mmm... I got to order pizza and tell them it was for me and my lover." Marc kept touching, breathing Pablo in deep.

"Oh, God, I like the sound of that, too." Pablo whimpered and pushed closer. "We're never going to get to the couch if you keep saying stuff like that, touching me."

"The couch will still be there." He leaned in, nuzzling Pablo's neck. "My lover..."

Pablo's head dropped back, neck stretching beneath his lips, the warm throat vibrating with Pablo's moan. One of Pablo's legs wrapped around his thighs, Pablo's hands clinging to his shoulders.

"Babe..." He licked, lips fastened over Pablo's skin, sucking up a mark, tongue sliding over the soft flesh.

"Oh God! Marc..." Soft, needy noises sounded, Pablo sawing against him.

He moaned, sucking harder, hand working hard. His. His lover. His Pablo.

"Oh. Close." Pablo shuddered, hands tightening, sweet noises pouring from him.

His teeth scraped Pablo's skin, thumb rubbing the ridge of that sweet prick.

"Marc!" Pablo shouted out his name, bucking hard and coming over his hand.

Marc groaned, eyes rolling, moaning low. Yes. Yes. God.

Pablo's leg slid away, his lover pressing closer and finding his mouth, kissing him hard. Of all the things he'd missed, the kisses were in the top two.

Pablo's hands framed his face, stroked over his head, the square fingers sliding through his beard. "Oh, Marc, I love you."

"Love you, babe." He couldn't stop grinning, so happy.

"God, I've dreamed of this. Of that smile." Pablo rubbed against him and giggled. "Come on. We'd better hit that sofa and take care of this growth."

"Growth? I have a growth?" He rubbed, chuckling low.

"Uh-huh." Pablo's hand wrapped around his prick, tugging gently, sort of leading him to the sofa by it, Pablo's giggles increasing.

They landed on the sofa, pushing into each other's arms. Pablo kissed him like it was the last time, all eager heat and tongue, lips sliding on his own. He groaned, hips rocking, wishing like fuck he had some lube in here because he was wanting to accept the offer Pablo'd made earlier.

"Oh, God, Marc I want to feel you inside me. I've been dreaming of it."

"Yeah. Fuck. We need stuff..." He was aching for it, deep and hard and hot, feeling them fly.

"I brought some in my bag. Is there any closer?" Pablo asked.

"In the bedroom." He groaned, pushing himself down and spreading Pablo wide, tongue sliding along the hot cleft.

"Oh God! Oh! Marc!" Pablo's hands slid over his head, sweet, almost pained whimpers coming from his lover. He nodded, tongue finding that sweet tight hole and pushing in, too needy to play, to tease. Pablo gasped and moaned, whimpering sounds raining down on him. Pablo tasted rich and dark, the scents of musk and need filling him, overwhelming and intense. "Oh God, Marc. You make me so hard."

He pushed in once more, then sat up, panting hard, balls aching. "I need. I can't wait anymore. Please, babe."

Pablo's hand wrapped around his prick, pulling him until the tip hit that sweet hole. "Please."

"Yes..." He pushed in, hips rocking, his head thrown back at the heat, the pressure.

"Oh God!" Pablo was so tight around him. His lover's hands came up and held his arms, fingers digging in.

"You're okay? It's good?" Please, God. Fucking say it was good. He needed this.

"Yeah. Yeah. Oh, God, Marc. It's good." Pablo's hands slid up over his shoulders and then down his chest, fingers sliding across his nipples.

"Yeah. Gotta move, babe." He groaned as he spoke, hips moving hard and fast, joining them again and again. Pablo cried out and then started to meet his thrusts. He just kept moving, kept fucking, kept pushing deep, loving Pablo with all he was. Pablo's sweet cries spurred him on, begging him to keep going, don't stop. He would have pumped Pablo's cock, but his hands were gripping the couch arm, keeping him steady. It wasn't long before he could hear the sound of Pablo's hand working his own flesh, Pablo's body squeezing him tight.

"Yes. Fuck. Babe. Good. Yes." He threw his head back, lost in the sensations.

"Oh, God, Marc. Caro. So good." Pablo was moving frantically, hand going faster on his cock, hips meeting his thrusts with harder and harder shoves. He nodded, words lost to passion, so close.

Pablo made a noise that was close to a scream and almost his name and the scent of Pablo's seed filled the air as Pablo's ass milked his cock hard. He grunted, shot, muscles tensing as everything stilled.

Pablo sighed softly, hands tugging at him, pulling him down onto his lover's warm body. His hands pushed up, searching Pablo's face, looking. Pablo nuzzled into his hands, kissing his palm whenever it came close. Oh. Oh, Pablo looked happy. Cool. Good.

"Missed that. Missed this. The time after? Touching, holding. Not on a bed." Pablo giggled. "We're even having pizza."

"Yeah, except this time it's not burned and it's the best in New England." And they were warm and safe and whole and grown and out and he was blind. Pablo giggled, the sound happy and soft. He took a deep breath, settled, basking. Yeah, he'd take it.

It was his last day.

Pablo had to be up early tomorrow to get his flight back to New York for a gallery opening and then he had another one a few days later, so it was going to be close to a week before he could even contemplate coming back. He'd pushed the discussion of what he and Marc were going to do about this long distance thing off when Marc had brought it up his first day and he'd been loathe to bring it up again, wanting to just enjoy their time together, to pretend it wasn't going to come to an end.

They were sitting on the deck, enjoying the sun, deck chairs pulled close together. "Marc?" he said softly, not wanting to wake his lover if Marc was asleep.

"Yeah, babe?" Marc's head turned toward him, eyes wide and unflinching from the sun.

He sighed and reached out to stroke Marc's cheek. "God, I love you, Caro."

Marc nuzzled into the touch, humming softly. "What's wrong, Pablo?"

"My flight out's tomorrow morning. And I don't know when I'm going to be back. I don't even know if you want me to come back. I mean regularly. This just sucks."

"Oh." Marc's eyes closed, cheeks flushing a little. "I must be doing something wrong, then, if you don't know how much I want you here. Regularly. Permanently."

"You want me here permanently?" Pablo took a deep breath and added quickly. "It isn't that I didn't think you did, it's just what I want it so badly and I didn't want to presume and maybe I was putting my own feelings on you. I mean you've got this great life now and you're rich and you've got Marge to take care of you and I'm barely going to be able to contribute after flying off to New York and LA and other places on a regular basis to do reviews, you know? I'm still in that dues paying place. But I want to be with you here so badly, I'd give it all up to be with you, Marc."

"Why would I ask you to give up your career, babe?" Marc looked confused, eyebrows frowning. "The bed's big enough for two. You can have the office for when you're home. I already pay the bills."

He was kind of trembling. He wanted this so badly. "You don't mind me mooching off you?" It was, after all, kind of why Marc had left, to not be a burden on him.

"You can pay some of the utilities. Be around sometimes to schlep me places." Marc reached one hand out. "Just be here with me and don't go back to a little apartment where you're alone."

He grabbed onto Marc's hand, holding on tight. "I can do that. I want to do that more than anything." He giggled softly. "I'm moving in."

"Well, if Piet approves, of course..." Marc squeezed his fingers, grinning ear-to-ear.

"Oh good -- I think he likes me." He leaned in and whispered, trying to make it a bit joke-y. "I was worried you were going to say Marge had to approve."

"No. She's going to go all mother-hen and weird and flutter and we'll have to let her know I'm not replacing her." Marc leaned back in his chair. "She saved me, babe, she and Bev, and I owe them more than I can explain."

He bit back his hurt at that. *He* would have been there for Marc. He'd wanted to have been, only that had been taken from him. "I'll try not to get in her way, Caro. I just want to be with you, you know?"

"We'll figure it out, babe. That's the easy part. The tough part is, are you sure you want to live with a blind man?"

He snorted. "You mean the one I've been looking for for thirteen years? The one it hurts to be away from? The one I love with all my heart? Oh yeah, I want to live with him."

"Well, then, give your thirty day notice. You can be here full-time mid-November and we can have the winter together."

"Oh, God. I can't believe this is really happening." He giggled and leaned over to kiss Marc. Marc's lips opened,

hand curling around the back of his neck. His chair went crashing as he leaned too far, and he landed on his ass, giggling madly.

"Shit! Babe? You okay?" Marc sat up, hands reaching for him, Piet barking.

He stood up, rubbing his butt. "Yeah. I think I hurt my dignity more than anything. These deck chairs? Not good for making out." He reached for Marc's hand guiding it to his ass.

Marc squeezed and pet, stroking his butt. "I'll have to order more."

"Of my butts? You can do that?" That didn't quite sound right, but he was distracted by Marc's hand.

"Chairs." Marc didn't sound exactly focused.

He frowned, hands going to stroke over Marc's head, fingers sliding along the MacAllen ski slope nose. "What about them?"

"Huh?" Marc's lips nibbled his fingertips, tongue sliding against them.

"I love you," he murmured, leaning down to kiss Marc. He started to lean into Marc when the chair Marc was sitting in creaked and he backed off. "Oh yeah. Deck chairs. Making love. Not together."

"Oh, right." Marc followed him up, hands reaching for him.

He giggled. "Besides, we don't want to freak your neighbors before I've even moved in."

"Our neighbors."

"Oh. Oh, yeah." He grinned and bounced a little grabbing Marc's hand and tugging him into the house. "*Our* neighbors."

Marc laughed, hand reaching up to push up glasses that were still in the bedroom.

"Hi Marge," he said softly as they passed her in the hall, but he didn't stop, just kept going toward Marc's... their bedroom.

"He's coming to stay, Margery! He's moving in. I'll have my muse." Marc's voice was overjoyed, triumphant.

He blushed, heart full, really happy that Marc was as thrilled about this as he was. He gave Marge a shy smile.

To his surprise, Marge gave him a grin. "Honestly? You're going to be a couple-couple?"

Marc nodded. "Yeah."

He nodded, before beaming up at Marc. "He asked me to move in. There's nowhere I'd rather be."

"Congratulations, boys. It's about time he found his partner."

"Thanks, Marge." He squeezed Marc's hand, feeling shy about just taking off from talking with her to go fuck. Marc though? Hustled them down the hall with a happy laugh, fingers pinching his ass. It made him squeak and giggle and he closed the door when they got to the bedroom, not wanting to worry about Marge overhearing them.

Marc dropped to his knees, fingers working his jeans open. Oh. Oh, God, he loved it when Marc did that, just stripped him naked and sucked him in. He whimpered softly, hand stroking over Marc's head. "Love you, Caro."

"Yeah..." Marc freed his cock, lips open and hungry for him.

"Oh God." He shivered, legs spreading a little so he didn't topple over.

"No, babe. Marc. Fuck, you taste good."

He half giggled, half moaned. "I know who you are," he whispered, hand sliding over Marc's short hair.

"Oh, good." Marc's mouth dropped over him, suction hard and immediate. He gasped, hands dropping to Marc's shoulders, holding on tight. Marc sucked and hummed, head bobbing, so uninhibited, so hungry. With a whimper he started moving his hips, pushing into Marc's mouth as pleasure shot along his spine, gathered in his belly and his balls. Marc took him in deep, licking and lapping, tongue wrapping around the tip.

"Marc!" He cried out, hips starting to snap.

Marc backed off, fingers wrapped around the base of his cock. "Uh-uh. Going to fuck me, babe."

"Oh..." He whimpered, cock throbbing. "Oh, please. Soon."

"Yeah." Marc stood, stumbling towards the bed, disoriented.

He grabbed Marc's hand, leading his lover to the big bed. "Where's the lube," he asked.

"Bedside table. Hurry." Marc was stripping, long lean body bared for him.

"God, you're beautiful. I'd forgotten how good you look." As if it hadn't just been a few hours ago.

"Just yours. Babe. Touch me."

"Yeah. Yeah." He pulled off his clothes and went to the bedside table. He fumbled through the drawer, finding the lube and climbing onto bed.

Marc moved toward him, moaning low. He slid his hands along Marc's legs, spreading them, settling between them. Marc spread for him, thighs trembling, cock hard and wet-tipped. He slid his hands along those pale inner thighs, stroking. "Yours. Babe, I need more."

"I'm coming." He giggled. "I mean, there's more coming. I mean..."

Marc started chuckling, eyes wide open, happy. He leaned in and kissed Marc, tasting that happiness. Marc moaned, pushing into his touch, rubbing them together.

"Love you," he murmured, fingers working open the lube, slicking his fingers up.

"Yes. Want." Demanding love.

He pushed his fingers into Marc, moaning at the tight heat. Marc nodded and spread, taking him in deep, riding him. God, it was good. So good. "Need you."

"Take me." He pulled his fingers out and lined up, moaning softly as he pushed into Marc's body.

"Oh..." Marc's hands searched his body, moving up toward his face.

He moaned again, pushing all the way in and leaning down into Marc's touch. "Love you, Marc. Love you."

"Yes. Love you." His face was stroked, explored. "You look happy. Tell me you're happy."

"Oh, God, Marc. I'm so happy." He watched Marc's face as his own was explored. "Gotta move now."

"Yeah. Now, babe." Marc pulled his legs up and back, spreading wide.

"Oh, God." It was gorgeous, the way Marc wanted him. He started moving, wanting to go slow and build, but so turned on and horny he just couldn't help humping away. Marc didn't seem to mind, body rocking, sliding on his cock, riding him. Gasping, he just let go, pushing into Marc over and over again. Marc's hands wrapped around the headboard, holding tight.

Oh, God. Sexy. Marc was. So very. He got a hand around Marc's long prick, tugging as he fucked his lover.

A dark flush climbed up Marc's belly, a low cry sounding. "Soon..."

"Yeah, Caro. I want to see you come. Feel it."

"Oh, God. Yeah." Marc's shoulders curled up, body going tight as seed sprayed over his fingers.

Marc's ass milked his cock, pulled his orgasm from him and he cried out Marc's name, shaking as he came. The look of Marc's face was pure bliss, relaxed and sated, happy.

He collapsed down, rubbing his cheek over Marc's chest, murmuring happily. "Love you, Marc."

"I know, babe." Marc's hand stroked his hair.

He sighed and let his eyes close, comfortable and happy and home. Home.

Chapter Twelve

He could smell onions and peppers, cumin and garlic and roasting meat over the damp earth scent of clay. Marc finished the smooth line of cheekbone, the face of the little girl he was sculpting clear in his mind, and then covered the bust with a damp towel. He washed his hands, frowning quietly as he worked. He'd told Marge to take a long weekend, he was sure of it. Pablo would be coming home for good in the next few days and he wanted some time to play, to help his partner get situated, to learn where Pablo's furniture would go, where Pablo fit into the house.

Marc slid on a simple t-shirt and some loafers onto his bare feet. Excitement warred with nervousness. What if Pablo didn't really understand what he was getting into? What if Pablo secretly hated the town, this more quiet life? What if Pablo...

A chuckle burst from his lips even as the thoughts crossed his mind. Of all the people in the world, Pablo was one who knew exactly what he wanted. And Pablo wanted to come home to him.

He hummed softly as he moved through the house, smile widening as he entered the kitchen. "Marge, lovely lady, you didn't have to cook for me. Hell, I'm as capable as any man in the kitchen. I know the number to Pizza Hut."

The chuckle that met his words was no feminine giggle. "I think my cooking's a step up from Pizza Hut, but if you'd prefer a cheese lover's special over Mama's fajitas...."

"Pablo? I... I didn't expect you until tomorrow night at the earliest!" His smile widened even further, hands leading him around the island, towards the voice of his lover. "Are you home then? Home for good?"

Pablo's hands slid over his shoulders, warm and right. "Si, Caro. I'm home."

"Oh." He swallowed hard, trembling hands sliding around Pablo's waist and holding tight. "Good."

He could feel the sun pouring through the big window, hear the splashing of the water outside, smell good food and Pablo's skin. Soon the scent of his lover would be everywhere, on the towels and the sheets and the air and then the house would be their home.

Pablo moved closer, pressing against him, head resting against Marc's shoulder. "I'm finally home." There was a soft tone of wonder in Pablo's voice.

"Yes." He leaned down and kissed Pablo's head. "And you're stuck now, babe. I cleaned out half the closet in our bedroom."

Pablo chuckled, his breath warm against Marc's skin. "I probably don't need much more than a drawer and a couple of hangers."

"Did you decide to rent a truck or did you get movers to pack up all those books?" His hands began tracing a line along Pablo's spine, cheek resting atop silk-soft hair.

"I gave the landlady the keys and told her to let the movers in first thing tomorrow. I didn't want to wait."

"Oh, I'm glad you didn't." Marc lifted Pablo's chin, thumb tracing the full bottom lip. Their lips met in a long, slow kiss, Marc welcoming his lover home, welcoming them home. The scent of meat brought his head up. "I love you. Stir the meat, it's burning."

Pablo moved out of his arms, sniffing. "That's pretty cool," he said, over the sound of the meat sizzling as he turned it over. "I couldn't smell it all."

Marc chuckled. "Everybody's got a talent, right?" He wandered over to the refrigerator and pulled out a soda from the second shelf. "You thirsty, babe?"

"Yeah, you got my Dr. Peppers?" Pablo loved Dr. Pepper. It was one of the first things Marc had learned about him.

"I think so, but I'll need you to tell me where Marge put them. Mine are on the left of the second shelf." He opened the refrigerator door wide. "Can you see any?"

"Yeah, same corner one shelf below yours." The meat sizzled again and then went quiet. "I'll just put yours together -- I remember how you like 'em." He could hear the sound of plates and cutlery being set out. "So Marge does all your shopping and stuff, right?"

"Like I've said, she's taken care of me for years." He found the cold can and headed toward the table. "She does the cooking, cleaning, shopping, mail reading -- all that fun stuff. Bev manages my business, makes sure the accountant's not screwing me." The food smelled delicious and Marc settled happily in his chair. "Although, to be honest, I think they're both tickled you're here. I'm really self-sufficient, but Marge has the hardest time leaving me on my own. She might actually go on vacation now."

"Cool." Pablo set his plate in front of him and then slid a warm hand along his arm. "I'm glad you had someone to take care of you, Marc, but now that we're together again, I want a chance to do a little care-taking of my own. I'd hate to have Marge think I'm impinging on her territory or anything, but I'm not going to back down."

Marc shivered, Pablo's hand felt so good, so right. "She'll just end up taking care of you, too, babe. Honestly, I manage really well. You don't have to worry. Now," His hand traced the edge of the plate. "What have I got here?"

"Three fajitas -- nicely stuffed and rolled up already. I figured they'd be easy enough to eat. There's a little bowl of salsa for dipping if you want at the top of the plate. And that's Mama's homemade salsa." Pablo sighed. "Whatever else you say about her, she's a great cook."

His hands stilled for a few heartbeats, before resuming their tracing of the scalloped plate edges. "She loves you very much. She wants the best and easiest path for you. She's a good mother, Pablo."

One of Pablo's hands slid across the top of his, stilling him. "I know why she did it, Marc. But it was still wrong and it's going to take me a little bit of time to forgive her for stealing all that time from us." Pablo cleared his throat and petted his hand. "Now eat, you're too skinny."

Marc laughed. "What? Did Marge give you lessons for her long weekend? Tell Marc to eat. Make sure he sleeps. No TV after midnight. No skinny-dipping at noon, he scares the picnickers." His fingers found a fajita and picked it up. It smelled delicious.

Pablo giggled, the sound beautiful. "She didn't need to tell me anything -- you're too skinny, always were. And TV, skinny-dipping? You aren't gonna have time for those, Caro, I have plans for you. Might let you sleep though." He could hear the grin in Pablo's voice as he spoke.

Marc smiled, sheer simple joy filling him. "Oh, I like the sound of that. Plans." He took a bite, moaning softly at the taste of tortilla and meat and peppers.

"You better eat all of those -- you're gonna need your strength," Pablo told him around a mouthful of food.

He swallowed hard, hands reaching to push up dark glasses that weren't there. "We going to play a fierce game of checkers after doing the supper dishes, lover?"

"Oh yeah -- king me, baby." Pablo giggled.

Laughter sounded good in his kitchen, in *their* kitchen. "Oh, I love you, Pablo."

Pablo's hand found his again, squeezing. "I love you, too, Marc."

"Welcome home." He held Pablo's hand for a long moment, just drinking the presence of the man he loved.

Pablo squeezed his hand again and then let it go. "Eat up, Caro, I really do have plans for us."

Marc nodded, finishing two of the three fajitas before Piet clicked in, nuzzling his leg. "Hey stranger, did you say hello to Pablo?"

The air was cooling, the sun sinking away. Marc slowly nibbled on his third fajita as he listened to the random sounds filtering in from the open windows. Pablo ate fairly quietly, neat and quick from what he remembered. He finished about half, sneaking Piet a piece of meat or three and then moved to the sink, washing his plate quietly, humming pleasantly, enjoying the breeze on his face. He heard Pablo's chair scrape along the floor, but he was still a little startled when arms slid around his waist and Pablo's body pressed up against his back.

"Mm... that feels good." He leaned back, letting his weight rest against his lover. "God, I love you. This is like a dream, you know? I keep waiting to wake up alone in my bed."

A soft kiss was pressed against his shoulder. "Well if you do, check the can, the kitchen, or where ever we set up my computer. Odds are I'll be in one of those places."

"Oh, that reminds me! Marge and I emptied the office, so it's yours now. I was doing to decorate, but thought maybe we could do that together."

"That sounds nice. But not tonight, okay, Caro?" Pablo rubbed against him, heat and hardness growing against his buttocks. "There's something I need to do."

"Oh?" Marc let his hips rock backwards, head falling forward as a flame bloomed in his midsection. "What do you need, babe?"

Pablo groaned. "Marc... oh, yeah." Another soft sound and Pablo was pulling away. "Bed and lube. Now, before I decide I can't wait and just rub against you until I come."

"Oh..." Marc shivered, hands tightening on the edge of the sink. "God, yes. Please, babe. Now."

Without further delay, Marc found Pablo's hand and led him to their bed.

He'd barely felt the bed against his leg when Pablo's fingers were at the bottom of his shirt, pulling it out of his pants and over his head. "Need you so much, Marc."

"Yes." He reached for Pablo, body hard and hungry. "Love me, Pablo. I need you to love me."

Pablo's fingers moved over his chest, rubbing along his collarbones, flicking across his nipples and stroking over his abdomen. The generous mouth met his own, open and warm, wet and eager. Marc heard his desperate groan, knew he was pressing into Pablo's touch, Pablo's mouth as if he were starving.

It felt wonderful -- free and wild and sexy.

Pablo's hands moved down to his waist, pulling at his pants with hands that held more need than finesse. His lover made a soft noise of frustration. Marc pushed Pablo's hands away and shimmied out of his pants and stepping out of his shoes. He stood before Pablo, proud and naked. He was so hard the kiss of the air made him ache. "Better?"

"Oh, God, yes." He could hear Pablo undressing, the slide of material and flesh honing his anticipation. Then Pablo was in his arms, naked and hard and rubbing.

"Pablo!" His fingers buried themselves in Pablo's thick hair, moaning as a hard cock slid against his own. "Please."

"On the bed, Caro, let me love you." Pablo's voice was breathless, his hands wandering restlessly over Marc's skin.

He nodded, feeling for the bed and pulling the comforter back. He crawled onto the mattress, holding out his arms. "Come here, babe. I want you." He stretched out on the bed, the satin sheets slick and cool to his back and legs.

He heard Pablo rummage around in the side-table drawer and then the bed dipped and a warm kiss was dropped on his ankle and a second on his knee.

"Mm... your lips are so soft, love." He shifted again, moaning softly as another kiss brushed against his thigh.

"Spread your legs, Marc. Let me taste you first."

"Oh, babe..." He felt a hot drop fall onto his belly, his body tensing immediately.

He felt Pablo's cheeks nuzzling between his thighs, felt his lover's breath against his balls and the soft skin beyond them. Then Pablo was encouraging him to pull his legs back, spread himself open. His legs lifted; he could feel the tremors beneath his fingers when he grabbed his knees to offer himself -- his need, his heart, his body -- to Pablo.

"Oh, God, I love you." Pablo's words wafted warm breath against him and then something soft and wet and hot slid along his opening.

"Oh... oh, I love you. I love you." His universe shattered, nothing but Pablo and Pablo's breath and Pablo's touch and Pablo's love left behind.

Pablo fucked him with his tongue for a long time, long, slow strokes and shorter, fast jabs. In and out and in and out and it was love and pleasure and something timeless and wonderful. He was flying, soaring along as Pablo

pushed him farther and farther. His belly was wet with the fluid leaking from his cock, his breath gasping from him.

Finally he found his voice, crying out hoarsely. "Please, please, love. Need to feel you -- us. Please, Pablo."

The warmth inside him disappeared and then was replaced by something far hotter, thicker, and Pablo's cock was pushing into him. He sobbed quietly, reaching up to 'see' his lover's face, needing to know Pablo was there, was as happy and overwhelmed and needy as he was. Needing to know they were together. Pablo nuzzled into his touch, hot tears burning his fingers.

"I love you." The sweet burn of Pablo within him stole his breath, his clarity. His fingers wiped each tear away, trailed over each feature, starving to relearn this face -- both known and new.

"Marc..." His name was sweet and soft on Pablo's tongue as Pablo began to move, carefully and slowly.

Yes, oh yes. He didn't know if he said it aloud, if he whispered or screamed or simply thought the words, but his entire body worked to encourage Pablo's motions. Pablo's lips found his, taking a long, deep kiss. He never stopped moving, driving their pleasure slowly, as if he could do this forever. They moved together, soft little encouragements, happy moans, tears of joy, slow slides of fingers merging to create bliss. Pablo came first, crying out and filling him with such heat. Then it was his turn, his seed spraying up over his belly. Pablo collapsed against him, pressing soft kisses on his chest and neck.

"Welcome home, babe."

"Thank you, Caro." Pablo's mouth covered his, hot and soft and there. With him. Home.

Chapter Thirteen

Coming to live with Marc was one of the best things that had happened to Pablo in a long time. They still had some things to iron out, like remembering to not leave chairs out and always put things back exactly where he'd found them, but those were just the little day to day details that would eventually settle as they became routine. On the whole though, it was everything Pablo could have hoped for.

The biggest drawback though was Marge. Oh, she was a nice enough lady. A lovely lady. But sometimes she got in the way.

Like when Marc wandered around the place in a tight, some might even say obscenely so, pair of cut-offs and nothing else. Pablo wanted to jump his bones. But Marge was there and he didn't want to give her a show. And dragging Marc off to their bedroom in the middle of the day seemed a bit caveman when there was someone else around. So he'd wait until she left.

Today that couldn't be soon enough and as soon as he heard the door click behind her, he grabbed Marc's hand and dragged his lover down the hall toward their bedroom. It was time to let the caveman out.

"Where're we headed, babe? Is there a fire?" Marc's voice was teasing, warm. Nobody who wore those cut-offs that were really just a button, a zipper and some denim colored tissue paper should be able to do any more teasing.

He decided suddenly that, with Marge gone, he didn't need the bedroom and he turned, pushing Marc up against the wall. He rubbed against his lover, hands sliding up from Marc's waist along his belly to his chest to his head and wrapping his arms around Marc's neck.

"Nowhere," he whispered as he brought their mouths together.

Marc's hands found his ass, pulling him close, tongue thrusting deep into his mouth. Oh God, it was just like he was still fifteen, seventeen, all it took was a kiss or a glimpse of Marc's body and he was hard and needy. Marc tasted so good, he tasted like the enchiladas Pablo'd made, despite Marge's insistence he didn't need to cook, and like the salsa and the beer and like *Marc*, salty and rich. Marc was hard for him, too, pressing into his belly, insistent and hot. The hands on his ass slid up, tugging at his shirt. "Skin, babe. Need skin."

He pulled away long enough to pull off his shirt, tossing it in the general direction of their bedroom before finding Marc's mouth with his own again. He whimpered as his chest pressed against Marc's, skin to skin. Hands tangled in his hair, holding him tight. Thumbs stroked over his cheeks, Marc looking at him, seeing him. He pulled Marc's glasses off, needing to see his lover's eyes, even if they couldn't see back. Marc stiffened slightly, almost imperceptible now, the flush on his cheeks light. One day, he wouldn't notice, wouldn't be embarrassed or unnerved or shy, Pablo had faith.

"Love you, Caro," Pablo whispered as he pulled Marc's face down, kissing the thin cheeks and Marc's eyelids, one and then the other. Marc took a long, sweet kiss and then that mouth slid over his chin and down his chest, long fingers opening his pants with ease.

"Oh, God, Marc..." His fingers were trembling as he slid his hands through the short hair on Marc's head. Marc always had loved doing this and Pablo wasn't about to complain. His breath hitched as the air's cool touch slid over his cock.

"Yeah, babe." Marc's lips slid over the head of his cock, pulling with a strong, steady rhythm that spoke of his lover's hunger, his lover's need.

"Oh, God." He wrapped his hands around Marc's head and started to rock, slowly, carefully, but it was so good, Marc's mouth so hot and wet and soft and he couldn't stop himself. Marc hummed, sucking harder, hands sliding over his hips to pull him in deeper, encouraging his thrusts. He was making soft, little noises that he had no control over, body moving faster and faster, pushing into Marc's mouth, pushing deep now. Marc took him in, took everything he was and wanted more.

He watched as his erection slid in and out of Marc's mouth, watched the happiness and pleasure dance in the sightless eyes, across the aching familiar and yet changed face.

"Marc..." he whispered, warning as he felt the pleasure gather behind his balls and begin to explode. He was taken in deep, come sliding down Marc's throat as the soft tongue swirled and licked and caressed his flesh, hands holding tight. He whimpered every time Marc swallowed, soft shudders going through him.

Marc suckled softly until his knees buckled, warm arms wrapping around him, holding him close. He pulled Marc in for another kiss, licking at the inside of his lover's mouth, searching out the pockets where it tasted most like them both, his come in Marc's mouth. Moaning softly, Marc pressed closer, tongue sliding against his, demanding, hot, hungry. They kissed urgently for some time and then Pablo pulled away to whisper in Marc's ear. "What do you want, Caro?"

"Touch me, babe. Want to feel your hands on me." Marc bent his head to nibble on Pablo's shoulder. "Please."

He could do that. He could do that for the rest of his life and still not get enough of the feeling of Marc's skin beneath his fingers. He started at Marc's head, hands roaming through the short hair once more, fingertips more active this time, searching out the shape of Marc's skull.

"Mmm... good." Marc leaned into his touch. "Feels good."

"You do," he agreed, hands sliding around Marc's ears, re-learning their contours, the fact that just underneath the lobe on the right hand side was ticklish enough to make Marc jerk and start making promises.

Pablo was washing the dinner dishes, humming softly under his breath. He could have put them in the dishwasher, but there weren't enough to make it worthwhile and he didn't mind the task. In fact, he quite enjoyed dipping his hands into the warm, clean water, washing up for Marc and himself.

Marc was putting away the condiments and fussing in the fridge. It was all so domestic. Quite wonderfully so, in fact. Suddenly something hit the floor, the sound of glass breaking like an explosion, making him jump. He whipped around. "What the?"

"Damn it!" Marc was standing there, red-faced, one bowl of chocolate pudding shattered at his feet, another bowl half unwrapped, the yellow pudding slowly sliding in heavy lumps on the floor. "They weren't marked. They weren't where they belonged. The fucking bowl fell."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking when I put them in. Just stay where you are and I'll get the glass cleaned up." He turned back to the sink, turning off the water.

"I've got it. No big deal." Marc's voice was tight and Pablo could not help wincing as more pudding fell from the bowl he held, disguising the shards of glass.

"Don't move." The words came out a little harsher than he'd intended, but there was glass everywhere. "Let me get the glass before you get cut."

"I'm not a kid. I can clean up my own messes. Quit fussing." Marc knelt down, fingers sliding through the slimy pudding, searching out the sharp pieces. The top of his head was red, the flush traveling down his neck.

"I know you can clean up your own messes, but why should you risk getting cut if you don't have to?" He knelt next to Marc, using the dishcloth to push the pudding away from Marc, his other hand batting at Marc's. "Damn it, Marc, let me."

The second bowl went flying, smashing loudly against a cabinet. "Fine. I'm fucking helpless, right? Can't even find my pudding in my own goddamned house! Can't clean, trip over the furniture, forget to turn on the lights! Poor you, with your awkward, clumsy child of a lover who can't deal by himself!"

The final two bowls -- one of macaroni salad and another with corn joined the puddings. Marc stood and stomped through the food. "I'm going to the studio."

"Marc, I'm so-" The slam of the kitchen door cut off his words and Pablo sighed heavily. "Oh, that was well done."

He went and got the pail and started to clean up the mess. This was just the latest in a series of missteps that Marc had alluded to. Pablo was having trouble remembering that he needed to put the furniture back exactly where he'd found it, that there were specific places for everything so that Marc could find it. Pablo had put the groceries away last week and not labeled a single can; he hadn't known, but that hadn't made it any easier for Marc to admit that he couldn't fend for himself if things like that weren't done for him. Marc forgot that Pablo hadn't had eleven years to get used to Marc being blind, he was starting from scratch. He knew it had to be frustrating for his lover, but he was trying, very hard, to make things work.

Once the floor was clean of glass and various foodstuffs and the dishes done, Pablo wiped his hands and headed for the studio. Hopefully Marc had had enough time to calm down.

The long, angry music that vibrated the closed door wasn't the best sign, but it wasn't locked against him either. He pushed the door open, eyes trying to adjust to the darkness. The light fell in, Marc was standing at the work bench, moonlight falling over his naked, sweaty chest, his pants replaced by the short, torn, faded into useless cut offs that he loved so. Steadily, Marc pounded at the clay in time with the driving bass, sobbing and snarling as he worked his frustrations loose.

Pablo bit his lip, forced himself not to cry out for Marc to stop as he wanted to. His desire to help Marc with everything, to take care of his lover's every need and want, was a part of the problem. He stood watching, trying to decide if he should say something or just slip out again and let Marc come to him when he was ready.

Three or four more blows landed and then Marc slumped, head falling forward as he fought to catch his breath. Slick hands moved over the clay, making it glisten, looking as if they had minds of their own, creating and discovering. The slow trails of tears began to ease, Marc's tension easing. Pablo went to the stereo and slowly turned the volume down, letting Marc know he was there.

"I'm sorry." Marc's voice was quiet, breath hitching in his chest.

"It was my fault," Pablo told him as he crossed the room. "I should have put them on the right shelves."

"Yeah, but I shouldn't have thrown a fit." Marc's head drooped farther. "I hate that you have to put up with all this shit, that your life got all fucked up. I mean, I at least pay Marge to organize the fucking kitchen."

"Hey." Pablo slid his hands along Marc's back up to his shoulders, rubbing gently. "I chose to come live with you, Marc. I knew what I was getting into. And I'd hardly say my life got all fucked up -- it used to be fucked up, but it isn't anymore."

"I wish you didn't have to -- that the patterns and the labels weren't there, that you didn't have to worry about it. I..." Marc sighed, head rolling up to nuzzle the back of his hand. "When stuff works, it's easier to forget that I can't see, that I'm broken."

"You aren't broken," Pablo told him, pressing against the long back. "Just a little bent."

Marc snorted, head falling back forward, and then he started laughing. "Just a little bent, huh? Not truly twisted yet?"

Pablo smiled and laid his head against the top of Marc's spine, rubbing against the sweat-slicked flesh. "Not yet," he whispered.

"Oh..." Marc gasped and shivered. "Are we already up to the make-up sex part? Or is this the hot fucking to work out our frustrations part?"

"Mm..." Pablo pushed his hips in, pressing against Marc's buttocks. "They both sound pretty good. Which one do you need?"

"Oh, let's fuck first. Then we can make love in the shower and in our bed. But we should start with fucking, babe." Marc undulated slowly, pressing against his body, hips insistent.

Groaning, Pablo began to thrust with his own hips, fingers finding the button at Marc's waist and popping it open. "I can do fucking."

"Gonna hold you to that." Marc shimmied out of the shorts, standing naked in a heartbeat. "Where -- right here?" And with that Marc leaned forward onto his elbows, thighs spread, body offered up to Pablo's touch.

"Oh, my God, Marc..." Pablo thought maybe he heard a button give way off his shirt as he tore his clothes off and he nearly tripped himself taking off his jeans, but at last he was naked, rubbing up against Marc. "You got anything in here, or should I just do you?"

Marc grabbed his hand, bringing the palm up and licking it, wetting it thoroughly before letting it go. "Fuck me, babe."

"Oh God." Pablo wrapped the wet hand around his cock, slicking it up before pressing the head against Marc's entrance. "As you wish." He pushed in past the tight ring of muscle, not stopping until his hips were pressed snugly against Marc's ass.

"Oh, yeah..." Marc's body was tight, hot, clenching and fluttering around his shaft, holding him, pulling at him. Grabbing onto the edge of the table, Pablo placed a kiss on Marc's spine and then rested his forehead against the hot skin. Then he began to thrust, rocking steadily in and out of Marc's body.

"Pablo..." Marc pressed back against him, body shuddering and hot.

"Love the feeling of you." He moved faster, pushing harder into Marc's body. Marc rocked back, meeting each thrust, one hand moving to work his own hard flesh. Low moans and pleas filled the air, pleasure and need growing unbearably. Harder and harder he pressed into Marc, fucking his lover with all his might. Suddenly Marc wailed, body tightening impossibly as he arched, hips jerking, the musk of his seed filling the air. Pablo continued to snap his hips moving jerkily now and coming with a shout.

Marc panted, sweat-slick and salty beneath his lips. "Wow."

He rubbed his cheek against the hot flesh, unable to keep from grinning. "I'm going to go out and buy a hundred of those dessert bowls. And when you've broken all of them, I'm going to go buy a hundred more."

A happy chuckle sounded and Marc pressed back against him. "I can try glasses next, they're cheaper."

Giggling, he wrapped his hands around Marc's waist, holding tight.

One hand covered his, holding tight. "We survived our first fight. Go us."

He placed a sucking kiss on Marc's spine. "Is this where the make-up sex comes?"

"Oh, yeah. First in the shower and then in our bed." Marc stood slowly, both men groaning as their bodies parted. "Lots of kisses and moaning and touching. Multiple orgasms. That sort of thing."

"It sounds perfect." He placed another kiss on Marc's spine and reached around for his lover's hand.

"Yes." Marc's fingers fit inside his own -- not perfectly, not seamlessly, but right. Bringing Marc's hand up to his mouth, he kissed the back of it before leading the way to the bathroom.

It was always the same dream.

He was looking for Marc. Not the long-term Marc had left him looking, but a far more urgent immediate looking. Marc was supposed to be in his studio, but he wasn't. Marc was supposed to be in the kitchen but Marge hadn't seen him. The backyard, with all its space and trees and grass and flowers was empty but for Piet, barking, running in circles and barking some more.

The noise haunted Pablo as he ran down to the dock, eyes searching, heart pounding, Piet barking and barking and barking in the distance. The lake was still. Completely and totally calm. Not even the wind disturbed its surface.

He called out his lover's name, heart pounding so loudly he couldn't even hear his own shout. He could hear Piet though, still barking in the distance, not interested in the water at all. But Pablo knew Marc was there under the still as glass surface. He didn't strip his clothing or even his shoes away, just dove in, hands above his head, shattering the glass. He fell through the air, falling and falling, the wind rushing by him, louder than Piet, louder than the frantic beating of his heart.

All of a sudden he hit the water. Gasping with surprise, his mouth filled with water and the liquid pushed into his lungs. He couldn't breathe and he couldn't see Marc anywhere, though he looked, twisting through the clear water, the panic of drowning slowly joining the panic of Marc missing.

He always woke up before he died, gasping for air with lungs that didn't work, alone in their bed.

The first night he had run, calling for Marc as he scrambled out of bed. He tripped over a chair, falling heavily. Piet barked and seconds later the dog was snuffling in his hear, licking his face. Marc was only moments behind, clay splattered and worried. After that, whenever he had the dream, whenever he woke up and Marc wasn't in bed next to him, he'd forget about trying to catch his breath and just make his way to the studio to watch Marc work.

One night he didn't wake up from the dream. Instead he just kept dying.

He stopped panicking, his heart stopped pounding so loudly and he just floated in the water, waiting for everything to go black. But it didn't go black. He looked around -- everything was tinted green from the water, the clear, clear water, and there was a whole strange world under the surface.

He still couldn't breathe though and it wasn't right that he wasn't dead yet and slowly everything finally started to fade. Suddenly he saw someone coming toward him, swimming through the water like a fish.

It was Marc. Only it wasn't Marc. Well it was, but this Marc could see and he didn't have legs, instead he had a tail like a fish. Marc's body undulated, propelling him quickly through the water until they were face to face.

Pablo smiled because Marc was looking at him, hand sliding along his cheek. "I knew you'd look like this," Marc said and Pablo could hear every word even though they were still under water.

He still couldn't breathe though and everything was still fading, going grey. Soft, familiar lips kissed his, pushing sweet air into his lungs. Everything snapped back into focus and suddenly he was naked in the green tinted water, Marc's hands moving over him, pulling him closer. The long tail wrapped around his legs and Marc's mouth covered his again, breathing for him.

"You don't have to worry, I'm not going anywhere, babe."

Pablo let his eyes close and floated in the water, held safe and close in Marc's arms as the dream faded to blackness.

Chapter Fourteen

Pablo was standing in front of the closet, towel wrapped around his waist, trying to decide what to wear to Marge's place for Thanksgiving. Marge *and* Bev. For Thanksgiving. He tried not to let that scare him. These ladies were Marc's friends; they'd been there for him. And he tried not to let that bother him. It was a happy day -- his first Thanksgiving back with Marc. He would focus on what they had to be thankful for, not on the years they'd missed.

"Marc? Should I wear my suit and tie?"

"Hmm? Tie? No, babe. Wear a sweater. The soft one with the cabling. Marge keeps her house bitter cold and that one feels good to me." Marc wandered out of the bathroom in his briefs, beard still damp. "Lisa and Sue from the Westin Gallery are coming, too, along with some other gallery folk, you'll fit right in. You did leave a couple of the pies you made for here, right?"

"I left a pecan and a pumpkin for us, is that okay? Or did you want one of the others as well? Are you sure I shouldn't dress up?" He was happy it wasn't going to be just the two of them with Marge and Bev; it would be easier with other people to talk to, he wouldn't be the odd man out in their little family.

"That's perfect." Marc reached for him, hands sliding over his arms. "Mmm... skin. You could go like you are..."

He giggled, his hand hands sliding over Marc's belly. "I thought you said Marge keeps her place bitter cold?"

"I'd keep you warm!" Marc grinned wide, blank eyes sparkling.

He giggled some more and brought Marc's mouth down for a kiss. "I know anyone who's seen your last show has seen me in the altogether. But I don't think Thanksgiving is clothing optional." And now that he'd mentioned it, that was going to be weird. Meeting people who'd seen Marc's sculptures of him...

"Does it bother you?" Marc tilted his head, fingers sliding over his face. God, Marc heard his feelings before he did.

"It's weird. Knowing they know, but I try not to think about it. Oh! Marge doesn't have one in her house, does she?" It definitely bothered him, being in the same room with people who weren't Marc and the sculptures of himself.

Marc turned a bright pink. "Marge and Bev have my old stuff -- from the last few drawings to the first good sculptures. Mostly? Terrible learning, awkward pieces. They're like moms and embarrassing baby photos."

"Oh. Am I naked in any of them?" He didn't think embarrassing baby photos had anything on his eighteen year old naked butt and other bits hanging out for everyone to see. They hadn't really changed all that much in thirteen years and people would be looking at him and... he tried not to squeak.

"I don't think so, no. Marge has a bunch of hands, feet. I went through a bird phase..."

He giggled, relief going through him. "I remember the hands. Do you remember the hands?"

"The very first time you fed me ice cream. You looked so scared when I kissed you and I kept worrying that the guy I was living with would show that night. What was his name... He ended up doing pornos..."

"I was scared. Scared you would and scared you wouldn't. My first kiss." He looked up at Marc, seeing the tall, skinny kid with the great orange afro. Marc hadn't changed all that much, not really. Matured, but he was still Pablo's Marc.

"You stole my heart." Marc's eyes softened, got distant.

"I had to replace the one you'd stolen from me somehow, didn't I?" He rubbed his cheek against Marc's chest, hugging his lover so tight. God, he'd nearly lost this. Well he had lost it, for thirteen long years, but he'd nearly lost it forever. He was never letting Marc go again.

Marc wrapped those long arms around him, held on tight. "This is the first Thanksgiving where I'll be whole."

"Oh, Caro..." He pulled Marc's head down again, kissing his lover passionately.

Marc met him head-on, crying low, shaking and holding him, tears sliding from those poor blank eyes. Pablo held on so tight, devouring Marc's mouth, loving with everything he had, as if that would make up for the lonely years they shared. He could feel when Marc shifted into needing him, the kiss growing wild, one hand tearing the towel away. He whimpered and moaned, tugging at Marc's underwear, glad that was as far as his lover had gotten in the dressed department.

"Yeah. Please." Marc tugged him away from the wall, towards their bed, cock long and curved and full, lips red and kiss-swollen. He wrapped one hand around Marc's cock, drawn to it, to the silky heat of it.

Marc moaned, arching towards his touch. "Love your hands."

"I know. I remember." He nudged them both onto the bed, one hand still wrapped around Marc's cock, the other exploring. Marc shifted and rocked, mouth open, sliding over his shoulder, his neck.

"Oh, Caro. I love you." He made soft noises of pleasure, swept away by their passion. Marc rolled them, straddled his waist, fingers exploring as their hips rocked together.

He squeezed Marc's ass and tugged on Marc's nipples, hands restlessly searching out all his favorite spots. Marc stroked his face, his throat, the line of his belly, gasping and moaning, moving against him. It was so good, so hot and he felt like a wanton, rubbing up against his lover. Marc's head was thrown back, lips moving, his lover whispering something, a dark flush crawling up along his body.

"What?" he asked, voice hoarse with need

"I dreamed this. Dreamed you here, touching me. Loving me. Was praying you weren't a dream."

"Oh, Caro, I'm not a dream. I'm here. Feel." He tugged hard on Marc's nipple and then his hip.

"Yes. Oh, fuck. I feel..."

"Yeah, you feel good. So good, Marc." He rubbed up harder, whimpering at the way his cock slid on Marc's skin. Marc lifted up, grabbed his cock and oh.

Oh. Tight. Hot. In. Marc took him in deep, crying out low. His hips bucked, totally beyond his control and he moaned loudly. "Marc!"

"Yes. Yes. Babe!" Marc started moving, uninhibited, beautiful. Pablo reached up, fingers sliding over the pale, freckled skin, shaking with how good it was. Marc's hand wrapped around his own cock, pumping hard.

"Oh, Caro. So beautiful..." He slid his hand with Marc's, their fingers twining together.

"Love." Marc jerked and cried out, come pouring over his hand. The squeezing of Marc's body made pulled his own orgasm out of him and he cried out, filling Marc with heat. Marc leaned down, mouth searching for his. He slid his hand along Marc's cheek, guiding his lover until their mouths met.

"Mmm... babe." Marc moaned, lapping his lips.

"This is a Thanksgiving tradition I'd like to get used to."

"Hell, yes." Marc nodded, grinned. "Better than turkey."

He giggled. "Turkey's good too though." The phone rang. "Oh man, we're not late, are we?"

"No. I don't think so. Marge said four at the earliest."

He frowned, detaching from Marc and getting the phone. "Hello?"

"Pablo?"

He closed his eyes. "Mama."

Marc took a quick breath, sort of scooted away, hand still on his belly. He reached down, taking Marc's hand in his, holding on. He'd been putting this call off for weeks.

"Is that all you have to say to me, hijo?"

"I don't... I don't think I can talk to you yet, Mama."

Marc pet him, fingers stroking gently, loving him

"You can't talk to your own Mama? You don't call. You don't write."

"I wrote, Mama."

"One little card it says you not come for the holidays!"

He sat up straight, hand gripping the phone hard. "How can I come see you when you stole my life from me?"

"Mi, hijo! I did not! I love you. I only did what I did for love." He could hear the tears in her voice, knew she was crying and he bit his lip, his own eyes watering.

Marc sort of wrapped around him, holding him, supporting him, right there. He focused on that warmth as his Mama went on and on, trying to make him feel guilty for not being there, telling him how he was missed, how the children asked for him and his father had a sad look that no one could make go away.

"Stop, Mama. Stop. You keep telling me about everyone else, but how do you think I feel? Knowing you deliberately sent Marc away? Knowing you told him I was married when he called? You hurt me. For thirteen years you kept hurting me and you expect me to just pretend it didn't happen?"

"Pablo. Pablito, please. You don't understand, you're not a Mama. You don't know how hard it is to make sure your children are safe."

"Safe? This had nothing to do with safe and you know it! You didn't like that I was gay and you didn't like that my boyfriend was losing his eyesight. All you cared about was making sure my life went the way *you* wanted it to!" He was shouting now and shaking, the anger pouring out of him and this was his *Mama* he was yelling at.

"Hey, now." Marc took the phone from his fingers, so easy, so gentle. "Mrs. Cervantes? I'm sorry, but it's Thanksgiving and Pablo has plans. With me." He could hear Mama's voice and then Marc answered. "You're welcome to call and speak with him, but it's a holiday. If you'd not wanted to upset him, you wouldn't have lied to him. What? No, Mrs. Cervantes, he doesn't need anyone to take care of him. He has me." Then Marc hung up the phone.

He wrapped his arms around Marc, holding on, crying and mad at himself for crying.

Marc rocked him, humming, holding on. "I'm so sorry. I'm sorry, babe. I never wanted you to hurt."

"I just can't believe she... I want her to say she's sorry and say she was wrong and say you're welcome to come and meet my whole family." He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry."

"One day, babe. Maybe one day she'll look past my eyes."

"I think she's got a bigger problem with your penis than your eyes, Caro." It took a moment, but then he realized what he'd said and he started to giggle. Marc started to laugh, deep and low and hard. He laughed until he was crying again and he hugged Marc hard.

"Never letting you go."

"Holding you to that," he said softly. Then he gave Marc a kiss and wiped his cheeks.

"Let me go splash some water on my face and then we should get dressed and go before we're late."

"You sure? We don't have to go if you don't want to."

"I know, but you want to go and Marge'll be disappointed and I don't want Mama to ruin our first Thanksgiving back together. She took the last thirteen years -- it's enough."

"Well, that and I want you to meet my friends." Marc grinned a little.

"Yeah, that'll be nice, Caro." He kissed his lover. "We should get dressed because I'm still not going naked."

"We should." Marc gave him a smile. "Still going to be the best Thanksgiving of my life, babe."

"Mine, too, Marc. Because it's with you."

"Yeah." Marc's face was transformed. All smiles. All happy. "Yeah."

And that right there was worth every argument he had with his Mama, that was why he was so angry with her. That happiness was his and Marc's and, finally, they had it.

Marc stretched out on the sofa, the smell of the Christmas tree sharp and neat. He and Pablo were going to make popcorn and cranberry strings this afternoon. Well, they were going to try, he wasn't sure it would work. Eating popcorn would be fun though.

At least, they were going to try as soon as Pablo quit arguing with his mother.

"Mama, I'm spending Christmas with the man I love. If he's not invited to your home, then we'll have it here. I've told you that over and over again... No, I'm not repeating myself and I'm not coming alone. Please don't call on Christmas Day and try to make me feel guilty like you did on Thanksgiving, it just makes me even madder at you. Until you accept Marc, you won't see me at any more family functions. Goodbye, Mama." Pablo hung up the receiver and sighed. Marc winced, fingers pushing up his glasses. God, he hated this. Hated knowing they disliked him, hated knowing Pablo was hurting. "She wants me to come up alone. She won't apologize for running you off all those years ago. She won't even admit she did anything wrong! Not even about when you called and she lied and told you I was married. And she expects me to just go up, by myself, and pretend everything is just fine and dandy."

He heard Pablo get up and then his lover's warmth was near, the sofa dipping under Pablo's weight. "I told her I was spending Christmas with you and if they invited both of us, we would consider whether we wanted to go or not."

He sighed reaching out to pull Pablo close. "I'm sorry, babe. I am."

"Yeah, me too." Pablo curled up into him, lying mostly on top of him. "And every time I think I'm getting over being mad at her, she calls and gets me all upset again because she hasn't changed. At all. She keeps expecting me to just change my mind about everything. After all these years."

He rocked, breathing in the soap and shampoo and musk scent of his lover. "But you miss her."

Pablo sighed. "She's my Mama. I talked to her every day until I moved out part way through college. And then I was home every Sunday and I spoke to her on the phone a couple times a week. Holidays, special occasions. Yeah, I miss her. But I'm so mad at her, too, you know?"

He nodded, "Yeah. You..." He took a deep breath. "You could invite them up." Marc had been thinking about it -- even talked to Marge and Bev about it, about whether he should, whether they could help with the cooking, that sort of thing. Bev's opinion was to send the Cervantes a fruit basket and tell them to go to hell. Marge, though, thought it was mature and smart and caring. Which was probably why it felt so awkward.

"What? Here?"

"Yeah. Here. This is where we're having Christmas."

"I know. You just surprised me. Would you really want that? To have them here? Not that I think they'd come. Mama wants to be where the kids are at Christmas."

"I'm not going to go anywhere, babe. They're going to have to learn to like me or at least put up with me." No, he

didn't want it. He wanted magic and presents and roaring fires and walks in the snow, but for Pablo? He'd do it and be happy about it.

"You got that right." Pablo was quiet for a moment. "I don't think they'll come without the girls and their babies, but if we make the offer, maybe they'll realize I'm not trying to shut them out."

He nodded. "So call her, make the offer, put the ball in her court and be done with it."

He could feel Pablo nod and then he was given a hard kiss and Pablo popped up and picked up the phone again.

Marc grinned, shook his head and stretched out on the sofa. One way or the other, he'd made Pablo happy and that was the whole Christmas deal.

Pablo couldn't believe his folks had actually agreed to come for Christmas. They'd hemmed and hawed and at the end said they couldn't afford it. So when Marc offered to fly them down, their bluff was called.

They were due around two pm, having spent the morning with Anna and all the kids and gone to church before getting on an airplane to fly out. Marc had pulled out all the stops -- flying them first class and arranging for a limo to drive them from the airport.

He and Marc had had a lovely morning, exchanging gifts and making love. The food was all ready, Marge and Marc and him having spent the last two days preparing everything. The turkey was doing its thing in the oven and he was dressed and Marc was getting dressed and. Pablo took a deep breath and forced himself to stop pacing.

God, he was nervous, worried about what was going to happen when his parents finally met Marc.

"Which of the new shirts go with these pants, babe? They don't have labels yet." Marc was holding up one that was striped and butt-ugly red and orange and brown that Marge had knitted, the other one a bright blue designer something from Bev.

"Um... aren't there any green ones clean? I like the dark green silky one on you."

"Green silky..." Marc wandered back to the bedroom, Piet chasing a string trailing from the hand-knitted sweater. Now that wouldn't be a terrible thing, if Piet accidentally ate it. Pablo wondered briefly if Marge was colorblind...

Oh, he hadn't brushed his teeth! He followed Marc back into their bedroom, hands sliding across his lover's ass as he passed Marc.

"Tease." Marc chuckled, rustling through the closet and appearing with two more shirts -- one a deep forest green, the other a blue-green. "Which one?"

"The left. Or maybe the right -- I'll be wanting to molest you all day long if you wear the left. I'm just going to do my teeth, keep an ear out for the bell, okay? I won't be able to hear it from in here."

Marc chuckled, "I'll hear it."

Piet started barking and Marc slid on the soft dark shirt, heading for the door, dark glasses firmly seated. Pablo knew he wouldn't see those empty blue eyes until his parents were gone.

He finished up quickly and made sure he hadn't spilled on his shirt and then hurried out to join Marc in welcoming his parents. He figured it was actually good that Marc got to them first -- it was his house after all.

"...go get Pablo, pretty boy." Marc's voice floated down the hall, Piet bounding down to find him. "Can I take your coats?"

"Hey boy, I'm coming." He pet Piet's head and took a breath, heading down the hall. "Feliz Navidad Mama, Papi."

Marc had two coats in his hands, was moving carefully around the suitcases and boxes. Mama came barreling down the hall, pushing into his arms.

He wrapped his arms around her, hugging tightly. "Mama. Thank you for coming."

"Pablo. Mijito." She started crying, jabbering in an incomprehensible mix of Spanish and English, squeezing him tight.

"Mama, come on, stop now, please? It's Christmas and we're together -- we should be happy, you know?" He looked past her to his father. "Papi?"

Papi grunted and tugged her out of his arms, murmuring to her quietly in Spanish.

Marc got the coats hung up, Piet at his side, so hyper-aware of Marc's nerves, Marc's attitude.

"So, you met Marc." He went to his lover and took Marc's hand in his and tugged him toward his parents. "Mama, Papi, this is my lover. Marc."

Marc nodded, tried to smile. "Merry Christmas."

Papi reached out to shake Marc's hand and Pablo guided Marc's hand up to meet it. "Thank you for the tickets, Marc."

Pablo beamed at his father.

"It was my pleasure. I'm glad you could see our home."

"Yes, thank you," said his Mama, stiff, obviously trying, but not trying nearly hard enough.

Pablo bit back his sigh. "Let's go into the living room. There's hot chocolate or coffee if you'd like."

"I'll get it, if you'll tell me what you want." Marc took his hand, squeezed it. The living room looked so much different now than it had when he'd come the first time. He'd painted the walls a warm mossy green and hung Marc's paintings all over so the room and the hall was a wash of color.

There was their tree, too and Christmas decorations, music softly playing, making the room warm and inviting. He saw Mama's eyes widen, saw his parents look at each other.

"Hot chocolate sounds good, mihijo," murmured his Mama.

Papi nodded. "Maybe a little shot of something in it?"

"Vencenzio!"

"It's Christmas, Mama. And you don't have to cook."

"Oh. Well. Maybe just a little one."

"Do you need help?" he asked Marc, knowing that Marc didn't, but might need a hug.

"No. No, it's okay, babe. Visit with your folks. I'll be fine." Marc headed to the kitchen, careful, graceful, head held high. God, he was proud of Marc.

He turned back to his folks. "Sit, please, make yourselves at home." Look around, see how nice it is.

Papi sat in one of the comfortable chairs, looking out the window at the snowy yard, the trees with their icicles. "It's cold here, si? You said there's a lake?"

"Si, Papi -- out the back. Marc swims in the summer. There's lots of trees, too. A town just over five minutes away. It's a really great place." Pablo got Mama settled, then moved their bags out of the way into the guest room so Marc wouldn't trip over them.

"The non-suitcases are presents, Pablito, bring them in for the tree."

"Okay, Mama." He hoped they liked their gift from him and Marc. It was a small sculpture Marc had made of him -- a bust.

Marc came in from the kitchen with a tray about the time he came down the hall. "Want to give me a hint where I'm going, babe?"

"They're on the chair and sofa, you can leave the tray on the coffee table." He took Marc's elbow, just keeping him away from the walls.

"k. Mine's the coffee." They got settled without incident, Marc sitting beside him on the loveseat, Piet at their feet.

Everyone reached for their drinks and sipped and sat and oh, God, this was awkward.

"Your tree looks nice," Mama said stiffly.

"Thank you."

"Our friends Kerry and Bob made most of the ornaments. They're glassblowers and they surprised us with two big boxes of ornaments to celebrate." Marc sipped his coffee, hand on Pablo's thigh.

"Very nice." Mama gave Papi a look and then turned back to him. "Your nieces and nephews were looking for you today, Pablito."

"Mama..."

"I'm just saying they missed you. Wanted to know why you hadn't come home for Christmas."

"And what did you tell them?"

"That you were busy."

"Mama."

"Well what was I supposed to say?" She looked at him defiantly.

"That I was spending Christmas with my lover."

"You want me to tell them how you are sinning? Even on Christmas?"

"Mama." He glared at her.

"Anna," Papi murmured quietly. "It's Christmas, si? We'll have a nice meal, open some presents, spend time with our hijo, si?"

She sniffed and subsided and Pablo tried to let the now familiar anger go. He reached for Marc's hand and squeezed it tight. Marc squeezed back, but kept quiet, little red spots on the high cheekbones, the back of the long neck flushed.

He sighed and put down his hot chocolate. "Would you like your present?"

He didn't wait for an answer, instead getting the box with the bust in it and putting it between them on the couch. "Marc made it."

It was a perfect likeness -- him as he was now, older, wiser, happier, home for the first time in years. Bev had pitched a fit when she found out it was a gift.

"Oh, Pablo, look! It's you."

He smiled at his Mama. "Yeah. Marc's good at what he does. Really good. And we thought this way, you would always have a part of me at home with you." It was a peace offering, really, an olive branch. This whole having them here was and so far his Mama had not taken hold of the other end of the branch with very much grace.

"Thank you," his Papi said quietly. "You look so happy."

"That's because I am, Papi. Marc makes me happy."

Marc's tension eased a little, his fingers squeezed again, a soft warm smile appearing on his lover's face. That seemed to break the ice some and the rest of the presents were opened with the tension eased. Marc got a shirt from them and Pablo made a mental note to ask if there was some tradition he'd missed. The 'give a blind guy a shirt' tradition.

He'd gotten a scarf and mitts and a hat, hand knit, along with a big picture of the family, including all his nieces and nephews at Trina's wedding last spring. He thought it was a bit of a heavy handed reminder, but let it go. They were trying to mend fences here and if his parents weren't working on their share, well it wasn't going to help matters if he stopped working on his, too.

Marc felt the scarf and nodded as he explained about the photograph. "You'll have to find a place to hang it, babe."

"Yeah." Okay, so maybe the ice wasn't that broken, because he was dying here, his parents staring alternately at the tree, their presents and him and Marc. "Dinner should be ready soon. It was a collaborative effort. Marc and Marge -- that's Marc's housekeeper -- and me."

"You have a housekeeper?" Mama sounded surprised.

Marc nodded. "We both work hard and she cooks, cleans, helps with things like reading the mail."

"That sounds like an expensive indulgence," sniffed Mama.

"Marc can afford it, Mama. Not that it's really any of your business."

"Okay, look. You don't like me, I get that, I do. But it's fucking Christmas and your son wanted to see you. You said you didn't want me to see Pablo because I'd be a burden. I'm not. Not even a little, so pick something else to not like about me -- like the fact that I'm bald or that I have a dick." Marc stood, shook his head, face bright red. "I'm going to let you two enjoy your son over dinner. I hope you like your Christmas present. Good night."

Then Marc headed down the hall, not even faltering, the sound of the bedroom door closing loud.

"Well," said Mama, sitting straight.

Pablo rounded on her. "He's bent over backwards trying to be nice to you, despite the fact that you've done nothing but try to split us up. Well it isn't going to work this time and if you can't find it in your heart to accept him, you might as well say goodbye to me now because I'm not going to leave him and I'm not going to step foot in your house again ever without him. I love him. He loves me. We're together. Forever. Deal with it."

"Vincenzio -- are you going to let him talk to me like that?"

"No, Mama." Papi turned to him. "Pablito -- Pablo. Please, show your mother to our room and then I would like you to take me to Marc, si?"

"I'm not sure that's a good idea, Papi."

"Por favor, Pablo. It is important to me."

"Okay, Papi." He got up and showed Mama to the guestroom, face stiff. He didn't know what Papi was up to, but he didn't want Marc anymore upset than he already was -- it was Christmas! "I don't want you upsetting him more, Papi."

"I don't intend to."

"Okay." Pablo knocked on the bedroom door. "Marc? Caro? Can me and Papi come in for a minute?"

He heard Marc's sigh, heard the bed creak. "Sure, babe. Let me grab my glasses." It took a second, then Marc opened the door, cheeks red, eyes hidden. "I guess I should apologize, huh?"

It was Papi who answered. "No, I don't think so."

Pablo looked over to his father, catching his breath.

"You'll have to forgive Anna. She truly believes two men that it is a sin and she cannot look past that and she worries for her boy's eternal soul. But she was rude when you have been very kind to us. I appreciate the effort, si?" Pablo looked at his Papi in shock -- it was one of the longest speeches he'd ever heard. "You make Pablo happy and that is most important." Papi took Marc's hand and Pablo's hand and put them together. "You make each other happy. That is all I wanted to say."

Marc squeezed his hand, held on tight. "Thank you. I love him."

"Si. I knew that was true when I found out why you left."

Pablo let go of Marc's hand and hugged his father tight. "Thank you, Papi."

Papi grunted and nodded, patting his back awkwardly.

"What are we going to do about Mama?"

"I'll talk to tu madre. And I'll talk to the priest. We have a new one. He is young and has many new ideas. Maybe he will talk to her." Pablo nodded. "You should find us a flight home, Pablo. We have ruined your Christmas enough."

"Oh, no. I'll stay in here. Pablo should get to enjoy you both..."

Pablo shook his head. "No, Marc. Papi's right. This is *our* first Christmas together in thirteen years. I don't want to spend it with you holed up in here."

Papi nodded. "I'm sorry, mihijo."

"I know, Papi. Maybe next year..."

Papi shrugged and patted his hand and went.

Marc stepped back into the bedroom, face just grey, hands moving over the statue of him.

He went in, closing the door behind him and went over to Marc, wrapping his arms around his lover's waist and resting his head on Marc's back. "I'm sorry, Caro. I shouldn't have invited them. I just thought... I thought if they gave you a chance they'd like you. Mama never did give you the chance though, did she?"

"I tried. I... I spent my last minute of sight alone. I lost everything and survived and..." Marc sobbed softly, fingers moving over the statue.

"Oh, Caro." He tugged insistently, turning Marc around. He took the long fingers in his hands and brought them to his face. "I'm right here. Right here. Living and breathing and warm and in your arms. Touch *me*."

Marc moaned, hands moving over his face, eyes and mouth open, throat working. "Oh. Oh, babe. I love you. I'm sorry. I tried so hard. I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, Caro." God, it broke his heart that Marc was taking any of this on himself. "This is mi Mama. Even Papi gave us his blessing. She's going to have to find her own way now to accept us, to accept you. Because I won't do it again, I won't be separated from you."

Marc nodded, the act of touching him, seeing him, a ritual that calmed his lover, centered Marc. "Never again, babe."

He cuddled in close and tugged Marc down for a soft, deep kiss. "I need to find them a flight home and arrange for the limo to drive them back. Then we can have the rest of our Christmas, okay, Caro?"

"I'm sorry, babe. I didn't mean to get nasty. I was trying so hard to be good."

"She started it. And if you hadn't said something I would have. And just maybe, it was easier on all of us because it was you yelling at her and not me, you know? I don't know if Papi would have been so supportive if I'd called her an interfering, cold-hearted bitch." They were strong words, but they'd been on the tip of his tongue -- she made him that angry.

Marc snorted. "You have a point and I haven't had a fist-fight in years to protect my lover."

He hugged Marc tight. "I love you, Caro."

"I know. I love you." Marc settled on the bed, sort of curling up. "I'm going to stay in here until they're gone, babe. Then we can have supper."

"I'll be back as soon as I've made the arrangements and let them know. I don't want to spend anymore time with her than I have to." He stroked Marc's cheek and then went out to make his phone calls.

He tried very hard not to hate his Mama.

The party was loud, crowded, and he was in full Mac Allen mode -- all black, no shoes, sitting still in the gallery while the world happened around him. The Hawthorn Gallery's New Year's eve party was a huge soiree, cameras and lights and Bev introducing Pablo to the entire world. Hell, this one night might make Pablo's career explode. One back nine years ago did his. Bev had promised to bring Pablo back around before midnight, so he got his kiss.

He drank another martini, the sound and the booze disorienting him, keeping him still and off-balance.

Warm hands slid along his waist. "Oh, God, Marc, make her stop."

"Babe? What's Bev doing to you?" He grinned, leaned towards his lover.

"She's just so... *on* and *pushy*. I don't need to meet everyone -- I want to be with you." He could hear the pout in Pablo's voice.

"Oh." He swayed, reaching up and chuckling. "Okay. Let's escape. Call us a cab." A little voice in his head said, "We're a cab!" and made him giggle.

"Where are we going to go?" Pablo asked, helping to steady him.

"Hmmm? Somewhere with a bed, babe. So we can get busy."

"A really fancy hotel? With champagne and bubbly hot water to sit in? You got your credit card on you, Caro?"

"Ask Bevvie if she's got us reservations somewhere, yeah? She's good about that... Oh, and Piet's in the back. I need him." Every time he nodded, the universe shifted under his feet.

"Oh, lets go get Piet and ditch Bev's plans." Pablo giggled softly. "Let's run away."

"Really? Want to?" Oh, God, he'd always wanted to just go, but he had been scared. Now, though? Yeah.

"Yeah, I do. Come on, it'll be fun." Pablo grabbed his hand and tugged him through the noise and people to the back room where Piet was waiting patiently.

He got hold of Piet's harness, let Pablo help him get his coat on. "Lead on."

"Cool." Pablo grabbed his elbow and it wasn't long before they were out of the noise and in the quiet of the elevator, going down and out. Pablo giggled. "We've escaped!"

"Woo! Is the street busy? Is it snowing? Are there lights?"

"It is snowing -- great big flakes like it's a snow globe or something! Oh, how about taking a carriage ride? I can see them a couple blocks up!"

"Oh, yeah. Don't let me fall." He could feel the flakes on his cheeks, his head.

"Don't worry, Caro, I've got you." They walked through the snow, Pablo describing the buildings and the lights. "Oh, the carriage has bells on it. Hi there -- will you take us for a ride?"

"Of course! Climb on up -- you want to go all the way around the park or only partway?"

"We'll take a ride to the fanciest hotel you go by." Pablo was giggling and sounded so happy.

He snuggled in, nuzzling Pablo's cheek. God, the air was cold, crisp, making him shiver. A blanket was thrown over their legs and Pablo's arm went around his waist, tugging him in close as Piet settled at his feet. It was fairly quiet, most of the revelers at Times Square or in bars and clubs, the clip clop of the horses' feet loud and crisp. He could hear the beating of Pablo's heart, feel his lover's hair soft on his cheek. "What do you see, babe?"

"It's like a fairy tale, Caro. There's hardly anyone around and the snow's falling all around and on the left is Central Park and it's all trees and grass and stuff."

"Yeah?" He leaned in, listening to Pablo describe, explain, falling in love with the warm voice over and over again.

The carriage drew to a stop. "This place good for you fellas?"

"Oh yeah -- it looks great, thank you!" Pablo sounded excited. "It looks grand, Marc. Like something really old fashioned, but ritzy old fashioned not dilapidated old fashioned."

"Oh, neat." They all tumbled down, Piet pressed against his leg. "Is there a chandelier?"

"I don't know -- I guess we'll find out. I hope they have a room!" Pablo led him across the street and in no time they were out of the cold. "There *is* a chandelier!" Pablo giggled softly.

"Yeah? Cool! With dangly bits?"

"Marc!" Then those giggles started again, louder now. "Yes." Pablo was still giggling as they came to the check in desk. "Have you got any rooms with hot tubs and champagne?"

"There are no hot tubs at this establishment, sir."

"Oh. Well that's still okay, isn't it Marc? It's like 11:30 -- we can't really be choosy at this point."

"A big bath tub will do. Along with a big bed." He was grinning ear-to-ear.

"We'll take your most expensive room. And a big bottle of champagne, please. And it'll mean a big tip if the waiter brings it up right away so we can toast in the new year."

"Of course, sir and how will you be paying?" Pablo took care of the details while he listened to the muted sounds coming from the carpeted lobby. It kind of felt old world, old money. Smelled that way, too. Piet was warm, steady against him, the wind from the opening and closing door bitter cold.

It wasn't long at all before they were headed up the elevator, Pablo's hand squeezing his, that soft giggle sounding.

"Smells fancy." He slid his hand along the banister.

"Yeah, it is. It costs to breathe the air in here." More giggles sounded, Pablo pushing against him. "We're on the 24th floor."

"Good thing we have money." He wrapped his arms around Pablo's waist, rubbing against him. "Happy New Years, babe."

"Happy New Year, Caro." Pablo's square hands slid around the back of his head and tugged him down for a kiss.

Oh, yeah. He hummed, tongue sliding into Pablo's mouth, fucking those sweet lips, tasting wine and spice and pleasure. Pablo whimpered softly, pressing against him. It was the soft bell of the elevator that brought them apart.

"Is this our floor?" He reached out, took Pablo's arm with his free hand.

"Yeah. Come on, let's go get our champagne and make love and ring in the new year properly." Pablo led him down the hall and opened the door for them. "Oh, it's nice, Marc. Very ritzy -- it looks like the furniture is covered in velvet, I bet it feels awesome."

"Yeah? Show me?" He unhooked Piet and handed over some doggy biscuits, reached for Pablo.

Pablo led him around, guiding his steps and putting his hand on each piece of furniture -- they were all soft and cushiony. The knock interrupted them just as they made it to the bedroom. "Oh, that'll be the champagne, you stay here a moment and I'll get it."

"Okay, babe." He grinned, started stripping, pulling off coat and turtleneck, toeing off his shoes. God, he was happy. Really. Deeply.

Pablo was back moments later. "Oh, naked Marc -- my favorite!"

Marc laughed, wiggling his hips, cock bouncing.

Pablo gasped softly. "Oh, Marc." His lover pressed against him.

He pulled at Pablo's sweater, hands sliding over the warm skin. "Hi. Hi, babe." Last year? He'd gotten shit faced and thrown up in a cab. This year? Better. So much better.

Pablo moaned and arched against his hands. "Hi, Caro. God, I love you."

"I love you." He pushed his hands into Pablo's jeans, searching for skin. Pablo's hands tangled with his, helping him get the pants down and off. He moaned, hands squeezing Pablo's ass, tugging them together, cock rubbing Pablo's belly. Pablo made those sweet, soft noises of his, hands sliding, finding his hips and tugging him. He gasped, hips jerking, moaning into Pablo's mouth. "Gonna miss midnight."

"This is more important," murmured Pablo, rubbing them hard together.

"Yes. God, promise me we'll have this every New Years from now on."

"Yes," gasped Pablo. "New tradition. Every year. Oh!" Pablo shuddered and heat splashed along his belly.

"Every..." He arched, the scent of Pablo's need strong, sharp. "Babe!"

Pablo's lips pressed against his again, breath pushing into his mouth. He inhaled, breathing Pablo in, seed spraying from him in a rush. Pablo's arms looped around his back, sliding along his spine. "Oh, Caro, I love you."

"Love you." Marc took a deep breath, body tingling. "You're here. Real. My new year's resolution is to love you forever."

"Oh, and mine is to make you look as happy every day as you do right now." Pablo kissed him. "Happy New Year's, Caro."

"Happy New Years, babe." He swayed, giggled. "Bed? Bubbly?"

"Oh yeah. That sounds like the best plan." Pablo giggled and grabbed his hand, tugging him until they found the bed.

They bounced together, limbs tangling together. Happy. He was happy.

It really was the best New Year's ever.

Chapter Fifteen

He ached -- fingers, arms, legs, even his stomach muscles were tight and sore. He'd been working for days -- he wasn't even sure how many anymore, one just melded into another into another. He hadn't gotten so lost in the shapes of the clay in months, not since Pablo came back, really. But Bev had given him a firm talking to and then inspiration had hit and then he moved into the studio. Literally.

After three nights of getting up and down to work, he'd taken pity on Pablo and started sleeping on the sofa in the studio. Marge stocked the little fridge without a word and took the piles of filthy, clay-stiff clothes away, replacing them with more shorts and underwear, just leaving them on the windowsill where he knew to look for them.

He'd done two pieces already and was half-way through the third when his fingers brushed the face of his watch, his muscles screaming for relief. 6:00 am. Fuck, no wonder he was tired. He stretched, wondering idly what day it was.

A tentative knock sounded, so soft he almost didn't hear it.

"Yeah? Come on in." His voice shocked him, raspy and so coarse, as if his throat had been rubbed with sandpaper.

"Hey Marc." Pablo's voice was still sleep-soft and laced with concern. "It's been almost two weeks, Caro. I miss you."

"Oh! Two weeks? So long?" He shook his head, trying to clear it. "I... I'm sorry, babe. I get lost in here and Marge never bothers me, just keeps refilling the coffeemaker and leaving tuna salad." He smiled, moving towards where Pablo's voice had been. "I miss you, too, Pablo."

"I didn't want to disturb you, but... well I started to worry and," Pablo's hands slid against his face, the warm naked -- oh yes, definitely naked -- body pressing close. "And I was lonely for you."

"Oh..." His moan didn't even begin to hold the hunger he felt coursing through him. He nuzzled into the touch, drinking the sensation in, his hands reaching out to touch automatically. He realized right before he contacted the warm skin that he was covered in dried clay. "I'm a mess, babe. Clay all over me."

"Yeah, you are," Pablo agreed with a soft giggle. "I hear they've invented something to take care of that -- it's called a shower."

"Oh, I remember those... water, right? Comes out of the wall?" He grinned, chuckling softly, turning his head to brush a wet, opened-mouth kiss over Pablo's palm. "I think you might need to come with me, so I don't get lost, confused."

Pablo nodded. "Yes, and I think I should come in with you so you remember how to use the soap."

"Absolutely." He licked along the line of Pablo's thumb, suckling and nipping at the tip. "Come on. Bathroom. Need to touch you, babe. Need to feel you." Pablo shivered against him a moment and then his lover's hand slid down his arm and grabbed his, Pablo tugging him along gently. He followed easily, soaking up the feeling of Pablo's fingers twined with his, the warm scent of his lover. "I love you, Pablo."

"Oh, that works out well, 'cause I love you, too." His hand was raised to Pablo's mouth, soft kisses dropped onto his knuckles.

"Mmm... good." They moved through their bedroom, he could smell the cinnamon of the candles on the headboard. Then the bathroom with its cool tiles. Pablo's hand fell away from his and the water began to run, Marc sliding easily out of his shorts and moving to the sink to brush his teeth. He took his time, knowing there would be a wait as Pablo found the perfect temperature.

He was just finishing up as Pablo's arms slid around his waist, his lover pressing up against his back. "Oh, I see I'm getting the full Mac Allen treatment."

"Nope." He put the toothbrush away. "You'll have to make do with Marc MacAllen. He's not as fabulous or as witty, but he loves you with all he is." He rocked, bending his knees until Pablo's cock nudged against his ass. "And needs you and wants you."

Pablo moaned, cock sliding along his cleft, the tip leaving a slick trail behind. "You keep talking and moving like that and I'm going to take you right here," Pablo whispered against his spine.

"Promise?" He pushed back and down with his hips, sliding Pablo's cock along his cleft.

"Oh, God, Marc..." Pablo nudged his feet apart and bent him forward. He could feel Pablo's cock press against his opening, hot and hard and right. "Do you want me?" Pablo asked.

He chuckled, head rolling back on his shoulders. "Only slightly more than I want to keep breathing, babe. Fuck me. Let me feel you."

"Oh..." Pablo groaned and then Pablo was pressing in, solid and full, going deep. He gripped the edge of the sink, gasping as Pablo filled him. He pressed back, eager and hungry for the intensity of his lover moving inside his body. Pablo was gasping against his back, forehead pressed against his spine. "Oh, Caro, you feel so good."

"Oh, yeah, babe. Need you. Need this." He nodded, tightening his muscles around Pablo's cock, squeezing him tight. Pablo moaned and then began to move, hands braced on the counter next to his hips. His lover's cock rocked steadily in and out of his body.

"Yes." His head dipped, meeting each thrust with a push of his hips, body arching and needing.

Pablo was making those little noises he liked so much, and soft grunts as his cock pushed inside Marc's body. They rocked together, heat and pleasure filling him, making his balls ache, his head swim. One of Pablo's hands slid across his belly and down to circle his cock, pulling in time with the constant thrusts. He sobbed, pushing first into Pablo's hand and then onto Pablo's cock, again and again. Each motion drove him higher, farther, his body caught within ecstasy. Pablo's thumb stroked over the sensitive head of his cock and he shattered, coming into Pablo's hand with a cry.

Pablo stayed still, pressed tightly against him, as he rode the aftershocks encouraged by Pablo's hands sliding sweetly over his cock. Then Pablo continued to thrust, hands finding his hips and pulling him back onto the sweet invasion. It wasn't long before Pablo's cry filled the air, high and sweet as Pablo filled him with heat.

"Oh, so good, babe. So good." He wriggled his hips gently, rubbing against Pablo with a soft moan.

"Mm, yeah, Marc." Pablo's forehead rested against his back again, his lover's gasps sending air tickling up and down his spine.

He leaned down, resting his head on his hands, exhaustion beginning to whisper in his muscles. "Think there's any hot water left?"

Pablo slipped from his body, hand sliding down along his spine in a gentle caress. "Yeah, Caro, it's still hot." Then Pablo was helping him up and leading him over to the tub.

"Oh... 's good." He groaned as he stepped in and the hot water hit him, beating against his sore muscles and releasing any tension the orgasm hadn't banished.

Pablo's hands flowed over him, slick with soap, stopping now and then to scrub with blunt nailed fingertips. He stretched and shifted, groaning and whispering his appreciation for the sweet care. Pablo didn't linger, didn't turn the washing into loving, they'd wasted too much of the hot water for that, but a soft kiss was placed on each of his feet and the tip of his cock and then Pablo turned off the water.

"Mm... thank you, babe. You're so good to me." He reached out, searching for his lover.

Pablo stepped into his arms, sliding wet and slippery against him. "Come on, Caro. Let me dry you and take you to bed. You need some sleep."

"Sleep? Are you suggesting that I am too old to live on coffee and creative energy?" His words were broken by a huge yawn and he shivered, snuggling against Pablo's skin.

Pablo leaned away and then a towel circled his back, Pablo rubbing him dry. "I'm suggesting two weeks is too long for me to be expected to sleep without my lover. I'm getting old too, you know -- set in my ways. And those ways include you in my bed." Pablo finished the pronouncement with a kiss, tongue sliding warmly across his lips.

"That means you're coming too? You'll sleep with me?" If he'd been less tired, he'd have been more embarrassed by the raw need in his voice.

"For as long as I can keep you there, yes." Pablo nuzzled against him and then took his hand again, leading him back out of the bathroom and to their bed. His eyes filled with tears as he sank onto the soft mattress. He held his arms out, needing Pablo's warmth and weight and presence to anchor him.

Pablo slipped into bed with him, pulling the covers up. Soft lips pressed against his eyes and then his nose and then his mouth. "Sh, Caro. Just sleep." Curling up against him, head on his shoulder, Pablo nuzzled against his skin.

His hand found Pablo's face, fingers tracing in the soft pattern that comforted him, time and time again, letting him see his lover. By the time his fingers reached the softness of Pablo's hair, he was already dreaming about swimming in a deep pool, Pablo floating and smiling and young beside him.

He stormed into the studio and locked the door behind him, so furious that it would only be seconds before the tears started. Most days it didn't matter. Most days he didn't think about it.

Okay, sometimes he forgot about it and most of the time, he dealt.

But still, there were days like today, days where the simplest fucking thing would go wrong and he got lost and confused and had to call Marge because if he didn't call and talk to someone and figure out where the fuck he was, he'd go crazy. That's how it had worked for years, the way it *was*.

But today when he'd called, Pablo'd answered the phone and, in that second, he realized he'd forgotten that Pablo was going to be there, that the one person in the universe he needed to believe him strong and capable and stable would answer the motherfucking telephone when he was almost in tears and really wiggled out.

He'd faked it well enough and Pablo had given the phone to Marge, who'd talked to him and calmed him down and settled him well enough to figure out where he was and how to get home. Home. Where Pablo was going to be worried and stressed out. Home where he couldn't handle it. Home, where he was a big chicken shit and just locked himself in the studio and banged clay and cried in sheer fucking frustration.

Pablo was going to want to kick his ass.

He had no idea how long he'd been at it when the knock came. Soft and tentative, he wouldn't have heard it if he hadn't been expecting it. "Marc? Caro? Let me in, please?"

He sighed and nodded, wiping at his cheeks and finding his glasses. "Yeah, babe. Be right there."

He took a couple of deep breaths and made himself relax, made himself chill the fuck out and go unlock the door.

"Hey." Pablo's voice was soft, a current of worry running through it. Soft fingers slid along his arm, Pablo stepping close. "Everything all right?"

"Yeah. Just... just a rough fucking morning, you know?" Marc breathed in deep, letting the soap and shampoo and scent of Pablo wash all through him. "God, you smell good."

Pablo giggled just a little and gave him a quick hug. Then gentle fingers were sliding along his cheeks, wiping away moisture. "Do you want to talk about it, or do you want to smell me some more?"

"I want..." He turned his face into Pablo's hand, taking another deep breath. Warm here, a hint of bread from lunch, a little hint of citrus too. He took a tiny lick. Tangerines.

"Mm. Yeah, I want that, too." Pablo stroked Marc's belly with his free hand.

He started to relax, to lose his anger and frustration in the face of Pablo's love and the need they built. He moaned, stretching under the touches, tongue sliding over the thin, warm skin of Pablo's wrist. "Oh, babe..."

"I think you should lock the door again," Pablo murmured.

"Mm..." He reached out with his free hand and pushed the lock, the click almost lost in Pablo's moan as his lips moved, soft and easy.

"Feels good, Marc." Pablo's free hand continued to move, finding its way beneath his t-shirt to stroke over skin.

"Yeah. Yeah, it does." He kept licking and touching and smelling, free hand finding Pablo's waistband and working open the button. "Wanna go make out on the sofa? There's even a pillow from the last time I napped in here."

"Yeah, I do." Pablo was breathless already, making those sweet gasps and soft noises.

"Oh good. Me too." They moved together, settling on the old worn sofa, pushing into each other's arms and sharing a long, deep kiss. Pablo's mouth was warm and soft and wet and open wide to him, his lover's tongue sliding along his own, moving against his skin.

He straddled Pablo's hips, framing his lover's face with his fingers, looking. He would kiss this man forever. Hours and hours and years. Please. Thank you. It seemed Pablo felt the same way. His lover's hands slid along his back, touching lightly as Pablo's mouth met his again and again, lips caressing, tongues touching. Nibbling, biting, pulling, breathing the same air and pushing words of love and pleasure into each other's mouths.

The passion and heat and need were wonderful, overwhelming, but this? The love and touching and good, sweet, honest pleasure? This was life. Real. Theirs.

Pablo's cock was hard and hot beneath his ass, but Pablo made no effort to move them past kissing. He unbuttoned Pablo's shirt, let his hands play on Pablo's skin. He didn't try to arouse, didn't pinch at nipples or head south to cup the hard cock. He just touched, enjoyed the warm, smooth planes of his lover.

"God, I love you, Marc. Love your touch and your taste and the way you feel against my skin." Pablo's fingers slid beneath his t-shirt again and pushed it up, their mouths parting long enough to get it over his head and then Pablo's lips met his own again, loving him slowly.

He sighed into the kiss, just letting himself sink against Pablo and enjoy the feel of their bodies together. God, it was unreal, how Pablo could touch him, kiss him and make the universe disappear, make things easy, good. Their noses bumped and Pablo giggled, hands moving behind his head to pull him close, their noses rubbing together gently, on purpose this time.

Marc chuckled, fingers tracing the lines at the corners of Pablo's eyes, watching the pleasure there. "I love you."

Pablo nodded, smile growing. "I know. I love you, too."

"I know." They laughed together and, fuck, it felt good.

Pablo's fingers traced his lips. "Your mouth is swollen, all red and thick." Pablo's tongue slid across his lips.

"Mm... well-kissed. Look's all the rage this season." He let his lips part, offering Pablo more of a taste.

Pablo's tongue slid into his mouth, Pablo's lips not pressing against his own, his lover teasing and tickling. Warm, blunt fingers slid over his skin, leaving trails of heat along his chest and belly. He moaned, focus captured by that hot, slick tongue. His slow rocking against Pablo stilled, waiting for the next touch, the next sweet shock of pleasure.

Pablo breathed into his mouth for a moment and then that heat disappeared from near his mouth and returned around his nipple, tongue lapping at the tip.

"Pablo!" He leaned back, letting his hips press harder against Pablo's, arching up into Pablo's tongue. Pablo played with his nipple, tongue sliding across the hard little nub, teeth closing over it but not biting, lips grabbing and tugging.

"Babe. Oh, yeah. Yes. Please." He was moaning and laughing and rocking, hands on Pablo's knees, holding on tight.

"Oh, God, you're so hot. I wish you could see yourself, see the way your body responds to my touch." Pablo dropped kisses along his breast bone, now with teeth, now with tongue, now barely lingering at all.

"Just want to see you, babe. Give anything for that." He shivered, thighs tightening and then spreading farther, body sliding.

Pablo chuckled. "I look the same as I always did -- you aren't missing much." Pablo's hands found his ass, helped him find a rhythm that slid their denim covered cocks together.

"No. You're different. I *know*. Still beautiful. Still mine, but different." He gasped, groaning low, little tingles rushing up his spine.

"So you *can* see me." Pablo's tongue teased the tip of one of his nipples again, one of his lover's hands sliding between them and working at their buttons and zippers.

He groaned. This was a perpetual argument, one he never resolved and one he couldn't win. Not like this. Not with Pablo touching him. Pablo's fingers teased his jeans open, opened his own, bringing their hard, hot flesh together. Pablo's hands slid around his waist, touching him as their hips rolled together.

"Oh. Love. Babe..." He grabbed Pablo's neck, arching and leaning into the thrust. "So good."

Pablo made a soft noise and brought their lips together, kissing him deep. He was going to come, going to shatter into a zillion pieces, going to scream. Marc shuddered, lips parting wide. "I love you, Marc."

He came, shuddering in Pablo's arms.

"Oh, God! Marc!" Pablo gasped and came, heat spraying against him.

He rode out Pablo's orgasm, tongue sliding deep, head spinning. Pablo latched onto his tongue, pulling on it. Oh, God. He whimpered, cock twitching against Pablo's belly, a shiver shaking him. Pablo's hands slid down into the back of his jeans, fingers sliding along his crack, all the way down to his hole. He groaned, pressing back against those fingers, rocking and sliding their slick skin together.

"Want to be inside you, Marc. I want to feel you all around me."

"Yes. Please, babe. Yes." He groaned and nodded, thighs spreading further.

"You're going to have to get up, Caro, let me take your jeans off."

"Are you trying to confuse me with logic, babe?" He chuckled, nuzzling and nibbling at Pablo's lips.

Pablo giggled. "I'm just trying to get you naked enough to fuck."

"Oh, cool." He took another kiss that dissolved into laughter, Pablo giggling into his mouth as he pushed Marc to the side. "Pushy lover."

"Hungry," Pablo corrected, half lying on him, half dragging his pants off.

"Love you." He helped, ass sliding on the leather sofa, clothes flying as they came off. They did this right, Marge'd be gone before they left this room.

Pablo was licking him clean, tongue soft, wet, hot against his curls and his belly and his cock.

"Mm... babe. So good." He sat up, curling around Pablo's head.

"I love you, Marc. Love the way you taste, the way you feel."

"Come here and love me. Let me feel you."

Pablo pushed him back down onto the couch, soft, sucking kisses climbing up his chest to his mouth. "Gonna love you," Pablo murmured.

"Yes. Forever. Love you." He arched, spreading his legs and rubbing against the slick heat of Pablo's skin.

Pablo's fingers teased at his ass and then were suddenly at his mouth, breaking their kiss and pushing in. He fastened around them and pulled hard, sucking and wetting and biting those fingers. Pablo moaned and whimpered and then pulled his fingers free. They slid away with a pop, making Pablo moan.

Then they were pressing against him, hot and wet and filling him slowly.

"Oh... Feels good. Want you." He lifted his knees, propping one leg on the back of the sofa. "Don't stop, babe."

Pablo dropped a soft kiss on his lips, fingers sliding in and out now, with a long, slow rhythm. "Not planning to, Marc."

"Oh... oh, yes. Good. Good." He pushed into each touch, riding Pablo's fingers, cock full and throbbing again.

Joining their mouths again, Pablo kissed him for a long time, fingers keeping him on edge. They rocked together, Marc's back slick on the leather, ass sliding and thrusting.

He was flying, aching, wanting and needing and getting and... "Pablo. Babe. Please!"

"Okay, Marc. Sh, it's okay, I've got you." Pablo's fingers disappeared and then Pablo's hot, hard cock was pushing against him and then into him, all the way in, not stopping until Pablo's hips were pressed tight against the insides of his thighs, his ass. He forgot himself, forgot about Marge and being quiet and adult and anything but the gasping scream that proved how good it was, how much he needed, how much he loved.

"Oh God, yes! Marc. Oh." Pablo was babbling and murmuring and gasping and whimpering.

"Yes. Fuck me. Feels good. Fuck me, babe." He planted one foot on the sofa, one foot on the wall, pushing into Pablo over and over.

"Yes, Marc, yes." Pablo thrust hard and deep and constant, the small whimpers and soft groans he made becoming louder, coming more often.

Oh... Oh, yeah. His hands reached out, looking at his lover's body, feeling the passion on that face. Pablo's lips caught at his fingers, nipping and licking, sucking one in and biting the pad. His hips never stilled, never lost their solid rhythm.

The couch was squeaking, rocking against the wall, his ass sliding. "So good. More. Good."

"Harder?" Pablo asked. "Like this?" Pablo moved inside him, thrust harder, pushed deeper, the head of Pablo's cock sliding over his gland with every shove.

Marc began crying out with each thrust, grinding down on that sweet cock, body growing tight and hungry and so close. That's when Pablo's hand slid around his cock, pulling in time with each thrust. He came with a loud cry, ass clamping down on Pablo's cock, shaking hard.

"Oh God! Marc!" Pablo jerked into him several more times and then came, filling him with heat.

"Babe. So good. Love you." He was clinging, he knew he was, but Pablo's skin felt so good, so right.

Pablo nuzzled him and rested against him, solid and warm. "Love you, Marc. So much."

He nodded, cheek rubbing against Pablo's shoulder. "I know. Thank you."

"For loving you? You don't have to thank me for that, Marc -- you just need to love me back."

"For loving me. For knocking on the door. For letting me know." Marc nestled close, cheeks heating. "For being here."

"There isn't anywhere else for me to be," Pablo murmured, kissing him.

Marc nodded again, relaxing into the sofa, beneath Pablo's warmth. "Good. Can't imagine doing without you anymore."

A slight tremor went through Pablo. "You don't have to, Marc. I'm right here and I'm not going anywhere."

"Even if I get lost and wig out and call in a panic and Marge isn't here?"

"As long as you don't mind when I do the same -- I hate being lost, I can only imagine how much worse it is for you." He got another soft kiss. "You know, it's all right to need people, Marc. It's all right to need me. In fact, I kind of like that you do, 'cause then I'm not the only needy person here."

He felt his cheeks heat. He'd never considered -- not once, not even once considered that Pablo might get lost, that Pablo wouldn't find him weak, that... "I just. I want to be strong for you, to be your equal. I fell asleep on the bus. I got lost and got scared and it would be easy to come home and lock the door and hide."

"Easy, but lonely if I'm not on the same side of that door as you, you know? And falling asleep on the bus! I did that once -- on a greyhound and suddenly we're two stops past mine -- a hundred miles at least -- and I didn't have any money on me to buy a ticket back to where I was supposed to be. I thought they were gonna toss me in jail -- 'cause I couldn't pay them for the extra two stops either!"

"Oh, God!" He reached up, stroking through the thick hair. "You must have been terrified!"

"Yeah, but I made a phone call and there was someone on the other end of the phone who calmed me down and wired me enough money to get home." Pablo nuzzled into the touches. "I felt like such a damn idiot, but when I got home all I got were hugs and smiles and told how happy everyone was that I was there."

"I... I'm glad you're here. I could get used to needing you here, to you being at the other end of the phone. I get scared you will get overwhelmed, that you'll figure out you're in love with a blind guy."

"Oh, Marc, I hate to break it to you -- but I already figured that part out."

He grinned. "Yeah? Always said you were a smart one, babe."

There was that sweet giggle he loved so much. "Yeah, that's me, Pablo Cervantes, boy genius -- you can't hide a thing like you being blind from me forever." Pablo sobered suddenly. "And you can't scare me away with it either. I knew what I was getting into when I moved in with you, Marc."

"I want to see you. It hurts me inside, to have you right here and not be able to look at you." He kept touching, letting the closeness and intimacy ease him. "Do you know what the last thing I remember seeing is? The pattern on a blanket -- it was red and blue and green and wavy and there was a cigarette burn in one corner and it was fading. I wasted my last look."

"Only if all you remember is your last one, Caro."

"I wanted it to be you." His eyes filled with tears, fingers still moving. "God, I wanted it to be you."

"I don't know, Marc, considering what you do for a living? I'd say it was of me."

Marc grinned, nodding. Yes. He knew his Pablo, knew every single curve and angle. "My muse. My hands know you -- every time I worked, you were right there."

"And you seeing me with your hands is what brought me home to you. Seems to have sorted itself out rather nicely, Marc. Old blankets notwithstanding." Pablo giggled a little. "And I remember that blanket, Marc -- it's the only one you took with you and it was my favorite one. We made love for the first time on that blanket."

"You remember?" Marc held tight, buried his face in Pablo's shoulder, breathing deep. "Smelled like you for weeks. Marge called it my security blanket. It's in a box, under the bed."

"Of course I remember, Marc." Pablo snuggled into him. "I can close my eyes and see it all. Can you do that, Marc? Can you still see the things you used to be able to see?"

He nodded. "I dream... when I dream, I can see. I dream about you, about your face. I paint you over and over again."

He could feel Pablo's smile against his skin. "I don't think it matters so much how you see, as long as you look with your heart, you know?"

"I think so long as I have you in my life, I'll figure it out. So long as you stay." So long as the passion and giggle and hands and hope and too good to be real love stayed where it belonged. So long as Pablo loved him.

Pablo pushed against him heavily. "Feel that -- the immovable object."

Marc chuckled and pushed back. "Irresistible force."

Pablo giggled. "See, we belong together and aren't going anywhere."

"Perfect." Marc bit at Pablo's shoulder. "After the noise we made, we'd be better off staying in here until suppertime than facing Marge and her evil glare of death."

Pablo's sweet giggles got louder. "That must be some glare, if you're aware of it."

"Oh, I can *feel* it melting my bones." His fingers found the corner of Pablo's mouth and he leaned up, taking a kiss. "I love you, Mr. Cervantes."

"Mm..." Pablo bent and gave him another. "And I love you, Mr. MacAllen."

"I know." He wiggled until he found the perfect spot, where arms and legs and bellies were settled. He sighed happily when he found it, relaxing completely.

"Yeah, perfect," Pablo murmured softly, breath brushing over his skin.

"Mm... yeah." He nodded, settled and happy. He could feel everything, the weight of his lover, the touch of breath. Everything.

God, it was good.

He was still blind. It still mattered. But so did the man in his arms and what they shared.

A home. A bed. A life.

Their life together.

Chapter Sixteen

Pablo was watching some weird independent film on HBO. He was paying attention, he *was*. Not that it was making much difference, he was totally lost. There was a girl and a guy and another guy and two other girls but he couldn't figure out whether they were supposed to be together or enemies or what the stupid ring everyone was searching for really was, except that he was pretty sure it wasn't an actual ring. And in that regard, he was one up on all the people in the film. Pablo sighed and turned off the television. He wasn't going to watch it if he couldn't figure out what was going on, even if he was bored as heck. He got up and wandered to the window, watching the snow fall, slowly covering the car.

Suddenly Marc's laughter floated down the hall from the studio, warm and alive and utterly unexpected. He headed that way, he didn't like to disturb Marc while he was working, but he was unable to resist his lover's happiness.

The door to the studio was open a crack and he could see Marc, covered in dried clay, flat on his belly, playing tug-or-war with Piet and a knotted up pair of old socks. Piet was growling, tail thumping, and Marc was chuckling, ass being dragged across the floor by the big lab.

Pablo giggled and leaned against the door, watching. Piet was having a ball, pulling Marc around, relishing the attention.

"You evil, black-hearted beast. Coming in here, interrupting me. Bringing me *toys* and distracting me and making me *laugh*! You *fiend*!"

Pablo's giggles got louder, his smile wide. God, it was good to see Marc laughing.

Marc lifted his head. "I hear another victim, Piet-baby. Sic him!"

Piet growled, shaking the socks and ignoring Marc completely.

"He knows who buys him those doggy treats." That just made Marc laugh harder, losing his grip on the socks as Piet bounded over him, tossing the socks in the air and barking, triumphant.

Grinning, he went over to Marc and helped him up. "Caro, you're covered in clay."

"I've heard that's a hazard of the sculpting job, babe." Marc was giggling, cheeks flushed, eyes bright.

He giggled too, Marc's laughter infectious.

"You done with your movie? I wandered by once, heard the TV. Sounded dull as fuck." Marc leaned in, licking at his smile, long nose stroking his cheek.

"It was inscrutable." He grinned, tongue playing with Marc's.

"Is that good?"

"No, it's another word for dull as fuck."

Marc's laugh tickled his lips. "Ah, good to know."

"So... are you planning on going back to work?"

"You planning on going back to pretend to watch the boring as fuck movie?"

"No, I turned it off. Waste of time, you know?" He nibbled at Marc's bottom lip. "I was in the market for something else to do when I heard you laughing."

"Mmm... promising. How about a nice long shower, then a nice long blowjob. Then we'll order pizza and work on breaking the bed. Then make giant snow penises before hitting the jacuzzi." Each suggestion was broken by a long, sweet kiss.

He was giggling by the end of them, and hard and wanting. He pressed close. "I think that sounds like a plan."

"Yeah. I'm good at those. Plans, that is." Marc started heading them out of the studio, towards the bathroom.

"You're pretty good at a lot of things." He waited until they were at the bathroom before he started stripping Marc's clothes, the dried clay dropping noisily to the floor.

"Marge is going to shoot me for messing up her bathroom." Marc's cock was full, dark, curving up towards the flat belly.

"Our bathroom," he corrected idly, one hand stroking along that tempting belly, the other wrapping around Marc's heat.

"Oh, yeah. Our bathroom." Marc shivered, stepping closer. "Feels good, babe. Love when you touch me."

"That's handy because I do love touching you." He leaned forward and took one of Marc's nipples into his mouth.

"Pablo..." His name was whispered, the nub of flesh tightening under his tongue.

He hummed, nipping softly. That got him a low whimper, a soft cry. "God, I love you. Marc." He cupped his lover's balls with one hand and worked the long cock with his other hand.

"Love you, babe." Marc's thighs parted, hips starting to rock towards his hands. "Oh... Pablo... Good..."

"I'd suck you off, but I think you've got clay on your dick." He giggled, tongue going back to teasing that hard little nipple as he stroked Marc's cock.

"Turkey." Marc laughed, reaching out to tweak his ribs. "I don't sculpt with my cock."

"Gobble. Gobble. Gobble." He was giggling again and he bit down on Marc's nipple. "I don't care if you don't sculpt with your cock, I'm telling you you got some clay on it. Come on -- shower and then you'll be suck-safe."

"Suck-safe?" Marc cackled. "Isn't that the name of that new vacuum sealer deal on those fucking infomercials? Try Ronco's Suck-Safe and make your cheese last forever!"

He nearly hurt himself getting into the tub, he was laughing so hard. He swatted Marc's butt. "You nut."

Marc cupped his balls. "Your nuts."

He giggled madly, bending over and trying to catch his breath. Marc goosed him, laughter echoing through the shower stall. He wound up sitting in the tub, wheezing, hiccups making it even harder to find his breath. "Oh, God. Marc..."

Settling in the tub behind him, Marc held him close. "See? Better than any old boring as fuck movie any day."

"You said it." He stroked Marc's head, cuddling close.

"Love you." Marc kissed him, warm and soft. "Love your laugh."

"I love yours, Caro. And you. So much." He opened his mouth, letting their tongue tangle together. Marc kissed him, slow and easy, humming into his lips. He returned the kiss, stroking Marc's cheeks and then broke away, rubbing their noses together. "You know... this whole shower thing would work better if we actually turned the water *on*."

"God, you're picky." Marc chuckled, toes reaching out and hitting the water faucet, cool water splashing over them.

"Too cold!" he complained.

"And spoiled rotten." Marc fumbled with the faucets, squealing as the shower started spraying cold water on them. It made him giggle, even as he squealed along with Marc. Between them they finally got the water coming out hot and he was giggling again, his stomach muscles hurting.

"We are not winding our way towards bumping uglies, babe." Marc's giggles were breathless, tears running down the thin cheeks.

"Bumping uglies?" He started giggling again. "Oh, god, Marc, you're going to kill me."

"No. No, babe. I'm going to love you forever."

"Oh... Caro..." He reached up and brought Marc's mouth down to his, kissing his lover with all he was.

Marc met his passion, matched it, let it grow as their tongues met. He pushed against the tall, lean body, hands finding Marc's spine.

"Love you." Marc snuggled close, humming, cock hot against his thigh.

"I love you, too, Caro." He pressed closer and reveled in his lover's heat and passion, as wonderful as the laughter they'd shared earlier.

Laughter, love, each other. They had it all.

Pablo drove in from the airport, intent on getting home, getting his shoes off and getting a nice long kiss from Marc -- not necessarily in that order. The Pacific was beautiful, Los Angeles trendy and exciting, the art show

fabulous -- not as fabulous as if Marc's stuff had been showing, but still good. But two weeks was a long time to sleep alone, now that he was used to the lanky arms and legs thrown over him.

Marc had sounded positively cheery on the phone this morning. It felt good, to know that someone was waiting at home for him. Marc had insisted he would have dinner ready for him when he got home. Pablo wasn't sure if that meant Marc rubbed Marge's shoulders until she offered to cook stroganoff or if they were having pizza delivered, but either way worked.

He hoped it was pizza. Marge was a darling, but he really wanted Marc alone for dinner. Actually, he really wanted Marc and then dinner. And then Marc again.

He forced himself to focus as he turned the corner onto their road, having an accident would put a crimp in his plans. Finally he was home, engine barely off before he was out the door. He grabbed his suitcase by force of habit and took the stairs two at a time. Piet met him at the door, barking excitedly. The huge chocolate lab was all wiggles and slobber and happy grunts and it was all Pablo could do to get into the front door.

"Is that you, babe? You made good time." Marc voice called from the kitchen.

"I couldn't wait to get home to my guys," he called back, bending to give Piet a good scratch. "See I included you, too. Now can I go see my lover?"

Piet gave a short bark and then bounded to the kitchen, just in case Marc hadn't noticed someone was home.

Marc was carefully spooning salad into bowls; the little kitchen table had a pizza box in the middle with an open bottle of red wine sitting beside. There was one of Marge's chocolate cakes on the counter.

"Relax, pup. I know he's home. Isn't it wonderful?" Marc was dressed in a loose white sweater and jeans, glasses perched on the end of his nose.

Pablo took a moment to drink in the sight and then stepped forward and snagged the glasses with his index finger, pulling them off and folding them neatly. His other hand slid around Marc's head, short hair tickling his palm as he pulled Marc down to meet his kiss. Marc gasped, bowls rattling on the counter as long fingers reached for his face, cool and damp as they danced over his cheeks and forehead.

"Oh, Caro, I missed you so much." He pushed close, opening his mouth wide and inviting Marc in.

Marc's hands slid around his head, holding him close as they welcomed each other, the kiss long and slow and sweet.

"So glad you're home, babe." The words were whispered against his lips and then Marc kissed him again, this time with more heat, more hunger. He let his hands slid down around Marc's back, hands finding his lover's ass. Marc groaned, hips pressing against him restlessly before the kiss ended. "Mm... dinner first. I want to hear everything about your trip."

"I'm hungrier for you than food." Pablo licked his lips across Marc's suggestively.

"Babe..." With a needy sound, Marc's lips covered his, tongue thrusting deep. Hands moved over his body, pulling restlessly at his clothes. He returned the favor, fingers finding skin as quickly as he could, sliding up along Marc's spine. "Have... have a surprise for you. Been waiting to show them to you."

He took another kiss before Marc's words penetrated. Releasing his lover's mouth with some reluctance, he rubbed their noses together. "A surprise?"

"Yes. Give me your hands." Pablo's hands found Marc's and then Marc was sliding their twined fingers over the thin belly and chest. When they reached Marc's nipples, Pablo gasped at the unfamiliar feel of metal rings. Almost unable to believe what he was feeling, his gaze flew to Marc's face, finding an anxious half smile there. Eyes not leaving his lover's face, he tugged gently on the rings. Marc's eyes widened, lips parting on a gasp. "Th...they're attached. Promise."

"How does it feel?"

"Like electricity. I... I touched them on my own, but it's not as good as when you did." Marc bit his lip hard. "Wanna see them?"

"God, yes." He tugged his hands out of Marc's and took the bottom of Marc's shirt, pulling it up. His cock jerked as he saw the small silver rings, bright against Marc's dark nipples. He reached out and touched one hard nipple, stroking the place where the metal disappeared into Marc's skin.

"Oh..." The skin tightened further and Marc whimpered, shuddering from only this simple touch. "Do you like them? Are they okay? What do they look like?"

"They look ... like they're a part of you. But they aren't. It's... it's hot, Marc. I want to taste them."

"Please. God, I've fantasized for days about it." Marc's voice was raw and hungry. "Please."

He leaned forward breathing in the scent of Marc's skin, finding the slight tang of the metal. He touched his tongue to the very tip of one nipple and then flicked across it, still not touching the metal ring. Finally he slid his tongue from one side of Marc's nipple, along the full length of the metal to the other side before taking both ring and nipple into his mouth and sucking. The taste of Marc and metal filled him.

"Pablo!" Marc's hands found his head, moving through his hair with jerky, random motions, as if they couldn't decide whether to tug him away or pull him closer. He could feel Marc's cock against him, hips thrusting restlessly, finding the rhythm of Pablo's mouth and then losing it again and again.

"Oh, God. Caro. Why'd you do this?" he asked as his hands slid down to Marc's hips, guiding them against his own.

"I... I wanted to give you something. Give us something. You like it... watching me. Always have." Marc was pushing steadily, voice husky. "I thought about how you would feel... watching me play with them, knowing they were there all the time... Knowing your eyes were on me..."

"Oh, God." He jerked against Marc, seed spilling from him as his mouth found Marc's nipple again. A low cry broke the air, Marc pressing his mouth close as lean hips snapped against him. His teeth tugged the ring gently and Marc stiffened, sobbing as damp heat spread between them.

"I love you," he whispered against Marc's skin, tongue returning again and again to slide through the loop of the ring.

"I love you, babe. Missed you. Welcome home." Marc shivered and gasped, hands clutching him desperately. "You... you hungry?"

"Starving, Caro." He moved to Marc's other nipple, sniffing first again, slowly tasting skin and metal. "Take me to bed and feed me."

"Yes," Marc stepped backwards, pulling Pablo with him. "Was California beautiful? Did you meet any sexy boy toys that want to steal you away from me?"

"Nobody who showed me anything like this." Pablo grinned, finger coming up to flick across Marc's nipple again. "God, Marc. Every time I think I know what sexy is you show me something new."

"You keep doing that we're not going to make the bedroom." Marc chuckled, the sound just a bit desperate. "Hell, you keep doing that I won't be able to *find* the bedroom."

He chuckled and kept walking, pushing Marc now, instead of being pulled. He flicked Marc's other nipple and then tugged on the end of the ring. Marc's skin around his nipple was puckered and dark, the small nub of flesh hard. "I'm not sure I'm ever going to let you out of the bedroom."

"God, that feels so good... You like them then? They... oh babe, do it again... they turn you on?"

He tugged again, even as he giggled. "Marc, I came in my pants and you weren't even touching me. Yes, I like them. Yes, they turn me on. You turn me on."

"Oh, good." Marc shuddered; Pablo could smell him -- salt and musk filling the air. "Has this fucking hallway gotten longer? Where's the bedroom?"

He was torn between hurrying them through the door just beyond Marc, and attacking his lover where they were, making mad, passionate love up against the wall, on the floor, hanging from the ceiling fan. In the end he grabbed Marc's hand and pulled him into the bedroom; he was old enough now to appreciate already being in bed when they were done.

Marc was pulling at his shirt, tugging it up and off, hands rubbing over his stomach. "So handy. Finding the bedroom for us. Makes love like a dream. Loves me so. 'm a lucky man."

"And don't you forget it," he murmured as his mouth closed over Marc's.

By the time they stumbled over to the bed, Marc had worked open his pants, pushing them down over his hips. He'd managed to unfasten Marc's jeans, a real accomplishment considering Marc was devouring him, touching and kissing and whimpering into his lips.

"Next time you're coming with me, Caro." He pushed Marc's jeans from the lean hips and pressed his lover down onto the bed.

"Coming with you?" Marc wriggled out of his jeans, bare ass shifting on the bedspread, cock hard and curving up towards his belly, nipple rings catching the fading light and shining.

"Yes. I'm not spending another two weeks apart. Sucks too badly." Pablo shucked his own clothing and climbed into the bed between Marc's legs. "Touch yourself," he ordered, voice thick.

"There's no sucking at all. That's just one of the problems..." Marc's hands slid over his own body, skirting his nipples, sliding down his ribs, his sides. His fingers danced over his hips.

"Is this what you wanted, babe?"

He moaned and slid his hands along Marc's thighs, watching through heavy lids. "I want to watch you play with them, want to watch you make yourself come."

Marc's cock throbbed, hips jerking at his words and a strangled moan colored the air. Marc's hands traveled back up the path they'd followed, slowly moving towards the peaked nipples. When Marc's fingers found the little rings, they began to rub, with just the lightest touch, over the tips of the distended nubs. Marc groaned, shifting so his legs brushed Pablo. "Better? Like what you see, babe?"

"Oh, yes." He could barely find air or voice to speak; his words sounded breathless, needy. "The only way I can keep my hands off you is by keeping them on me. You're gonna make me come, Marc, just from watching you. Gonna come all over you."

"Oh, god..." Marc flushed, the color spreading up his torso and neck to light in his face. He began to pull on the rings, twisting them slightly. Hungry little whimpers sounded as his hips began to thrust into the air, as if his cock was being pulled by invisible hands. Pablo moaned and began to thrust his hips, fucking his own hand as he watched Marc touch himself.

"Dreamed about this... about how hot this would make you. Wanted to tell you so bad." Marc was tugging rhythmically, the long cock dark and full. "Wanted to surprise you more."

"I'm surprised. And hot. And, oh, God, Marc, I'm gonna come soon." He could feel his pleasure, heavy and urgent at the base of his spine, in his balls. His own nipples ached as he watched Marc's fingers play with the rings.

Marc reached down to grasp his own cock, pumping frantically as his other hand continued tugging and twisting. It was like watching passion made flesh, Marc rocking between his own hands, caught in pleasure, Pablo's name on his lips again and again. Pablo's vision was blurred by tears and he wiped them away with the back of his hand before returning it to Marc's thigh. He rubbed the hot skin beneath his fingers, giving them a point of contact, a point where they became more than just watcher and performer, a point where they became lovers, two merging together.

"Oh, Pablo, love you. Love you." Marc sobbed, one hand reaching up for him in a familiar, needy motion.

When Pablo leaned forward, cheek nuzzling into that hand, Marc came with a long, low cry, body convulsing in pleasure. The sight of Marc's face as he came and the scent of his lover's seed pushed him over the edge and Pablo came moments later, seed spraying across Marc's cock and belly.

"Love you, Marc," he whispered, turning his head to kiss Marc's palm.

Fingers moved over his face, looking at him, letting Marc see him. "I love you, babe. So glad you're home."

"Me too, Caro. Me, too."

He nibbled at the passing fingers, making Marc smile and then he bent and began to lick Marc clean, eyes closing as the flavor of them together filled his mouth.

Marc moved beneath him, sighing softly. "You feel so good to me. I missed you. I'm used to you being home, being here." Long fingers stroked through his hair, gentle and lazy.

"You need to start coming with me, especially if the assignments last more than a couple of days." He rubbed his cheek against Marc's damp belly, eyes closed, just enjoying the sensations. "I hate being away from you."

"We've spent enough time apart to last, you think? The bed was empty without you."

"Everything is empty without you." He gave Marc's belly and the tip of his penis one last kiss before sliding up to lie next to his lover, curled around the lanky form. He reached out and slid his finger softly around one of the nipple rings. "And who knows what I'll find next if I leave you alone that long again."

Marc chuckled and turned, one long leg curling over his hip right where it belonged.

A soft, sweet kiss warmed him through and then Marc settled back. "I needed to make sure you knew I missed you."

His hand slid to Marc's hip, stroking the prominent bone. It felt right and familiar in his hand. "I know, Caro."

"Feels good, love." Marc's fingers traced his collarbones, dipping into the hollow of his throat. "I started a new piece while you were gone and thought about having the bathroom remodeled. Oh, and Marge decided to only work four days a week unless you're out of town."

"It'll be nice for her to have more time off. What do you want done to the bathroom? And tell me all about your piece." He placed a kiss on Marc's nose in between each response to what Marc had said.

"That means us cooking three nights a week, though. You sure you're up for that?" Marc looked happy and sated, eyes closed as his hands wandered. "I tell you, the pizza joint's gonna love us."

"Marge has been taking too good care of you if you don't know that they make all sorts of things these days that you just throw into the oven and let warm up. Microwave stuff, too. None of it's as good as anything Mama ever served, but a lot of it's better than what I make." He giggled. "'Cause I have to tell you, pizza only tastes good if you only eat it every second night."

Marc chuckled. "Marge takes exceptional care of me and I could eat pizza for every meal."

Pablo stilled for a moment. "What would you think about asking her to work a little less?"

"I suppose we could do that." Marc blinked. "I won't ask you to cook, babe. Marge and I talked and she'll make stuff I can throw in the oven, go home a little earlier so we can be alone in the evenings. I didn't think it would be a problem. She didn't say anything, but I bet that she'd like to do a little more traveling, see her daughter, you know?"

Marc blinked suddenly, flushing. "I don't want you to think... I mean, I'm self-sufficient. I don't need... I don't want you here to take care of me."

He cupped Marc's face in his hands, fingers stroking over the warm cheeks. "No, Caro, no, don't worry about that. It's just that I show up and everything you're used to starts changing. Are you okay with that?"

"Everything I was used to was about hurting and missing you and needing to fill up the spaces the art couldn't." Marc sighed. "It's like the life I dreamed about for so long finally started."

He pressed his lips to Marc's and kissed his lover long and hard. "I love you, Marc."

"Oh..." Marc pressed close with a pleased murmur.

"I'm never letting you go. You're mine now, for good. No take backsies." He hugged Marc tightly to him.

"Promise?" Marc chuckled. "Cross your heart?"

"Cross my heart to hope to die and I'm not laughing, Marc. I mean it. I'm not losing you again."

"I'm not going anywhere, Pablo. I belong right here."

"You do," he agreed, relaxing again. "It's a perfect fit."

"Yes." Marc's fingers found his ass, stroking in circles, almost tickling. "So, you want to sleep, to eat, to talk... to see if this old man can't get you up for a third round?"

"Keep doing that and I'll definitely put my vote in for that last one."

"Mm... is that supposed to make me want to stop?" The touches were accompanied by slow, sucking kisses against his neck.

His eyes close again and he tilted his head back. With a happy murmur, he began to draw slow circles around Marc's back. "It means I'm happy with whatever you want, Caro. I just want to be with you."

"Love you, babe." The touches and sweet, soft kisses continued long into the night, whispers and promises and chuckles wrapping around them like a blanket.

Chapter Seventeen

Pablo was sitting out on the deck, arms crossed, pouting mightily. He was also freezing his ass off in the not quite so warm spring weather and it was all rather for naught, considering that Marc couldn't see any of it. Still it was the principle of the thing. If Marge could glare and bang pots, he could freeze and sulk. So there.

It wasn't even like it was her kitchen in the first place -- it was *Marc's*. And Marc was *his* lover. So he had every right to be in there making grilled cheese sandwiches for him and Marc. Even if he did set off the fire alarm when he got caught up in his book and forgot he had the sandwiches on in the first place.

Tensions had been rising between him and Marge from the outset, both of them wanting to do for Marc. The fight had been short and fairly brutal, ending when Marge had brought up how she and Bev had been there for Marc when he'd really needed it, when he'd gone blind. And what did he have to say to that? That he would have been if Marc hadn't left? The truth was plain and simple: no, he hadn't been there for Marc. It didn't matter how much it hadn't been his choice, it just was.

He'd turned and stalked outside, the argument over. And of course now that he was planted out here, he couldn't go back in, it would be bad form. So he was just going to have to freeze.

"Babe? You out here? Fuck, it's cold! Piet, we gotta find Pablo. Babe?" He looked up. Marc looked... He looked devastated, mouth tight, face pale.

"I'm right here."

"Oh. Oh, good. Can... can I sit with you?"

"You gonna be warm enough? I don't want you to catch cold. I could sit with you inside," he offered grudgingly. He really didn't want to have to deal with Marge right now. It hurt.

"I'll be good wherever you are." Marc moved slowly across the deck, hands searching for the folded up chairs stacked next to the house.

"To the right two steps," he guided, voice soft.

"Thanks, babe." Marc grinned over at him, finding the chair and opening it. "Okay, now, where am I putting the chair?"

"Right next to me, I hope. I'm a half dozen steps straight on. Just follow my voice."

"Gotcha." Marc set the chair down, then curled up in it, long legs drawing under his chin. "You wanna talk?"

"Marge and me had a fight." There was no reason to be coy about it; Marc had probably heard most of it anyway.

"Yeah, I heard. I'm sorry." Marc pushed up his glasses, rubbed his nose. "Can I help?"

"That's supposed to be my line. Only she won't let me. Anytime I try to do something for you I get a lecture." He stopped and took a breath, anger trying to climb back out again.

"She's just a mom, Pablo. She's just... She's done it a long, long time."

"So now she can take a break -- it's my turn." The words came out fiercer than he'd meant.

Marc winced. "I... I don't want you to *have* to take care of me, Pablo. I want to be your equal, your partner. I don't want to be your burden."

"I don't have to -- I want to. Don't you get that? Partners help each other."

"Yeah, I know that. I get that, but..." Marc ducked his chin, talking into his knees. "I'm never going to be able to make it equal between us."

He snorted. "So you can't see and I have to do stuff for you because of that. You make up for it in other areas and I'm not talking about the sex." He reached out and touched Marc's arm, needing to touch, to connect. "Caro... I'm barely making a living for myself and you're rich. We aren't equal there and quite frankly, we probably never will be."

"It doesn't really matter, you know that, right?" Marc tilted his head, a small, bittersweet smile on his face. "Equal or not, I'm not letting you go, not leaving, so it doesn't matter, we just have to figure out how to make it better."

He rolled his eyes. "So it doesn't matter that you make more money than me but it does matter that I need to help you out a bit more? Or are we going to just not worry about the whole who's unequal where thing? Because frankly that doesn't matter to me. What does matter is that I want to help you. Hell, I was making you a fucking sandwich Marc -- it had nothing to do with whether or not you could see and Marge practically took my head off for doing it."

"Chill out, babe. I meant the whole equality thing doesn't matter. Well, it matters, but it doesn't matter-matter, because I love you. And Marge..." Marc shook his head. "I don't know what to say, except that she and Bev, that's their life now -- making sure I'm functional and stuff. They have a long time invested in me, more energy than you know. She's tried to cut back her time here and I don't think she's trying to be a bitch."

Tears prickled at his eyes and he wanted to rail, to yell and scream and point out that if he'd had his way he would have been the one with time and energy and love invested in Marc. He'd never chosen not to be there. And obviously now everyone else was happy and comfortable with the way things were. Marc didn't need his help at all. And that hurt.

"I'm sorry, Marc. I'll back off and try not to stray into Marge and Bev's territory anymore." He got up and placed a soft kiss on the top of Marc's head. "I should get back to work," he said quietly, fleeing before the tears really did start.

"What am I doing wrong? Do you want me to fire them? Tell them to go? I will. Just say the word." Marc's voice was husky and low, raw, hitting his ear as he opened the back door. "Just tell me how to make it right and I'll do it. I just got you back; I can't lose you again so soon. Tell me what you need."

"I'm not going anywhere, Marc. I've never left you yet and I don't plan to start now. I just... God, Marc, I just want to be able to live with you without feeling like I'm stepping on someone else's toes, without having the fact that I wasn't here for you when you needed me being thrown into my face any time I try to do something for you which

Marge has decided is *her job*." And damn it, he was crying now, stupid tears rolling down his cheeks. He wiped them away impatiently.

Marc nodded and stood, shivering a little, goosebumps showing along his lower arms. "I'll ask her to go. She's not a bad woman, Pablo. She's more of a mother to me than I knew I could have. She... fuck, babe. She was with me during shit I don't even want to remember, shit I'm glad you didn't have to see. Shit you might not have forgiven. She's not against you, she's just used to being my link with the world and doesn't know what to do with herself now."

"Oh man." Now he was feeling guilty. "I don't want to be responsible for her being fired." Sighing, he leaned against the door. "I'm not even trying to get her out of your life, Marc. But she's acting like I'm some Johnny come lately who she's tolerating until you decide to send me on my way. Oh hell, I just don't want to start world war three every time I do more than sit in my office or fuck you."

"I agree. Maybe... maybe she needs a vacation, a sabbatical. A few months where you and I can settle down and then the two of us can decide what help we need when she gets back?" Marc was chewing his lip, wandering along the deck, eyebrows furrowed.

"Do you think she'd go for it?"

Marc grinned, the look almost wicked. "Pablo... Babe... She's got a new grandniece due in six weeks. If I offer her a vacation until the fall, a chance to travel, to relax? She'll jump at it."

"Oh... Oh, Marc that would be really great. Just to be the two of us. To lay out some ground rules when she's back..." He wiped the last of his tears away on his sweater. "Thanks, Caro."

Marc shrugged. "Anything for you, babe. Anything I can."

He went over to Marc and wrapped his arms around his lover's middle. "I'm sorry, Marc. I tried to just get along, I did."

His lover snuggled in close, cold cheek nuzzling him. "It's okay. It's a big change, adding a member to the family, yeah? We'll muddle through, you and me."

"Just don't forget the 'you and me' part. That's what really counts."

"Never. Now, can we go inside and have lunch? It's cold and I'm starved."

He squeezed his lover tight. "Well the going inside part, no problem. The lunch part I'm not so sure about -- I turned the last of our bread into flambé."

"Cool! That means we get to eat chips until the pizza gets here, right?" Marc's voice was warm, light, teasing, easing the tension inside him.

"That sounds like a plan." He leaned up, licking at Marc's bottom lip and then turning the caress into a kiss.

Marc's arms tightened around him, a soft moan tickling his tongue. "Maybe I'll just eat you instead. Pablo appetizers -- my favorite."

"Oh, that sounds nice."

Marc gave him another kiss and then the back door opened, Marge's voice tense and upset. "Marc. I'm about to go to the grocery. Do you need anything?"

Marc frowned and shook his head. "No, but I need to chat with you, lady-bird. Meet me in the kitchen?"

"Sure, son. Marc. Sure." The backdoor shut, leaving them alone and quiet.

"Do you want me to come with you?"

Marc sighed. "No. Why don't you go order lunch and let me explain things to her. That way, she can just be honest -- tell me if she's angry, you know?"

"All right. I'll be in my office."

He reached up and kissed Marc again. "I love you."

"I love you, babe." Marc nuzzled and then stepped back, about to head in. Abruptly he stopped, reaching towards Pablo. "Hey, when would you be ready for her to go? I mean, there's lots I need her for and, well, you understand, right?"

"That's just it, Marc. I don't know what all she does for you, if there's any of it I can't or don't want to do. It doesn't really matter when she goes -- we'll muddle through, but I'm getting tired of running into the walls she puts up around you, so the sooner the better really."

"Okay." Marc gave him what he privately considered the "blind, but I'm not scared, damn it" face and headed into the kitchen sitting at the table, reaching towards Marge's hands.

He headed around the house to go through the front door, feeling too guilty to stand there and watch them. A part of him was really happy they were finally doing something about the situation, but he wasn't heartless, and he truly was grateful for everything Marge and Bev had done to help Marc, but that didn't make any of this any easier.

He settled at his desk and called for pizza and then turned to his monitor -- he doubted he was going to get anything done, but he could pretend at least.

There was no yelling, no noise, nothing until the doorbell rang. He headed down the hall to get it, and found Marc fumbling with his wallet, cheeks flushed as he tried to find some cash.

"This one's on me, Caro," he said as he moved in next to Marc and handed the driver a twenty. "After all, I'm the one who burned lunch."

"Oh, thanks. I was... I sort of... I was sitting at the table, thinking."

"Yeah?" He grabbed the pizza box and his change. "Thanks, man." Closing the door, he nudged Marc's arm with his elbow. "Eat in the living room? What were you thinking?"

"Huh?" Marc looked completely confused and just a little lost.

He balanced the pizza box on one hand and took Marc's arm with the other, leading him slowly into the living room. "Is it okay if we eat in here, with our fingers?"

"Yeah. Sure, babe. What kind of pizza is it?" Marc followed easily, leaning into him a little.

"Meat lovers supreme." He walked Marc to the couch and pulled the coffee table close for the pizza. He waited until they both were eating before bringing Marge back up. "So... how did it go? With Marge I mean."

"It went. She left her key on the kitchen table. She said she'll call from New Mexico." Marc picked the sausage and hamburger off his pizza, eating it bit by bit.

He winced. "She was upset then."

Marc nodded. "She was, but she understood, too. I think she wanted to go as bad as you wanted her gone. She's been unhappy, uncomfortable."

Pablo sighed and reached for his lover's knee, squeezing gently. "I am sorry, Marc."

"Yeah. It'll be okay. We all needed some time." Marc leaned closer. "Means we have to go grocery shopping now, though."

"All right -- you know what that means? I can buy all those things that Mama never let me buy that Marge didn't either."

Marc's chuckle made him grin. "Yeah, babe? Like what?"

"Like Hungry Man dinners and cookies and those frozen cakes and whipped dessert topping. 'I can make you anything you want mi'hijo, you don't need to buy that ready-made frozen stuff'. I happen to like that ready made frozen stuff."

Oh... That got him a full-fledged laugh and a snuggle, Marc eating the pizza now, resting full against him. "And cashews and chocolate covered Oreos? Oh! And chips with onion dip!"

"Anything you want, Marc. In fact, I think we should make this shop a total indulgence. Not one 'good' thing allowed in the basket."

"Except grapes. I like grapes. Oh, and coffee and frozen pancakes and we need to see if Piet needs kibbles and doggie treats, too."

"We could make a list," he suggested, happy to see Marc's smile again, happy to feel his own.

"We could. It would probably be marginally more readable if you did it, though." Marc snorted, wiping his fingers clean before reaching up to stroke his face, looking carefully. "I did good, Pablo? I made you happy?"

"Yeah, Caro. You made me happy. I'm just sorry it was at Marge's expense."

"Yeah, me too. Maybe in the fall, it'll be easier."

He kissed Marc's fingers as they passed by his mouth. "I hope so. Maybe she'll come back missing her grandbaby so bad that she wants to stay in New Mexico." A thought suddenly occurred to him. "Bev's not going to show up in the next couple of hours to read you the riot act, is she?"

"Not if we're at the store, she won't." Marc grinned, one eyebrow arching. "Besides, she's in LA and my cell's turned off."

"Oh good. She scares me," he admitted.

"She's terrifying. She devours sweet men like you for between meal snacks. I adore her."

"Hmmm... you know you're the only one around here allowed to devour me, right?"

"Yeah? You sure about that, babe? No Bev-action for you?" Marc held back his laughter, but just barely. Pablo could hear it threatening.

He giggled, even as he shuddered. "Ew... girl germs. Icky!"

"Cooties!"

He and Marc laughed, relaxed and easy together, Marc's hand still and warm on his chest. He covered Marc's hand with his own, slowly twining their fingers together. "I love you, Marc."

"I know." Marc nodded. "I love you, babe. You scared of being left alone with this loony blind dude?"

"No, Marc. I'm scared of not being left alone with you."

"Good." Marc squeezed his fingers tight. "'cause I need you. You'll have to see for me for a while, my spare set of eyes are headed to New Mexico."

"For always, Marc. You can always count on me."

"Cool. Let's go buy Ho-Hos."

Chapter Eighteen

Pablo watched the little kids swimming as he waited for six o'clock to come. Five more minutes and the indoor pool would clear and it would be time for his first private lesson.

The little tots were jumping and paddling with noisy enthusiasm, the water sending the sounds echoing around, magnifying them. Some of the kids were swimming properly; one girl couldn't have been more than five, but there she was in the deep end -- the deep end for the love of God -- without any sort of flotation device.

He wondered if the water was cold. He hoped it wasn't, hoped he wasn't about to further embarrass himself by being a total wuss about getting in.

He wished suddenly, foolishly, that Marc was here to hold his hand. It was stupid, because he'd told Marc not to come. "You don't need to hear me squeal like a girl while I try not to drown," he'd told his lover.

"You don't have to do this, you know." Marc's voice has been soft, his hands gentle across Pablo's face.

He knew. He knew he didn't have to, but there was no way he was going to feel comfortable with Marc swimming if he couldn't. It didn't matter that Marc had been swimming with Piet for years. It didn't matter that his lover had been taught by the best how to take care of himself in the water, even if he found himself alone with no idea where shore was. Hell, it wouldn't matter even if Marc promised to always wear a life-jacket, Pablo would still worry.

Even when he knew how to swim, he would worry. He just couldn't help it. Thirteen years was a long time to be without the one person you loved more than anything, he couldn't bear the thought of losing Marc again, especially to death. But he refused to limit his lover either. Swimming brought Marc pleasure, made him feel independent and strong and capable. So Pablo would learn to swim and he would learn CPR and if that meant being the only thirty year old man in the world taking swimming classes that even a five year old girl didn't need, then so be it.

But that didn't mean he wasn't going to squeal like a girl as he tried not to drown.

He dipped his hands into the bucket of water and stroked them across the clay, fingers smoothing and pressing just so, giving the cheekbone the feel he wanted. Humid and hot, the weather was good for working outside, sun beating down on his naked back and legs, the clay warm and damp and heavy.

There was something special about working outside, hearing the water splash against the deck, the smells of plants and evaporating water, the brush of winds against his sweaty skin. He'd come out before dawn, the piece calling to him in that almost-done-please-touch-me-I-need-you way that only sculptures that were almost finished, almost right could.

Well, he grinned, the sculptures and Pablo. Pablo could call to him.

Marc chuckled and dipped his hands again, trailing them over broad shoulders leading to a solid neck arched in passion -- hot and silky, the clay almost felt alive.

The sound of the back screen opening was followed by Pablo's sweet laugh. "Am I interrupting anything?"

His head tilted as his fingernail added a tiny scar to the nape where Pablo had had a mole removed years ago. "Hmm... interrupting? I'm almost done actually. How does it look?"

He let his hands fall away and leaned back, stretching his neck and stomach slowly.

Pablo's hands were cool against his sun-warmed skin as they slid around him from behind, a soft kiss finding its way to his shoulder. "It looks amazing. The look on the face... I don't know how you do that."

"Me either. I just do it and leave the hows and whys to Bev." He shifted beneath Pablo's touch, pleasurable goose bumps following the wandering fingers. "God, that feels good, babe. How's your morning going?"

"Bed was lonely when I woke up, but I watched you work from the window while I had my coffee and then got right to work. I got that article finished and the Sampson Gallery reviews cleaned up and emailed off." Another kiss dropped onto Marc's skin. "I was hoping we could both take a break. You know, rub lotion on each other and enjoy the day."

He smiled as warmth and pleasure splashed through him. "Sounds perfect. Help me wrap this one in the plastic? I'll call Bev later and have her send the boys out to have it cast."

His hands covered Pablo's for a minute, fingers tracing lightly. "Then I'll jump in the lake and get the clay off me and I'll be yours for the rest of the day."

Pablo's hands tightened almost imperceptibly at the mention of the lake and then began to stroke over his belly. "Don't stay in the lake too long, you're going pink. I'll smooth sun lotion on you after you're out of the water, if you like."

He turned, pressing close with a soft murmur. Pablo was scared of the lake, hated the idea of Marc lost in the water and, although his lover had stopped worrying aloud, Pablo couldn't quite let it go. It felt good in a way, to know that he was so wanted.

"You could just hose me off, you know. Save us from wet dog fur and all." The offer was accompanied by a kiss to Pablo's forehead, tongue just sneaking out to taste the salt there. The fabric of Pablo's shirt was soft against his skin and the warm musk of Pablo's skin made him tingle.

Pablo giggled. "Hose you off?" Another giggle and then the sweet lips were pressed against his own in a soft kiss. "That'd be quicker, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, babe." Marc took another kiss and then stepped back. "Let's cover this bad boy up. Bev will be orgasmic that I've finished another piece." He bent, fingers searching for the tarp, chuckling. "I haven't been nearly as productive as she's used to in the last months."

He heard Pablo pick up the tarp, one end brushing against his hand. "I guess I cramp your style, Caro."

"No, love. You gave me my life back." He smiled as they settled the plastic, checking the edges carefully, tucking his art away. "Now I have love and work and home and everything I could ever need."

Pablo's hand slid along his arm to his shoulder, squeezing gently. "I love you, Marc."

"I love you, babe." He ducked his head, capturing Pablo's hand between shoulder and cheek, and nuzzled. "Go get the hose and cool me off?"

Pablo giggled again, the sound moving across the deck with his lover. "You do realize I'm just going to get my own personal 'hose' and heat you back up again, right?"

"You'd better! I'm counting on it!" Marc laughed and moved down the deck away from the clay. The familiar click-clatter of Piet's claws followed immediately, cold nose pressing against his thigh.

Marc bent and stroked the soft fur. "I'm fine, beast. I thought you were sleeping in the shade, taking the day off."

"The people that love you never take a day off, Marc." Pablo's voice was warm and sweet and it morphed to something more amused as his lover addressed Piet. "Come on, mutt. Out of the way." The water came on, noisy against the wooden deck and then Pablo was speaking again. "I think you should strip out of those shorts. Save them getting soaked."

He arched an eyebrow, hands still going to pop the buttons on the ancient cut-offs. "What if one of the neighbors comes out?"

Pablo giggled again. "The dock's private and fenced -- if someone peeks and gets an eyeful they've got only themselves to blame."

Marc grinned, slowly shimmying his shorts off and stretching up into the sun. "Sounds fair to me, babe."

Pablo made a soft noise above the sound of water. "You make me wish I could draw or sculpt."

"You can see me." Marc rolled his shoulders, letting his hands slide down his sweat-slick belly. Parting his legs slightly, he slowly arched his hips, knowing that Pablo's eyes would be on him, hot and hungry. "I know you like to watch."

"I do..." The hose clattered against the deck and Pablo swore softly and then giggled. "I soaked my jeans."

"Mmmm... guess you'll have to take them off, babe." The water finally reached his feet, cold and slick and sliding. "And you're supposed to be soaking me."

"I know, I know, but you distracted me."

The spray of water hit him without warning. He gasped and then relaxed into the spray, hands running over his body and stripping the bits of clay away. Then he turned and offered Pablo his back. Pablo rinsed him all over and then let the spray settle on his ass. Marc wiggled, chuckling as he made a half-turn so the water hit his hip and sprayed just a bit on his hardening cock. Pablo's giggle turned into a moan and the spray stopped abruptly as the water was cut off. The sun was warm on Marc's skin, keeping him from getting cold. Something heavy and wet hit the deck and then Pablo was in his arms, wearing only his shirt.

"Mmm..." With a smile, Marc slid his hands down to cup Pablo's ass, squeezing lightly. "Hey there, lover."

Pablo pressed against him, the shirt absorbing the water drops from Marc's skin. "You still need the sunblock on," Pablo murmured, even as he rubbed against Marc suggestively.

"Your hands rubbing hot lotion all over me?" Marc bent his head for a hungry kiss, toes curling against the wood of the deck. "Sounds heavenly."

Pablo's mouth was warm and wet, pulling him in deep. He felt laughter bubbling up inside him, happy, joyous, rich pleasure that he loved and was loved, that something as perfect as today could be common, normal, unremarkable.

Pablo pulled back, nibbling at his lips. "You think those new lounge chairs we bought are up to some strain?"

"Isn't that why we paid so much for them?" He followed Pablo easily, not even paying attention to anything beyond the soft lips, trusting his lover to lead him around any obstacles.

Pablo stopped moving and sighed against his mouth. "I love touching you, kissing you, loving you."

"Good, because you're sort of stuck doing it forever." Marc's fingers started to unfasten the little, smooth round buttons of Pablo's shirt.

"I'm not sure that's going to be long enough, but I guess it'll have to do." Pablo gave him another quick kiss and then pushed him down onto a chair. "If I don't get you all slicked up now, it's not going to happen and you're going to get burned."

"Then you'd have to rub me down with aloe vera." Marc stretched back in the chair with a laugh. "Green goopy cactus gel sex. Yummy!"

Pablo was giggling again. "Well if you'd prefer green goopy cactus gel sex to cocoa butter lotion sex..."

"Oh, cocoa butter smells better." He grinned, stretching along the smooth wooden slats. "And this way we can do both."

Pablo straddled the chair, sitting across his hips and then the scent of cocoa butter filled the air. Slick, warm hands began to smooth over his shoulders.

"Oh..." He moaned, the scent reminding him of teenaged beach fantasies during long evenings masturbating in the summer's heat. This was so much more real, so much warmer.

Pablo made a soft purring sound as the slick hands slid down along his chest, fingertips dancing over his nipples.

"Mmm... god, that's good." Marc's hands slid up Pablo's arms, humming happily as he discovered the shirt was gone. "My beautiful lover."

"You're not so bad yourself, Caro."

"Make sure you don't miss any spots, babe. I don't want to be speckled."

Pablo giggled again and began to speak with a horrendous British accent. "Ladies and gentlemen, we have here, in his natural habitat, the red-headed, speckled artist. I do believe we have come at just the right moment. Yes, yes, that is his mate, the writeus shortus atop his oiled and naked body. Stay tuned, ladies and gentlemen, when we come back from the break, I do believe we'll have quite the sight for you."

With a full, happy laugh, Marc tugged Pablo down for a kiss, arms twining around his lover's and holding tight. "Oh god, I love you!"

"Oh, good, because the writerus shortus is much happier when the redheaded speckled artist loves him." Pablo rubbed the lotion onto his nipples, fingertips teasing the rings, and onto his navel and then onto his nipples again before sliding down until they cupped his hips.

He was purring, stretching in the sun, letting it pour down over him. Pablo made a soft, happy noise and suddenly his cock was engulfed in heat, Pablo's slid fingers sliding over his balls.

"Oh!" The world shifted under him, spinning a little and he loved it, loved that Pablo could do that.

Pablo hummed, one hand sliding for his, holding on tight as Pablo's mouth sucked him like a Hoover. He started moving, jerking, fucking Pablo's mouth with a surprising hunger, his cries filling the air. Pablo's hands slid beneath him, cupping his ass as Pablo's throat swallowed around the tip of his cock.

His orgasm came fast and hard, balls damned near drawing back up into him. Pablo swallowed him down, fingers sliding on his ass.

When Pablo came off his cock, his lover's head rested on his thigh. "Mmm.. love you, Marc."

His fingers were trembling, brushing through Pablo's hair. "Love you. Damn."

Pablo turned his head and pressed kisses to his palms. "Good."

He grinned, hands looking, admiring his lover, his flesh and blood lover.

"So the long-legged red speckled artist is good?"

"Your artist is better than he ever prayed he could be."

"Oh good. The National Geographic people will be pleased." Pablo giggled softly, the sound lingering in the air.

He snorted. "Watch it, o writerus shortus, before your pretty ass gets tossed into the lake."

Pablo giggled some more. "I can think of better things for you to do with my ass."

Mmm. Yeah. He arched an eyebrow. "Race you to the bedroom?"

"Yeah, okay." Pablo giggled and leapt up, helping him up before taking off, laughing all the way down the hall.

Marc followed more slowly, grinning the entire way. Man, it was good he'd finished the sculpture today. Someone wanted to play.

And that was just fine by him.

Chapter Nineteen

It was his birthday and Pablo was thinking it was just about the perfect one ever.

He and Marc had slept in and made love and had pancakes and then made love some more. They'd spent the afternoon on the deck, him reading to Marc, the chapters broken up by necking and petting and then more love-making. He was still waiting on his present from Marc, though he didn't really need one. Marc himself was more than enough -- his lover just plain made him happy and he couldn't think of a better gift.

The phone rang and he gave Marc a kiss before going in and picking up the receiver. "Hello."

"Bueno cumpleaños, mihijo."

"Mama." Wow. She hadn't called except to try to convince him to come up for Easter, on his own, since Christmas. For a moment he considered hanging up on her -- he didn't want the perfect birthday being ruined. But it was his Mama and he missed her and maybe her gift was going to be an olive branch.

"Your present will be late. Your sister left it in her car and didn't mail it until yesterday."

"You didn't have to send anything, Mama." Especially when what he really wanted from her was love and approval for who he was.

"Of course I did. You're my boy-child, mi hijo." He heard her snuffle, sigh. "I talked to Anna and el Padre and... you know how I love you."

He closed his eyes and sat, back to the wall. "I love you too, Mama." Unconditionally, he added silently, because even though he wanted to hate her for her prejudice, he couldn't. She was his Mama.

"Perdoneme, mihijo? I meant the best."

"I don't know, Mama. Are you going to keep... refusing to acknowledge who I am and who I love?" There wasn't any point in going through this if it wasn't going to change anything.

"I tried to do the best for you. I did. I was wrong. You... I didn't know what else to do."

"You were wrong. Thank you for admitting that. I. Have things changed? Are you going to accept me as I am?" Please.

"I will try, Pablo. I will pray for us to be a family again."

"And what about Marc?" Because her praying for them to be a family again? Kind of sounded like what she was doing before.

"I will never believe he is enough for my son. You cannot ask that of me."

His heart fell. "Mama. He's my life. I'm just thankful he still wants me."

He heard her sigh. "Yes. But, Pablito, Anna's George? Julia's Eduardo? Even Maria's Javier, who works so hard, none of them are enough. You cannot ask me to not be a Mama."

"But you accept them! You welcome them into the house and are kind to them."

"Did I say that I would not let your Marc in my house?"

"Well no, I guess you didn't. But you didn't say you would either. You just said you wanted us to be a family again and when I asked if that included Marc you said you'd never believe he was enough for me. So I don't know what to think, Mama. I need you to tell me exactly where we stand."

"I don't want to fight, Pablo. I called to tell you good birthday and we love you and miss you. All of you."

He blinked back tears. "So Marc and I could come and visit. And it would be okay. And you'd be nice?"

"Si, Pablito. You come and bring your Marc. Papi and I put a double bed in Anna's old room and the dog could be in the back yard to run."

"Oh, Mama. Thank you." It was the only gift he wanted from her, one he'd thought he'd never get. "Thank you," he whispered again.

"Te amo, mi hijo, mas que todos."

"Tu tambien, Mama. Te amo mucho."

"You come home soon, Pablito. You come and your Mama will make tortillas for you."

"Yeah? Homemade tortillas, Mama?" Maybe they could take a few days the next time Marc was in New York for a showing. Or Christmas. He'd like it if they could all do Christmas together with the little ones and everything.

"Si. Just like when you were a boy."

"That sounds good, Mama." He sniffed and rubbed at his eyes. "Te amo. Gracias."

"You go and have your birthday. You have a cake?"

"I don't know -- Marc wouldn't let me make one myself, so I guess so." He smiled as he mentioned his lover, eager to get back to Marc and tell him the good news. He wasn't sure Marc really wanted to have much to do with his family, but he knew his lover would be happy for him, would make the effort for him. Which just went to show the power of Marc's love -- he'd been willing to do that all along, even though his Mama had been so awful.

"Pablo, mi hijo. You can still see, yes? You should look and see." Mama chuckled, teasing.

"I don't want to ruin the surprise." He lowered his voice down to a hushed whisper. "I'm hoping for an ice-cream cake."

Mama laughed. "Oh, that is a good thing. My Pablito loves his ice cream."

"Yeah, Mama, I do." He cleared his throat. "I should go. Thank you... for calling. And saying what you did."

"Si. Call your Mama soon. Papi too. We miss you."

"I will. I love you. Papi, too. Bye." He hung up the phone, blinking back more tears. Wow. She was trying, really trying.

Marc wandered in, a laundry basket of oddly wrapped presents in his hand. "Babe? You in here? You okay?"

"Yeah." He cleared his throat and sniffed. "I'm fine. Good, even."

"Yeah?" One bright red eyebrow raised, Marc tilting his head. "You're crying. Who was on the phone?"

"It's good crying. It was Mama. She wants to start over. She talked to my sister and her priest. And she wants us to come and visit." He sniffed again. "They put a double bed in Anna's old room. For us."

"Oh." Marc reached up, pushed his glasses up. "That's excellent news, babe. Congratulations."

He got up and took the basket from Marc, sticking it on the ground before pushing into his lover's arms for a hug. "I didn't think she'd ever accept the fact that I was gay."

Marc held him tight, hands moving over his back. "I guess miracles happen, yeah babe?"

He nodded and reached up to tug Marc's head down for a kiss. "I found you again, didn't I?"

"Yes. Walked right into my life." Marc's kiss was soft, sweet.

"Thank God," he murmured, pressing close.

"Yeah. Come on. Presents. Cake. Birthday blowjobs. No more tears."

He bounced a little and giggled. "Cool. In that order? I don't know which I want more, the presents or the blow-job."

"Your birthday, babe." Marc grinned, goosed him. "Your choice."

He giggled, trying to dance away from Marc's hand without losing contact with his lover. "Presents then. I think that blowjob is going to lead from one thing to another..."

"If you grab the presents, I'll get the cake." Marc backed away, heading for the freezer.

He bounced a little and picked up the presents. "It's in the freezer? Ice cream?" Marc knew him so well.

"Well, yeah." Marc grinned, shook his head. "Like I'd get any other kind."

He giggled again and gave Marc a kiss on the back of his neck. "Here or in the living room?"

"Bedroom." Marc shivered, smiled. "There's not a better to place to celebrate."

"Oh, yeah. I have to agree. You need me to take anything else?"

"Forks and napkins." Marc smiled, moving down the hall, singing for him, ass wiggling. Happy birthday to him.

The first in what promised to be a long line of great ones. Who said getting older sucked?

Pablo dog-paddled through the water, trying very hard not to clutch at Marc. Piet swum better than he did. But Marc liked it when he came in, too, so he was doing his best and trying not to panic as he started to get tired.

"Do you think we should head back?" he asked.

"Sure, okay." Marc took his hand and squeezed. "Want to float a second and rest? You can rest against me."

"Oh, that sounds nice." He hoped he didn't sound too eager. He really wanted to do this for Marc, didn't want his lover to think he was apprehensive. He awkwardly pushed himself onto his back.

Marc's chest pushed up underneath him, solid and stable, supporting his head and shoulders, fingers trailing over his face. "Relax. Piet's here and we'll head in as soon as you've caught your breath. I've got you, babe."

He did relax, lying happily against Marc. "I'm sorry, Caro. I just can't to shake the conviction that man just doesn't belong in water."

"It's okay. Makes me feel strong, to move through the water. Makes me feel good." Marc chuckled, fingers tracing his eyebrows, his nose. "What's on the plan for tonight? Anything special?"

"Yeah, I think so. I want to make love with the best guy in the world."

"Oh... can I watch?"

Pablo giggled, nearly upsetting their balance. Marc's laughter was warm and they slowly moved towards the deck, Piet steering Marc if he floated too far astray. "Marc... I love you. You know that, right?"

"Yeah, babe. I know." Marc's hand brushed his jaw.

"Okay, good. I just..." He shrugged and turned his face to kiss Marc's hand. "Sometimes it kinda floods my body and I have to say it."

"Yeah. I know that one. Sometimes when you're asleep and I'm working, I have to come back and touch you, make sure you weren't a dream."

"Oh..." He wriggled out of position and turned, treading water awkwardly as he put his arms around Marc and kissed him, short but hard. "We're at the dock. We have to get out now. I need you."

Marc nodded and bumped against him with a shiver. "Yes. Want you. Where's the ladder?"

He grabbed onto the side of the dock and took Marc's hand, guiding him to the ladder. "Too bad it's so open down here..."

Marc's eyebrow arched, the long body rubbing him again, this time with more intent. "Are you suggesting a little slap and tickle, babe?"

He giggled and slapped Marc's ass, the water slowing his movements. "Inside! So we don't scandalize the neighbors."

Long finger slid inside his trunks. "If you're quiet, we could hold onto the ladder. You could fuck me. No one would ever know..."

"Marc!" He gasped and pressed close. "Oh God... Marc... do you really think we could?"

"Yeah and I think you want to." Marc wriggled, then pressed the little cut-offs Marc always wore to swim into his hand.

"Oh my god." He was scandalized, really he was. And so turned on even the touch of the water hurt his cock.

Marc's hands stripped his shorts away, draping them on the ladder. Then his lover turned, ass pushing against his cock, holding onto a rung beneath the surface.

He couldn't catch his breath, couldn't think, so he just grabbed onto the ladder next to Marc's shoulder and wrapped his other hand around Marc's hip. Moaning, he pushed forward, cock nudging against Marc's heat.

Marc leaned forward, hand wrapping around his cock and positioning him against that tight hole. "Fuck me, babe. I need you."

"Oh God! Caro." He pushed in, moaning at the tight heat. So hot, always so hot, but with the cool water around his cock, Marc's body felt like it was on fire. He didn't stop moving once he was in, just kept thrusting, out and in, cold and hot.

"Yeah. Yeah, babe. Fuck, you make me dizzy." Marc was whispering, taking him in, riding his cock.

"You're all that's keeping us above water," he reminded Marc, not actually caring right this second if Marc kept holding on or not. He whimpered, pushing harder, the water lapping at Marc's and his own skin, slapping against the dock with the same rhythm he was using to push into Marc's body.

"Not going to let us sink, babe. Does it feel good? Fucking me in the sunshine?"

"It feels wrong and scandalous and decadent and so good I might just make it a habit." He gasped in between the words, starting to shake. Sliding his hand around Marc's waist, he grabbed his lover's cock and started to stroke. Marc tightened around him, a low moan sounding as those thin hips started to jerk, long cock pistoning through his hand.

"Soon, Marc." He wasn't sure if it was a plea or a warning, but he moved faster, pushing harder into Marc's heat, hand tightening.

"Yeah. Oh... Oh... Babe. Now. Fuck! Now!" Marc sobbed, ass milking him as heat ghosted against his fingers. He cried out as his climax was pulled from him, spending himself in Marc's body. He held on tight to his lover, pressed tight against the long back as he tried to catch his breath.

Marc was panting, shivering. "See? The water's not all bad, yeah, babe?"

He giggled, licking drops of water from Marc's shoulders.

"Love you, babe." Marc turned, all grins, and gave him a soft kiss.

"I love you, too." He kissed Marc again, a little longer, a little slower and then pulled away. "We've just got one problem. How're we gonna get our trunks back on?"

Marc chuckled and winked. "Piet! Piet! Bring me the towels, boy. Come on, sweet baby." As Pablo laughed, two towels were dropped into the water. "Better to drip on the floor, than moon the neighbors."

Giggling madly, Pablo wrapped Marc's towel around him first and then took care of his own.

Once they were out, he gave Marc a quick kiss, tugged on one nipple ring, and whispered. "Last one home has to fuck the winner." And then he was off, flying across the yard toward their deck, laughing all the way.

"So tell us about your new man, Mac." Rob's hands were warm, gentle on his head as the scissors trimmed. "He's cute."

Carrie's giggle sounded. "Yeah, he looks like a sweetie. Great eyes. Where'd you meet him?"

Marc chuckled, relaxing under Rob's familiar touch, the friendly chatter. "We're old friends. We met up at a show and... reconnected."

"Is that what you're calling it these days?" Rob chuckled. "Well, he's good for you. You look ten years younger." Breath brushed near his ear. "Well-fucked is a great look on you, friend."

His amused snort made Piet shift, cold nose pressing into his hand. He stroked the silky fur, pushing the pup back to the floor. "Thanks, Rob. I'll make sure and note that in my beauty diary. Day One -- cucumber mask. Day Two -- fucked through the wall. Day three -- mudbath."

The salon burst into gales of laughter. The laughter petered out rather abruptly and Piet gave a happy, welcoming bark.

In the rather loud silence left behind, Pablo cleared his throat. "I, uh, finished my errands and figured you'd be about done."

"Hey." He smiled and rolled his eyes. Now Pablo was sure to think something bad. "Rob was just telling me you were good for me, made me look younger. Am I beautiful yet?" Piet's tail was wagging, brushing against him.

He could hear Pablo's sneakers on the linoleum, the rest of the salon still pretty quiet. "You look great." One of Pablo's hands slid along the back of his neck. "I still miss the red curls."

"Oh! You're going to talk him into growing it out? *Fabulous!* I've been trying for years, but Bev's so stubborn!" Rob's voice was ecstatic and Marc felt his cheeks heat. "Hi there. I'm Rob. Nice to meet you. You've got great hair, too, by the way. You ever need a trim, just book an appointment. Mac'll vouch for me."

Marc arched an eyebrow. "'Cause I'm always noticing people's hairstyles..."

The salon started laughing again, the happy chattering starting up again as it faded.

"Hi Rob. Did he ask for a shave today, too?"

Marc blushed and his eyebrow arched higher. Sneaky, sneaky, lover. "No, babe. I thought you were going to shave me."

"Oh! You're going to let me? Awesome." He could hear Pablo's grin.

Bastard. Adorable, playful, quick, funny, beautiful bastard. He grinned, too, ignoring Rob's exclamation of delight and immediate suggestions and offers of help. Pablo chatted with Rob about electric versus non-electric, wet versus dry, while Rob finished up with his hair. At one point, Pablo's fingers slid along his forearm, the touch gentle, quiet. That sort of thing -- that easy, natural, I'm-here-I-love-you-you're-mine touch -- was what he'd been missing for the last too-many years. It made him happy somewhere deep inside, made him content. Made him whole.

Pablo was telling Rob about his mop. "It was this high off his head and this fantastic orangy red color. Really great, suited Marc." He could just imagine Pablo holding his hands apart like you would with a fishy caught one this big story.

Marc shook his head and chuckled. "It was obscene and messy and very kinky curly. Like a Raggedy Andy doll with an afro."

"Yeah, it was so curly. And pretty soft." There was a hint of nostalgia in Pablo's voice and then his lover giggled. "You couldn't lose Marc in a crowd."

"Like you can now. Skinny, bald, blind, with a ski-slope nose giants aren't taking over are they?" Rob's chuckle mixed with Pablo's as the towels got pulled away.

"You aren't quite bald," Pablo told him. "You do look pretty distinguished though."

He stroked his beard and grinned. "The epitome of successful artist, huh?"

Pablo giggled and he got a quick kiss. "Yeah, you've even got your very own groupie."

Rob wolf-whistled and the laughter that filled the salon as he gathered up Piet and paid was warm and friendly. "Come on, groupie. Let's go home."

Pablo's hand slipped into his as they left the salon. "Wanna stop for ice cream on the way? Or we could do lunch."

"Sure. I could use some food." He squeezed Pablo's fingers. "You having a good day, babe?"

"Any day that starts with what we did this morning can't be anything but good, Caro." Pablo's voice held a flicker of arousal.

"Mm... you have a point." The memory of the scent and flavor of his lover filled him, made him cock leap. "I can still taste you."

"Oh... You know... maybe we should just head back home. Save our money. Or..." Pablo paused, squeezing his hand. "I noticed some of those benches are pretty secluded at the park. We could go make out like we were kids again."

"Oh, I could handle that, if you think we can avoid getting arrested." He grinned, cock filling within a few heartbeats. "God, you think you'll ever suggest making out and I won't just jump to attention?"

Pablo giggled as he changed the direction they were headed in. "God, I hope not!"

Marc liked the way their laughter sounded outside, in the wind and the other people and the buildings. He liked it a lot.

"So, tell me about the park? Flowers blooming? What color are the benches?" Another thing he loved about having Pablo here -- his lover would see things for him, things he was embarrassed to ask about, simple things that everyone forgot to 'show' him.

"Oh, it's beautiful, Marc! Everything is so green. There's a whole bunch of trees -- big ones that look like they've been here for a hundred years. Some willows and evergreens and maples and I think there's even a couple of oaks - they're the ones with the funny leaves. The paths are just those little rocks so that if they aren't used there's green growing in them -- we're gonna take one of those." Pablo giggled. "Take the path less traveled, so to speak."

He chuckled and they walked, talking about boring normal things -- groceries and work and how they needed to hire an electrician to install better wiring in Pablo's office -- good things, real things. And underneath the chatter, their hands squeezed and held on and made promises.

They walked for awhile, the sounds of the street and people fading away, leaving the wind in the trees and the birds to fill the spaces. Pablo stopped and pulled him down to a bench. "It's brown -- real wood, too. Cool -- you don't see these much anymore. And there isn't a soul around and we're near the water -- can you hear the little creek at all?"

He listened and nodded with a grin. "Yeah, babe. And we're in the shade, yeah? Or did it just cloud up?" His hands moved over the wood, sliding over the smooth varnish until his fingers found Pablo's denim-covered leg.

"Trees overhead. And we're around the corner on a path." Pablo voice was low, quiet and getting closer. "And if anyone shows up, we'll just tell them you're blind and I was helping you."

He leaned in, hand moving up over Pablo's thigh. "Helping me what, babe?"

"I'll think of something," Pablo murmured, lips pressing softly against his. He smiled, lips parting beneath Pablo's, hand sliding in and up, rubbing the seams between his lover's legs. So fun, so wicked, so sweet -- touching and groping like teenagers in the park. Pablo moaned softly into his mouth, legs shifting apart.

He rubbed for a few more seconds and then cupped those sweet balls that had been in his mouth this morning, hot and soft and satiny and full. He scooted closer, tongue sliding into Pablo's mouth, finding the one tooth in the front that was just a little crooked -- just a little, too little to see and no one knew about it but him. No one could see it but him. The thought made him hot and he pushed a little deeper, gasping.

Pablo was making those sweet little gasping noises, pushing the sounds into his mouth as the squares hands moved over him. He let his thumb slide up and down the bulge of Pablo's cock, rubbing slow and steady in time with their kiss. Breath catching, hitching, Pablo started to move with him, rocking just a little.

"So sexy. Fuck, babe." He nibbled along Pablo's bottom lip, groaning. "Make me so hard."

"Me, too," said Pablo, giggling a moment later. "I guess you know that though."

He chuckled into Pablo's lips. "Yep. You know us blind guys, we can figure stuff out with our fingers." He followed his tease with a push, hand rubbing hard.

Pablo gasped and made a little squeaking sound. "You're going to make me come, Marc."

"You want me to stop?" His hands moved to open Pablo's jeans. "Or you want to play lookout while I suck you off here in the park?"

"Oh God!" Pablo's lips closed over his, tongue pressing deep. "Oh, please, Mark."

"Be quiet and watch." He backed his butt up and leaned down, sliding his mouth over Pablo's cock. It was warm and salty and hard and he sucked strongly, not teasing or playing at all.

"Oh God. Oh Fuck!" Pablo's hands slid over his head, the cock in his mouth jerking. He chuckled and lifted up long enough to shush Pablo before relaxed and swallowing the hot, sweet cock down to the root.

"Oh God, Marc, I can't believe..." The sentence finished on a soft moan. He slid his hand behind Pablo, pushing hard against the seam as he pulled and sucked, filling his throat. A shudder went through his lover's body, Pablo sobbing his name out softly.

When they had been kids, he had taken Pablo out to a park in the middle of the night, fucked him long and slow beneath the little bridge over the bicycle path, then they jerked each other off by the duck pond, watching the moon. Pablo had loved it -- outside and illicit, had been so hot. Was so hot right now.

Pablo's hips were moving, soft pushes into his mouth, his head held still by Pablo's hands.

"Marc!" Pablo cried out loud as he shoot deep down Marc's throat.

He swallowed the bittersalty seed down, sucking Pablo dry and clean before sitting up, tucking Pablo back into his jeans. "Hey babe."

He was grinning like a fool, he knew it.

Pablo giggled, shifting to lean against him, the soft sounds continuing to fill the air. "Oh God, I can't believe we just -- you..."

"Yeah, we did. Felt fucking good too, didn't it?"

"Yeah... yeah it did." Pablo kissed his lips softly. "What about you, Marc? You want to feel good in the great outdoors, too?"

"I can't play lookout, babe." He moaned against those warm, soft lips, pressing close.

Pablo's hand slid up his leg towards his hard cock. "But I can."

"Oh..." He stretched out, legs spreading. "Your hands, babe. So hot."

"Yeah?" Pablo giggled again, the sound excited and happy, fingers pulling his zipper open. "It's not as good as what you did for me, but this way I can do you and watch at the same time." Pablo's giggles increased. "I can always say I was helping you pee."

"Oh, yeah. That'll work." Marc chuckled. "Gee, Officer, my friend, the blind guy, he lost his dick and I was helping him locate it."

Pablo's fingers fumbled against him, his lover clumsy from laughter. "Oh God, Marc -- I love you."

"Love you, babe, more than anything." He was laughing now, happy and horny and in love.

Pablo's fingers closed over his cock, pulling slowly, thumb stroking across the head of his dick.

"Babe..." He leaned his head back with a groan, the smells of green and water and wood all shunted to the side as he was inundated with Pablo sounds, Pablo smells.

"God, you feel so good. It's so good."

"Yeah. Don't stop. Make me come." He pushed up into Pablo's touch with a groan. "Remember when we were kids? When we'd be dying for a come, have to stop in a bathroom, an alley, couldn't wait one more second?"

"Oh yeah." Pablo breathed softly against his lips, mouth nuzzling his face, hand pulling his cock, moving faster now.

"You were so fucking eager, so fucking beautiful when you came. Your eyes. And I could see you." He gasped, gripping the edge of the bench, caught between Pablo's hand and his favorite fantasy -- seeing his lover's eyes again, wide and happy and in love and coming.

"I'm still pretty eager," Pablo whispered against his skin, free hand carefully pushing into his shorts to cup his balls.

"Oh... fuck. Yeah." One hand reached up, traced Pablo's face. "Still fucking beautiful. God, I love you."

"Love you, too, Caro. More than anything." Pablo's mouth closed over his, the kiss hot and hard and fucking eager. He cried out, jerking hard as he came, holding Pablo close. Pablo murmured happily into his lips and then tucked him back into his jeans. He could hear a lapping noise, knew that Pablo was licking his hand clean.

He shuddered, spent cock twitching. "God, do you know how sexy that is?"

"What?"

He reached up, touched Pablo's wet lips, wet fingers. "That."

"Oh..." Pablo answered softly, face turning to nuzzle at his hand. "You just taste good."

"Mm... stop it or you're going to get me hard again, and you promised me lunch." He rubbed his chin against Pablo's cheek. "And then we'll go have ice cream and discuss the benefits of having a beard."

Pablo giggled and kissed him, tongue lingering for just a moment. "Have I told you lately how much I love you, Marc MacAllen?"

"Yeah, babe, but tell me again."

"I love you more than anything in the world, more than anything I can imagine. I love you, Marc."

He stole another kiss. "I love you too, babe."

Pablo giggled again and Piet barked. "Somebody coming. We'd better get going."

"Yeah. Antone's for lunch? Or the Tamale House?" He stood, straightening his clothes. "And the beard makes my look distinguished, Bev said so."

Pablo giggled. "Just for that we're going to Antone's and I'm going to tell you your steak is where the brussel sprouts are."

"And if you do that," He leaned in to whisper as they began to walk. "I won't let you shave me all over when you come for the beard."

"Oh."

It was a squeak, no doubt about it.

Chapter Twenty

He had been so focused on the slow steady slide of pressure inside him that he'd almost missed the clicking sound of the key sliding into the front door lock.

Almost.

The sandalwood and musk smell of the oil would ruin the surprise, Pablo would smell it in the hall, knew what the soft, exotic scent meant, knew that he was needy and hungry and willing to admit it, show it, offer it up to his lover.

He slid down, biting his lip hard as the fake cock filled him -- not yielding and not warm enough and not Pablo -- but good, good enough to make his balls ache, good enough to rub against the soft clean sheets and push the dildo further, deeper.

Marc grinned as Pablo's steps stuttered, keys clanging into the wooden bowl in the front room. The whisper of his name floated in as he let his hand slide over his erection, let himself touch and feel and show Pablo his hunger.

"Oh God, Marc..."

The harmony of need in Pablo's voice draped over his body, a sheet of desire sinking into his skin.

He began to pump, fucking himself slowly, matching each motion to the waves of noise splashing over him. The room, cool when he'd made his preparations, stripping and slicking and waiting, was now almost uncomfortably warm, the late afternoon sun and the weight of Pablo's eyes catalyzing.

"I wanted you. Was working, my hands in the clay, working on the curve of your lips and I needed you, babe."

Pablo's moan tasted sweet and bright, tiny cherry tomatoes or tart strawberry Popsicles, and Marc licked his lips, searching for flavor. That earned him another moan, this one more dark chocolate and rich coffee and he pushed himself upright, riding and pulling and gasping with the warm sun on his shoulders and the mattress beneath his knees and Pablo's eyes on the slick cock fucking him like Pablo wanted to fuck him and...

He arched when he came, shattering into a thousand phosphorescent shards, twinkling like the fireworks he remembered. When the world settled back into its truths of sheets and sun and skin, Pablo was beside him, mouth insistent and hands curling around to slowly work the dildo, short pulses within him that made him whimper and shift. His hands found Pablo's nipples and began to tug.

"Tease."

Later, neither of them could remember who made the gasping accusation that led to pleas and chuckles and languorous sated bodies.

Neither of them really cared.

Pablo looked at the blank screen and sighed. He'd been sitting in front of his computer for well over an hour. He'd started the review again and again, each time deleting everything he had and trying to start again.

The problem was that the showing he was reviewing had no redeeming qualities; he couldn't think of a single positive thing to say. He couldn't even think of positive ways to spin the awful truth.

While this might not have been a problem for a lot of reviewers, one of the reasons he had become a sought-out freelance reviewer was because of his ability to be even-handed and fair, to find both the good and the bad in works and lay them bare to the less discerning eye.

Unfortunately, no matter how you sliced it, Devila's work was derivative, poorly executed and just plain boring. And for a man who got paid by the word that was a pretty damn cheap review.

He let out a groan and rolled his shoulders, trying to work out the kinks that were slowly tightening in his muscles.

A soft knock came to his office door, Marc's voice breaking over the soft music pouring from the computer. "Babe? You busy?"

Another sigh and he ran his hand through his hair. "I should be -- but I'm getting nowhere." He looked at his watch. "Crunch time is still a couple of hours away -- I usually get pretty inspired an hour before deadline."

"Wanna talk about it? Oh, I brought you a Coke."

Pablo turned, Marc was leaning against the doorframe, can of soda in his hand. Dressed only in a holey, ragged pair of cut-offs, fresh from working on a project out on the deck, Marc was gleaming, tan just beginning to turn pink. The small rings in Marc's nipples stood out, shining in the light.

He felt his body tighten and he licked his lips. "It was just a really shitty bunch of pieces by a derivative, crap artist and I'm try to come up with something a little wordier than that, but even shaving the truth a little seems wrong in this case. Like if I say anything but the bald truth I won't be able to trust myself as a reviewer anymore."

He got up and made his way to Marc's side, taking the Coke in one hand and sliding his hand across Marc's belly with the other. His lover's skin was hot and slick with sweat.

"Mmm... feels good." Marc wiggled slightly beneath the touch, shorts slipping down, copper curls peeking over the worn denim. The musky scent of Marc was touched with sun and lake water and clay. "So whose show was it again? Devila or Kertesz?"

Pablo answered distractedly, fingers sliding through the bared curls. "Devila. Kertesz' crap at least as originality and signs of promise if he ever figures out that yes, the audience needs a fucking clue."

"Oh... fucking is good." Marc shook his head with a wry chuckle, body swaying beneath Pablo's touch. "I mean, a fucking clue. For the audience."

Pablo laughed and slid his hand down, letting his fingers tickle Marc's skin through the rips before cupping his lover's cock and balls through the denim. "This," he said softly, grinning as he leaned forward to lick at the salt on Marc's skin, "would be a fucking clue."

"Mm... babe. I didn't come in to distract you." Marc's hand covered Pablo's and pressed, hips rocking up. "I just wanted to kiss you, bring you a soda."

"Well I've got the soda." Pablo rolled the cold can across one of Marc's nipples making the can and ring clink together, squeezing lightly with his hand at the same time.

"Oh!" Marc jerked, nipple going immediately hard, lips parting on his gasp.

Leaning forward, Pablo slid his tongue across the hard pebble of flesh, warming it again.

He squeezed Marc's cock and balls again. "All I need now is the kiss."

Marc's hand slid up his arm to find his jaw. The callused fingers cupped his face and tilted it, thumb rubbing against his bottom lip. "A kiss I can do." Then Marc's lips touched his, hungry and hot.

Pablo rubbed his own erection against Marc's thigh, even as his free hand slid beneath Marc's waistband to curl around the rigid flesh. His other hand held the can tight; cold metal against one palm, warm flesh against the other. Marc murmured into Pablo's mouth, some nonsense words laced through with pleasure. His mouth clung to Marc's as his hand worked up and down along the soft as silk skin.

Marc's hands stuttered over him, trembling as the fingers pushed and pulled at fabric, searching for skin. He wanted to help, wanted to aid those fumbling fingers but his hands were full and he wasn't about to let go of his prize, so he just pressed closer and stroked faster. The groans and gasps and sweet moans his lover gave made him hot and the insistent motions into his hand made him shudder. Then Marc's fingers wrapped around his cock and that made him fly. Their hands fell into the same rhythm, pulling and tugging and stroking as they rubbed against each other, mouths stilled locked in the kiss.

Marc came first, his thumb insistent on the crown of Pablo's cock as he came with a soft cry, heat pouring over Pablo's hand. The scent of sex and love and Marc filled the room and Pablo's cry echoed Marc's as he came. The can in his hand went flying, landing on the floor with a thud before exploding and spraying their legs with the sticky liquid.

Marc burst out laughing, the sound bright in the heavy breaths and soft gasps. "Either you've learned a neat way to transform ice cream into cold come or you dropped the soda, babe."

"I dropped the soda. That was quite the kiss you brought me."

"Mm... I'm telling you, I could get used to these afternoon work breaks." Marc kissed him again, grin wide and mischievous. "So much better than cigarettes and a chocolate bar."

"Oh, I'm rated above chocolate and cigarettes, am I?" Pablo wiped his hand on Marc's pants. "Come on lets go get cleaned up and find some new pants. I think a shower would do the trick. I'd hate to waste water though -- you wanna join me?"

"Of course. You need me to scrub your back. Saves time AND water." Marc winked and grabbed Pablo's hand, free hand reaching for the door frame. "If we hurry I can give you a blowjob for inspiration and you can still make your deadline."

"If I can't find something nice to say about Devila after that, there can't be anything nice to say about him in the first place."

"Exactly." Marc chuckled, tugging Pablo through the doorway. "I love you, you know that, right?"

He stopped his lover and tugged Marc's face down until their lips were almost touching. "I count on it every second of every day."

"Oh, good." He could feel the words against his lips.

He let his tongue slide out and push between Marc's lips, cock already growing hard again.

Something told him he wasn't going to make his deadline.

He'd been swimming for a little over an hour, floating lazily, when the storm began to blow in, the air cooling, the thunder rumbling in the distance. Marc chuckled as Piet barked, the sound bright and welcoming.

Pablo must've seen the clouds gathering all afternoon. Marc was impressed his lover had waited so long to tempt him out of the water.

He listened to the steady, rhythmic sound of Pablo's bare feet on the deck, the noise muffled by the waves and the winds. "Hey babe. How's the writing going?"

"I got another chapter done on the novel. How's the water?"

"Fabulous. You'll have to read it to me tonight." He swam lazily, Piet's body brushing against him every now and again. "The water feels good. A little cool, but good."

"It's gonna be a lot colder soon -- there's a storm coming." The words were spoken oh-so-casually.

Marc hid his smile and nodded, heading toward the dock slowly. He knew better than to tease too long. He came in now, his lover would be warm and Marc might tempt him into turning on the new hot tub and making love as the storm came in. He made Pablo worry and he'd be showering alone and spending the evening listening to the click-clacking of the keyboard. "Does it look bad? I heard the thunder."

Pablo's hands were there to help him as he climbed up onto the dock, hands warm and soft on his arms. "It came in pretty slowly, but all of sudden the sky's a pretty solid dark grey -- it's like twilight out here."

"Really? Cool." His face turned toward the sky automatically, part of his brain still convinced that if he looked, he would see. His shoulders were covered in a soft towel, Pablo's hands drying him.

"Can you feel it?" Pablo asked, voice curious. "It's got that growing cool thing going on that evening has."

Marc nodded. "The wind's picked up and the sun's gone. And it smells different, too. Like ozone, but colder."

"We should go in before we get caught in the storm and waste my drying efforts." Pablo's hand slid along his arm to his hand, twining their fingers together.

"In? You don't want to play in the rain? I could start up the tub, keep you warm." He held Pablo's hand, following automatically. Thunder rumbled and the crack of lightning sounded, much closer this time, making him jump and Piet whine nervously.

"It's dangerous to be in water when it's lightning out."

Marc gave him a patently false pout, free hand reaching out to ease Piet. The dog wasn't fond of thunderstorms, the sounds upsetting him. "So, if we can't play out here, then you have to amuse me inside, you know. You wouldn't want a restless artist on your hands, would you?"

Pablo giggled. "I bet Bev would prefer it if I locked you in your studio. Lucky for you I think tying you to the bed would be a lot more fun."

"Are you suggesting that I haven't been working like I..." He blinked and stopped, the second half of Pablo's sentence hitting him. "Okay, who are you, you kinkster, and what have you done to my Pablo?"

Pablo giggled again and pulled him up the deck stairs. "Didn't I tell you about the last show I covered? The entire gallery was nothing but pictures of this guy. Tied up, bound, gagged, getting fucked, you name the perversion it was there. And the whole time, I couldn't help but think that it wasn't erotic at all, that watching you simply jacking off was more erotic than any of this guy's photos."

"Was that the show in Baltimore, the one that you kept calling 'pseudo-pornographic and poorly lit to boot'?" He stumbled after Pablo, the first ice-cold, heavy raindrops splashing on his shoulders as they made it inside.

The door closed behind them and Pablo pushed him up against it, body warm and close. "Yeah. I think he was trying for erotic and shocking. It wasn't either. By the time I hit the last few I was bored, not even pointing out the pimples and the tan lines was fun anymore."

Marc wrapped his arms around Pablo's neck, holding him close, kissing him playfully. "How about we try for erotic, babe? I guarantee I won't notice a single tan line."

Pablo giggled, settling against him. "Do you want that sometimes? Kinky, I mean."

He thought for a second. "Honestly? Making love with you is more than I ever hoped for. Tasting you, kissing you, feeling you, knowing your eyes are on me -- I still have moments where I wonder if I'm dreaming." He leaned forward, kissing Pablo's forehead. "Besides, I have a built-in blindfold. How much more kink can you ask for?"

Pablo made a soft sound and his hands slid around Marc's head, pulling him down. A soft kiss was placed on each eyelid. "I love you Marc MacAllen. Every bit of you."

"I love you, babe." He hugged Pablo close, nose wrinkling as his cold, wet shorts moved on his legs. "Ick. Clammy shorts. Not sexy."

Pablo giggled again and then warm hands slid along his waist. "Getting you out of them could be though."

"Mm." He arched into the touch. "Your hands feel good."

"Yeah? How about this?" Pablo pulled the shorts down a scant inch and began to lap at the bared skin.

"Oh!" Pablo's tongue was so hot against his water-cooled skin. "Y...yes. Yes, that feels perfect, babe."

Pablo licked all along the top of his shorts and then pulled them down another inch, slowly repeating the process of licking and nuzzling his cool skin. His stomach muscles clenched, toes squeezing the cool tile. He couldn't figure out which sensation to focus on, the driving beat of the rain mixing with the heat of Pablo's tongue and the cold touch of the wooden door. Further and further, Pablo pulled down his wet shorts, keeping his cock trapped within them, the warm tongue and soft lips touching him everywhere but there.

"Love you. Love the feel of you." He reached down, stroking Pablo's hair. "God, you make me feel so sexy."

"Oh, Caro, you're the sexiest thing I've ever seen." Pablo's breath was hot against him and then Pablo was pulling his pants right down, nudging his feet to step out of them.

He thought about protesting, but got distracted by the feel of Pablo's hands traveling up his legs, the rhythmic breath against his hip.

Pablo licked the tip of his cock and then his balls, gentle touches. Then his lover giggled. "Blowjobs in the kitchen -- seems pretty kinky to me."

He grinned. "We've done some very fun things in this kitchen, babe. And in the studio, the hallway, the bathroom..."

"Yeah." The giggle was back, sending sweet gusts of breath over Marc's cock. "My Mama would be horrified."

"I won't tell if you won't." He chuckled, hips bumping playfully against Pablo. "Somehow I don't think she'll ask on her own."

"No, I don't think so either," said Pablo with another giggle. The tip of his cock was nibbled lightly. "So you want to take my mouth here and now or wait until we're in another room?"

He groaned, arching into Pablo's mouth with a shudder. His head knocked against the door, hands clenching as he was taken into wet heat. Pablo's hands slid up until they found his, fingers wrapping around his hands and bringing them to Pablo's head. "Take my mouth."

"Oh. Oh, god. Babe." His breath caught, body shuddering as waves of fire and ice sped through his nerves. His mind blanked, body moving instinctively in a hungry, driving rhythm, remembered lightning flashing behind his eyes. Pablo's hands were hot on his hips, holding tight, but not stopping his motions. The tight heat around his cock sucked and licked and loved him. He was crying out nonsense words, knowing Pablo would hear him, understand that he loved and it was good and he ached and he needed and wanted and oh, fuck, yes, he was going to come, right here, right now, those lips surrounding and pulling and holding him. Pablo's hands tightened, pulling him in further, the suction increasing, telling him to come without words.

Marc came, crying Pablo's name into the air, the storm outside answering him with a crash and a roar. Pablo's hands held him, the sweet mouth suckling softly, drawing shudders from him.

He gasped, trying to catch his breath, head falling forward. "Oh, babe. Oh..."

He stroked Pablo's eyebrows, the full, thick hair. Pablo let him slip from between the warm lips and began to nuzzle, placing soft kisses on his cock, his hips, his fingers.

"I love you, Marc."

"Love you. Oh, that was... my world tilted."

Another kiss pressed against the tender skin next to his cock and then Pablo was sliding up his body, hands reaching to pull him down into a kiss flavored with his own come. Marc moaned, hands sliding down to cup Pablo's ass, running over the worn denim and tugging him close.

Pablo finally broke the kiss, nuzzling cheek against cheek. "Come on, Caro, let's get into the bedroom before I decide to bend you over the kitchen table and have my way with olive oil and you."

"Does that mean you're going to bend me over the bed and have your way with me?" Marc's lips found Pablo's ear, nibbling and licking.

A shuddering sigh went through Pablo. "Uh-huh," he murmured absently.

He chuckled, teeth fastening on Pablo's earlobe, holding firm for a second. "Or I could always just tease you until you can't bear it, until you do bend me over the table and fuck me."

A soft moan answered him, Pablo pushing urgently against him, cock hot and hard, caught within the denim.

His fingers worked the jeans open, hissing as Pablo's hot cock touched his skin. Tongue sliding along Pablo's ear, he groaned, "God, you're hot, babe. Hot and hard for me."

"God, yes." Pablo pushed against him, searching for contact. "Need you, Marc. Need you so bad."

"Take me, then." He nipped hard, hands moving back to slide between skin and denim to squeeze and stroke Pablo's ass. Pablo moaned, closing their lips together, and then grabbed hold of his shoulders, pulling and pushing until he was turned and bent over cool wood.

"Spread your legs," Pablo ordered, his heat disappearing and then reappearing at Marc's back as the unmistakable scent of olive oil filled the room. Pablo giggled. "It's extra virgin."

Marc laughed, head dropping onto his arms as he chuckled. God, he loved this man. "As opposed to the two of us -- who come in as well-fucked, right, babe?"

"Extra well-fucked," Pablo corrected as two fingers slid into Marc, curling to find his prostate.

"Oh, god!" His head lifted, body arching as pleasure shot through him. "Again, please, babe. Again."

"You look amazing." Pablo's fingers slid out and then pushed back in again, curling once more.

"Babe!" He parted his thighs, pushing back against Pablo's fingers, fucking himself steadily on the searching fingers, bright pleasure sparking again and again. "Pablo... love."

"Jesus, I could come just from watching you do that." Pablo's voice was thick and unsteady.

"No, going to fuck me, first." Marc's body wasn't listening to his voice, riding the invading fingers eagerly, the sensations flowing over him.

Pablo's fingers disappeared and then large, blunt heat pressed against him. "Take me in. I want to watch."

He whimpered, body hungry and eager. The burn traveled up his spine as he pressed back, hips pulsing as he took Pablo in, inch by inch. Pablo's hands slid over his lower back, stroking along his spine. "So beautiful. God, Marc, I love you."

"Love you. Love you, Pablo." He sobbed softly as his ass met Pablo's thighs, filled with the heat and pressure of the hot, thick cock. "Oh, so full. So good, babe."

"Yeah... nothing like being inside you." Pablo pulled out and thrust back in, once. Leaning over, Pablo rested his head on Marc's spine. "You want me to fuck you or do you want to do it yourself, Caro?"

His body jerked and he had to fight not to come, not to spill himself just from Pablo's words. "Don't... don't move. Give me a second to catch my breath."

Pablo moaned but remained still, his breath coming in short gasps that blew against Marc's skin. Slowly, he reined in his control, body relaxing. Taking a deep breath, he stretched, hips starting to push back against Pablo, slowly beginning to fuck himself on the hard cock.

Pablo straightened, hands sliding along his ribs, stroking gently. "I could watch you do this forever," Pablo said quietly, voice strained. "Feels so good, so hot."

Marc moved and rocked, moaning softly each time Pablo's cock filled him. Pablo's breath hitched every time he moaned and they became a concert of need and want and arousal. Heat and pressure filled him, made him soar. He rose up off the table, pushing back harder and faster, testing his and Pablo's control. Pablo's fingers wrapped around his waist, digging in, but not interfering.

"Love you!" He reached for one of Pablo's hands, dragging it around to his cock. "Touch me. Please, babe."

Pablo's wail made the kitchen ring with sounds as Pablo's hand wrapped tightly around him, pulling in long, quick strokes as Pablo thrust into him. It was more than he could take, more than any man could take. He sobbed, rocking back and forth between cock and hands, seed pulsing from him. Pablo continued to thrust into him, graceless and hard, and then Marc heard his name, felt Pablo stiffen as heat poured into his body.

He slumped onto the table, panting harshly, head swimming. "Pablo..."

Pablo's head rested against his spine again, a soft moan coming from his love. "Wow."

"Yeah. Wow." The storm was raging outside, the rain pounding against the windows, almost as hard as his heart was pounding in his chest.

"Oh, man, I don't know how to tell you this, Marc..."

He lifted his head, frowning. "What, babe? You okay?"

"I don't think I can move -- I don't have any bones left. Not one. Do you think Marge'll be upset if she comes in tomorrow and finds us like this?" Pablo sounded so deathly worried and serious.

"The sanctity of her kitchen and her extra virgin olive oil deflowered, violated? Hell, babe, she'd go from two days a week to so fucking gone..." Pablo's giggles finally broke through his worried voice.

He snorted once, then responded, deadpan. "Nah. She caught me trying to learn how to lambada naked in '93. If that didn't kill her, nothing will."

Pablo's giggles got louder, his body shaking against Marc. The flagging cock slipped from Marc's body, making both men groan and Pablo rubbed his cheek against Marc's back. "I can probably move, but in all honesty, the bedroom seems a really, really long way away."

"Yeah. But if we get come on the couch, Marge will castrate me with a spatula." He stretched out with a moan. "We could head out to the hot tub, it's a shorter walk."

Pablo moaned. "That sounds so good, Caro. But what about the storm?"

"The thunder's dying away, rain won't hurt us. You see a lot of lightning, we hustle inside." Marc tempted. "Hot water, bubbles -- you can tell me about the novel, I'll rub your shoulders." He whispered. "There's even champagne in the fridge."

"You drive a hard bargain." Pablo lay against him a moment longer and then took a deep breath and stood up. "All right, but I get to pop the cork this time."

That sparked a bright laugh, Marc standing and heading for the fridge, moving slowly. "Yes, lover. You can pop anything you want."

Pablo's happy giggles faded into the sound of the rain on the deck.

He found the bottle of champagne and two glasses and then headed out to the water. Maybe the rain would stop and he could get Pablo into the lake for a midnight swim after they soaked the evening away. He did seem to be on a roll.

"Hurry up, Marc, the water's cold without you."

Either way it didn't matter, as long as they were together.

The sudden hug and the enthusiastic kiss wouldn't have surprised Marc so much if he couldn't feel Pablo's arm in his right hand, warm and solid.

"Marc! God, I haven't seen you in months! I've been in LA shooting a picture. Can you believe it? Me? In a movie? I mean, it's a tiny part, but there were lines and costumes and everything."

The chatter continued on, Marc shaking his head and smiling, waiting for Brian's mouth to stop running so he could answer. "Hey, Bri. Congrats. I'd like to intro..."

"Yeah, I heard there was a great band playing over at the Thorn. Maybe you wanna come? I have a bunch to tell you. Got laid in LA, man, fucked over a gravestone."

He could feel Pablo's arm, tense and still in his arm. That wouldn't do at all.

"Bri! Bri! Hold up, man. I want to introduce you to someone." His hand slid down until their fingers twined together. "This is Pablo. Pablo, babe, this is a good friend of mine, Bri."

Pablo's fingers squeezed gently. "Hi Bri, nice to meet you." It was Pablo's talk to the publishers voice.

"Oh, hey." Marc could hear the wheels spinning in Bri's little rat trap of a brain. He waited patiently and couldn't hide his smile when the gasp came. "Oh! Babe! He's a... I mean, you're a... Wow! You two are like a pair? Cool!"

His laughter was unavoidable and felt really, really damned good, too. "Yeah, man. We're like a pair."

Pablo chuckled as well. "The question is, a pair of what?"

"Lunatics." Marc and Brian spoke at the same moment, the word dissolving into gales of laughter.

"Oh, Lord, Marc. I've missed you so much, man. You got plans for..." Bri's voice trailed off, stuttering still.

"Bri?" Pablo's hands tightened on his own and Marc frowned.

"My God, Marc. This is... This is your muse. You found him. He was *real*. I didn't think he was real..."

"In the flesh." Pablo chuckled again, the sound as false and strained as his usual giggle was true and light.

Marc squeezed Pablo's hand, trying to comfort and support. "He found me and I couldn't be happier."

"That makes two of us," Pablo's smile was in his voice.

"Who the fuck are you and what did you do with Mr. 'Love doesn't exist, Bri, a decent blowjob is all I hope for in life'?"

Marc shrugged. "I fell in love."

Pablo snorted. "You always were a cynic."

"Smartass." He chuckled and nudged Pablo's shoulder. "Good to talk with you, Bri, but there's ice cream in the bag and a promise of banana splits a la Pablo at home. Call me? We'll do lunch."

Pablo giggled quietly; a la Pablo meant served on his lover's hot skin, the cool treat melting and sweet, almost as sweet as Pablo's skin beneath it. He couldn't stop smiling. He lived for that sound, loved the freedom and pleasure in that sweet chuckle.

"Bye, Bri, good to meet you." Pablo's fingers tightened just a little bit on his, warning that he was going to start moving again.

Marc chuckled, following his lover happily. "That was Bri. He's a good friend of mine." He shook his head. "Man, that was lame."

Pablo snorted. "A very good friend, I'd say -- or do you look for decent blow-jobs from all your friends?" Pablo's voice was dry, just a hint of jealousy in the mild tones.

"No, only from fuck-buddies and certain well-built model-actors." He arched an eyebrow. "I look for forever from my muse."

Pablo stopped and his face was taken suddenly between warm hands, eager lips covering his own and pressing a hard kiss on him. "I love you, Marc," Pablo said fiercely.

"Oh!" He smiled, flushing hot, pleased to his bones. "I love you, babe."

"Good." Pablo took his hand and returned it to Pablo's arm. "Let's go home and melt some ice-cream."

"Oh, yeah. I'm so there, babe." He grinned following Pablo eagerly. "Do we have cherries?"

"Not for quite some time," answered Pablo, giggling.

He stopped short. "That... that was fucking awful, babe." He began to laugh, shoulders trembling. "Funny as hell, but awful."

Pablo continued to giggle, leading him to the car and unlocking the passenger door for him. "Five minutes, Caro, and then I'll show you how awful I can be."

"Promise?" He climbed into the car, fingers looking for the seat belt.

"Promise," Pablo answered, voice husky. He heard Pablo's seatbelt click into place as he found his own.

"Kiss me." He leaned over, searching for Pablo's lips.

Strong hands slid around his head, guiding him and then Pablo's mouth was on his own again, warm and wet and welcoming.

Kissing Pablo was... oh, if he were a writer he would have a thousand words, but it was kissing Pablo and it was good -- memories of burnt umber and vermilion and ocher and verdant green.

Pablo ended the kiss, voice husky and filled with need when he spoke. "We're in the middle of town..."

"Oh, yeah. Guess we can't make love right here, can we?" He groaned, not sure when playful teasing had become passion. "How fast can you get us home again?"

"Five minutes. I could do it in four, but I can't start speeding before we leave the town limits." Pablo turned on the engine and maneuvered them into traffic. "You can tell me all about Mr. Good-looking-muscularly-movie-actor Bri to while away the time."

Marc leaned back with a chuckle. "We met at a bar. He was a live model a few times. He's not the brightest, but decent in bed and not looking for any ties."

"Live model? After you couldn't see? So you..."

He felt his cheeks heat. "Uh... yeah. Sort of."

"I'm sorry. I know I shouldn't be jealous, I just... I can't help it."

He reached out and stroked Pablo's leg. "Nothing to be jealous of, babe. You've got my heart."

"I know." Pablo's hand covered his briefly. "I'm just greedy when it comes to you."

The words made him warm all through, made his toes curl. "Are you? This old man?"

"You better believe it, and even if you don't, I'll prove it to you in two minutes."

"Promises, promises." He scooted down on the seat, hands rubbing against his hard cock through his jeans, moaning softly.

"Jesus, Marc, you're going to cause an accident!"

"Hey, I'm not driving." He chuckled, cupping his balls. "Eyes on the road, babe."

"You're making it hard," Pablo told him. It took a moment, but the sweet giggles followed the words eventually.

He grinned, rocking up into his own hand. "Oh, yeah. It's hard, Pablo."

The car swerved slightly and then the engine whined as Pablo sped up. They turned onto gravel and then moments later were slowing and turning, the car stopping.

The engine had barely shut off when his mouth was covered, Pablo's hands working at his jeans.

"Ice cream'll melt." He thrust up, groaning harshly, his fingers tangling with Pablo's.

"Uh-huh."

The snap of his jeans were undone, the zipper pulled down and Pablo broke the kiss. Warm fingers tugged him gently but urgently from his shorts and then Pablo's mouth slid over his cock, tongue teasing the slit. Pablo hummed and took him deep, sucking fiercely.

"Fuck. Fuck, babe!" He arched, hips rolling.

Pablo just kept sucking hard, demanding his orgasm, hands moving on his thighs. He gave it up, entire body flushed with heat, brain shorting right out.

Pablo licked him clean and then kissed him softly. "How was that for a decent blow job?"

"Wow." He hoped that was good enough, Pablo wasn't getting better until he unmelted.

Pablo giggled, fingers sliding on his cheeks. "Come on, Caro. You're melting my ice cream."

"Oh, we can't have that." He chased those fingers, loving that sound. "Let's go in, babe. I'm thinking it's time for dessert."

The water was cool -- almost cold -- on his feet, the stone dock rough beneath him. The wind had just a nip that threatened to be a bite. Summer was almost gone and soon the lake would be too cold to swim in. Marc grinned. Of course, he'd bet Pablo would say the water was too cold already, which was why Pablo was asleep in bed and he had Piet had left a "gone outside" note on the board beside the back door and come down to have a last swim.

He could hear the Labrador swimming, every few minutes an icy nose would tickle his thigh, a soft whimper asking him to come in and play. Finally he built the bullet and slipped into the water, ducking down and pushing away from the dock, trusting Piet to stay close and keep him close to home.

It was freeing, being loose in the water, slightly scary, very exciting. Piet's wet fur brushed against him every few strokes, pushing him gently, keeping him on track.

"Marc?" He thought he heard his name and then it came again, louder and closer. "Marc!"

"MARC!" Loud thumping was followed by a loud splash from close by.

He stopped with a frown, treading water slowly. The splashing and water was confusing him and he couldn't tell which way Pablo was coming from or which way home was. Many unnerving swims had taught him to relax, stay still and wait for the disturbance to settle. Piet wouldn't leave him in the water and would lead him home. So he took a few deep breaths and waited.

"Marc! Are you okay?" He could hear Pablo's clumsy strokes drawing nearer and then his lover was next to him, hand on his arm. "Marc?"

"I'm fine, babe. What's the matter? You all right? Is Piet okay?" Reaching to slide his hands up Pablo's arms and neck to feel the expression on his lover's face, Marc whistled and heard the sharp bark right behind him.

"I couldn't find you." Pablo was gasping, out of breath and treading water awkwardly. "Then I saw your stuff on the deck and I thought... You sure you're all right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, babe. Piet and I were having a swim, that's all." Marc frowned, stroking Pablo's cheek. "I left you a note by the door, didn't you see it?" He wrapped Pablo's arm over his shoulder, supporting and letting Pablo catch his breath.

"Yeah, 'gone outside'. I couldn't find you." He suddenly realized that Pablo was still wearing his bathrobe. "I didn't expect you to be swimming -- the water's like ice."

"It's not! It's just not warm! Besides, I'm highly unlikely to take the car and drive down to Denny's for pancakes, babe." He hugged Pablo. "I'm fine. I didn't mean to scare you, honest."

Piet began herding them both back to the deck, nose and shoulder insistent against Marc's side. He chuckled, not resisting. Pablo was wet and cold and unhappy and things wouldn't get better until Marc had him washed, dried and snuggled in between warm flannel sheets. "Apparently Piet shares your opinion that it's time to go in, though. Pushy beast."

"I expected to find you sitting on the dock, or walking or something." Pablo would probably have sounded more upset if his teeth hadn't been chattering. "Damn it, it's hard enough to swim without a 300 pound weight..." Pablo let go of him and Marc heard thrashing and then Pablo's hand was on his arm again, urging him toward the dock. "I loved that bathrobe." Pablo sounded mournful.

Marc sighed and simply dived for it, trusting his long arms and legs to find it as he angled himself in the water. The robe brushed against his hips and he grabbed it, lugging it up to the surface. Piet barked brightly as he surfaced, pushing him more insistently toward the ladder. "Got it, babe. We'll throw it in the washer and it'll be okay."

He could feel Pablo's hands pushing toward the ladder as well, his lover spluttering and finally finding words. "Are you crazy? It's just a bathrobe!"

"It's your bathrobe. You love that bathrobe. What is the matter with you?" He found the ladder and he helped Pablo up and then Piet. Finally it was his turn to climb up, stripping the water from his skin easily.

"What's the matter with me? I love you a hell of a lot more than the stupid bathrobe." Pablo grabbed his hand and dragged him up the dock, not stopping until there was grass under foot. "God, for a moment I thought you might be..."

"Pablo, lover. I can't see, I can still swim and Piet was right there. What, the worst case scenario is that I climb up the wrong deck and someone points me home?" He wrapped his arms around Pablo and hugged. He couldn't understand why his lover was so upset. Marc had been swimming since he was little and it hasn't like the fact that it was dark could make a difference... "Come on, let me get you in the shower and get you warm, my worrywart."

Pablo took a deep gulping breath and his arms came around Marc's middle, holding on tight. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry,

it's just... God, for a second there I thought, and I'm not ready to lose you again. I can't lose you again, Marc. I love you. I love you." The words were punctuated by small kisses along his collarbones.

"Oh, Pablo. Babe." Marc ducked his head, lifting Pablo's chin and kissing him softly. "I'm not going anywhere, love. I love you and I'm not leaving."

Pablo's hand slipped up around his neck and held his head down, kissing him deeply. There was desperation in Pablo's kiss and Marc opened to him, attempting to reassure and comfort. Passion and hunger quickly made themselves known, making the deep kisses hard and needy.

Finally Marc pulled away from Pablo with a sob, putting some space between them. "Inside. Now, babe, before I end up on my knees in the lawn."

Pablo's hand slid into his, fingers holding tightly as he was led back to their home.

The door had barely closed behind him when Pablo pushed him up against it, mouth finding his again, tongue hot and aggressive in his mouth. Marc moaned, head spinning as Pablo devoured him, not easing up or backing away in the slightest. His hands found Pablo's shoulders, the skin wasn't cold anymore, but warm and slick.

One of Pablo's hands wrapped around his hip, fingers digging in hard enough to leave bruises, the other ran restlessly up and down along his side, and Pablo's knee pushed insistently between his legs. He spread his legs, hands sliding up Pablo's neck to touch the beloved face again, to stroke the fine skin and see his lover.

Pablo's fingers found his nipple, teasing the small nub with quick, soft flickers and then tugging it between thumb and forefinger. His rings were tugged next and twisted, the touches rough and urgent. His lover's hips began to rock rhythmically against him, soft groans and gasps filling his mouth. Marc held Pablo's cheeks in his palms, fingers curling into the thick, wet hair. His lips fastened over Pablo's tongue and suckled, pulling in time with the rhythm of the cock pressing hypnotically against him. Pablo made a sound like a sob and pressed harder. One hand slid down to wrap around Pablo's hip, pulling them tighter together with a soft whimper. He needed to sink to his knees and taste, to spin around and feel Pablo inside him, to feel Pablo's mouth pulling him in deep.

What they were doing simply felt too good to interrupt.

Pablo's movements became frantic, his hands clutching; his kisses were sloppy and intoxicating. The sounds were enough to make his balls ache, to put him on the razor's edge of orgasm -- those sweet, uninhibited, incredibly fucking sexy noises of his Pablo lost in passion. Pablo's whole body began to tremble, soft shakes that warned Marc he was about to come. A soft cry confirmed it and then Pablo was jerked gracelessly against him, warmth splashing against his skin.

Marc reached down, grasping the base of his cock firmly, panting heavily. As hungry as Pablo was, he could get his lover back to a frantic hunger in the shower and maybe again in bed... "So fucking sexy, babe. Love you so."

Pablo murmured softly, something that sounded vaguely like agreement, mouth busy licking and sucking at Marc's neck.

"Oh..." Marc's head fell back, knocking against the door. "Pablo... feels good... shower... hot water...God..."

Pablo was heavy against him, sliding slowly down, teeth nibbling, lips and tongue soothing as a trail of liquid heat was left behind.

"I love you, Marc." The words were spoken quietly, solemnly, and then Pablo's mouth closed around his cock, sucking him into wet heat.

"Pablo! Fuck!" His cry echoed through kitchen, body arching, hips thrusting into full, soft heat.

His lover hummed happily, the vibrations traveling up his cock and settling deep in his balls, at the base of his spine. Hot hands settled on his hips, encouraging him to thrust. He shuddered, all thought of waiting or showers or anything but Pablo's tongue and lips and hands fleeing. He pressed deep, sobbing as heat crested over him. He stayed still as long as possible, and then his hips began to rock frantically, taking his lover's mouth with deep, passionate thrusts.

Pablo took everything he gave without complaint, no whimpering or gagging or pulling away, just increasing suction and the soft touch of tongue. His mind was lost, as free and wild and excited as if he were in the water. He reached down, hands sliding through Pablo's hair, anchoring himself to the most important thing in his life. "Oh, I love you. I love you."

With a sob, he came, shuddering violently. Still humming, Pablo swallowed him down, hands now rubbing and down along his thighs.

He slid down the door, knees buckling. Marc pulled Pablo close, tremors rocking his body. "Oh, god. So good, love. So good."

Pablo's mouth found his, sharing his own taste with him in a slow, tender kiss. "I love you."

"I love you, babe. You okay?" Each word was punctuated by soft brushing of lips.

"Yeah, I'm good. I'm sorry I freaked out on you."

"Mm... s'okay. I didn't mean to scare you. I wanted one more swim before it got too cold." Marc continued nuzzling Pablo's jaw, lips enjoying the texture of skin. "It's a fabulous feeling, the water all around me. I miss it in the winter."

"We could add an enclosed pool beside the deck, glass walls and ceilings to let the sun in." Pablo chuckled. "It would be heated of course."

"Nah we got the hot tub!" Marc grinned. "Let's have champagne. Bubbly and bubbles in a hot tub. A seat for us, we could let Piet sit across from us, just in case, you know..."

Pablo hit him lightly in the arm. "That dog is not hot tubbing with us!"

"Piet's not just a dog, Pablo! He... he's family! Think of him as our little fuzzy son!"

A snort answered him. "You try telling that to Mama."

Marc giggled. "Oh, Mama! Meet your grandson, Piet. No, really! Pablo had a short labor and got his figure back right away. Of course, nursing was a real bitch."

"Hey, how come I have to go give birth to him? You're the one who wanted him -- don't worry you can have a short labor, too." Pablo dissolved into giggles, pressing close as he laughed.

They laughed together, the sound filling the air and making Marc warm all through. "Oh, how did I survive without this, without you? I love you so."

"I don't know about you, but I survived it by holding onto the hope that I'd find you again."

"Maybe that was enough for both of us, babe."

"It doesn't matter, does it? Just that we do have this, have each other now."

"Yeah. Now and tomorrow and forever."

Forever and always.

Chapter Twenty One

Marc had started drinking when Marge brought the mail in and read it to him, handing him the box full of wrinkled photographs and dusty sketchpads and folded pieces of paper. A key ring with old, useless keys and a stuffed animal that had been a dinosaur once -- garbage.

A box of worthless fucking garbage.

He was still drinking when Pablo showed up, undoubtedly fetched by Marge or Bev or someone. He held up a hand before the fretting could commence. "I'm fine, babe."

"Marge says 'he's in the kitchen, he needs you' and I find you with the whiskey. I'm not sure that's my definition of fine, you know?" Pablo pulled a chair over to his, the rubber feet sliding noisily. His lover sat down, almost in his lap. "So what's got you so fine you're drinking at 9:40 am?"

Marc poured himself another three fingers of booze and shrugged. "You'll have to ask Marge were the fucking note is. Apparently someone was going through my mother's things and they found this shit the old bitch kept. Apparently she knew where I was. Left some asshole instructions to send it to Bev." Fucking whore knew where he was for God knew how long, then had this sent to him -- photos, drawings, his fucking drawings that he couldn't fucking see anymore.

He growled and slammed back the whiskey, suddenly desperate for a cigarette for the first time in ten years.

"Is she dead?" Pablo asked, voice quiet, hand coming to rest next to his, offering comfort but not forcing it on him.

"Who the fuck cares?" Truth be told, he wasn't absolutely sure anymore -- Marge had only read the letter once and all he could remember was the feeling of all the paper on his fingers. Years and years of drawing, of color, all lost, and she'd known where he was to send it all back.

"Is the whiskey making you feel any better?"

"Not yet, but I'm hoping." His hands were trembling as he poured again, whiskey splashing on his fingers, the table.

The bottle and the glass were taken from him and something soft wiped the booze off his fingers. "Well I suppose you can sit here until you're shit-faced, though I won't promise to be quiet when you wake up hung over. Or you could let me try to help you feel better. A little skin, a little moaning... and you aren't puking after."

He took Pablo's hand, holding on tight. "I don't know if can... I... Oh fuck, babe. She should never have fucking had it sent here."

"No, she shouldn't have, but I guess she felt a need to... I don't know try to make you as miserable as she was? Maybe she read about how we got back together again and it pissed her off that you found the happiness she never

had. It doesn't really matter though -- it's done. The stuff's here." Pablo shifted some of the papers on the table. "You know... I bet Bev could sell these for a lot of money. You could have a trust set up to run a shelter for kids."

"I'm going to burn it all. I... oh, God, I could see then. Colors and shapes and you and it's gone and I was okay and she sends me this shit like it fucking matters anymore!" He was sobbing, furious and hurt in a way that he couldn't figure out how to stop. He wanted to see Pablo's face, those dark eyes. He couldn't remember the difference between green and blue, whether he liked purple or not.

The rubber feet on Pablo's chair skittered across the floor again as Pablo stood. Strong fingers dug into his shoulders, rubbing and working at the knots. "I don't know what to tell you, Marc. I haven't got a magic wand that can make you see again, though I wish I did. All I can do is remind you that you still have four other senses and your health and you have me."

He nodded, forcing himself not to respond, not to scream and rant and rail about how unfair it was, how he hurt and hated and longed for ten minutes -- ten fucking minutes -- to see Pablo's face, the water, the dawn.

It didn't matter. It wouldn't change anything and he'd be damned if he upset his lover anymore than he already had. No matter what he did, what he wanted, when the chips fell, he was still blind -- was yesterday, would be tomorrow, would die that way.

Pablo's arms slid around his chest, his lover's weight pressing against his back as Pablo rubbed a cheek along his head. "I love you, Marc. I loved you when you could see and I love you now. Your paintings are beautiful, but your sculptures... you give them life. People like to look at them, but more than that they want to reach out and touch. It's almost as if you've imbued them with something that says 'I was made by touch -- to really see me you have to touch me'."

"I miss painting. I miss your eyes. I miss sunsets and colors... Oh, I want colors. I can't remember what blue looks like anymore." His words were harsh whispers, forced out of him and offered up to his lover because he was tired and didn't want to carry them alone anymore.

Pablo didn't say anything, just kept holding him, touching him, soft movements that said "I'm here, I'm listening."

He talked forever, until he was sober and hoarse and there were no secrets or tears or hidden anger left inside him. He gave everything away -- and his lover accepted it all. Pablo held him, stroked him, touched him and let him know he was home, safe, loved.

Finally he trailed to a halt, croaking. "I need a shower, babe, and some water. Please."

Pablo kissed the top of his head. "That I can do."

A cold glass was pressed into his hand, Pablo's fingers lingering, stroking his.

Oh, God, he was thirsty. He gulped the water down, moaning as it hit his throat. "Thank you. I'm sorry."

A soft kiss pressed against his lips. "Don't," Pablo said softly. "Don't apologize for how you feel."

"Can I apologize for melting down all over you and our kitchen table?" He stood, wrapping his arms around his lover and holding on tight. "I feel sweaty, sticky, empty, like I threw up almost."

"In a way I think you did, just not what you ate, you know?" Pablo gave him a squeeze. "Shower, Caro? Lets go get you cleaned up."

"Yeah, babe." He leaned into Pablo's arms, let his partner lead him down the hall. It wasn't all right, but it would be.

Pablo watched Marc sleep for awhile and then slipped out of bed. He needed to gather together the stuff that Marc's mom had sent, either get rid of it or at least put the box somewhere that Marc wouldn't find it accidentally.

Marge was in the kitchen when he got there, along with Bev and he said a little prayer of thanks that he'd remembered Marge was back from her niece's and had pulled on some clothes. He frowned at Bev's cigarette but forced himself to stay quiet. The last thing Marc needed right now was the three of them fighting. He picked the box up from the corner where Marc had kicked it.

"That the box the bitch sent?" Bev's voice was gravelly -- half angry, half mercenary.

"How's Marc, son? He looked so..." Marge fluttered a little. "He's going to be sick."

He dumped the box on the table and shook his head. "No, he stopped drinking before he'd had too much." He sighed and pushed a hand through his hair. "He's asleep now. I haven't even had a chance to look at this stuff or read the letter. Is his mother dead?"

Marge nodded. "Liver cancer. Her sister sent the box. The note said she wanted Marc to have it."

Bev started going through the illustrations. "Oh, God. Margorie. Get me a good box?"

"Hold up." He pulled the pictures from Bev's hands. "Those are Marc's. He hasn't decided what he wants to do with them yet." Mercenary bitch.

Bev frowned. "Now, see here. You know him. He'll have a snit and tear them up. Let me get them catalogued, dated, framed. Preserved. No one has to see them. Hell, no one has seen a lot of his stuff, but they need to be archived."

"No they don't. I won't let him tear them up in a snit, but if he decides he wants to have a bonfire and burn them, then that's what we'll do. I don't care about what they're worth or what they might be worth one day to students of his work -- this is about him and what he needs to get through this."

"Damn it, Pablo. Think with your head for once." Bev frowned over, crushed out her smoke. "He's bad enough, never thinking of the future, of history. You don't need to enable him."

"If I wasn't thinking with my head, I would have torn them to pieces already myself! These are his, Bev. *His*. Not yours, not mine, not his mother's." He got up and glared at Bev. "I'm not the Johnny-come-lately the two of you seem to think I am, you know."

"Bullshit." It was Marge that said it, surprising him and Bev. "You weren't there for the bad parts. You were there for the good and then back when he got himself back together."

He felt like he'd been slapped and he took a deep breath. "I searched for him from the moment he was gone until I found him again. I would have gone through it with him, I wanted to. I was never given the choice."

"You think you'd have stayed with him, do you?"

"Marge!" Bev looked over. "Stop it."

God, did she really think he was that fickle? "I would give anything to have those thirteen years back. You think I'm here because of the money? I loved him when there was nothing but a warehouse and pizza out of the dumpster. I would have stayed."

Marge's eyes filled with tears. "And if you found out how far he fell from that warehouse? Would you love him then?"

Bev shook her head, reached for Marge's hand. "Now, now. If Marc had had Pablo then, it would have been different."

Marge nodded. "I know."

"I love him no matter what, Marge?" He frowned. "What do you mean he fell from the warehouse? He left the warehouse -- he never went back. I would know -- I haunted that place."

"Pablo, son..." Bev shook her head, wouldn't meet his eyes. "We met him in Chicago. On the street. Marge ran a homeless outreach. A... a place for addicts, prostitutes. Street people."

Pablo sat down, arms wrapping around himself and nodded. He knew Marc had occasionally done pot and knew his friend... Les? prostituted for money. But he'd always hoped Marc had managed better, figured he'd been right when thirteen years later he was doing so well for himself. "Was it bad?" he asked softly, not looking at them.

"Yeah. We thought we lost him. Bevvie found a school for the blind for him, training, everything and when we went to find him again in the shelter, he was gone. It took three months to find him in this filthy tenement." Marge sobbed. "He weighed ninety pounds. He had lice. His teeth were falling out. We almost lost him."

"Oh, God." Tears prickled at his eyes and he started rocking, mad at Mama all over again, mad at *Marc* for going, for not letting him take care of his lover.

"It doesn't matter anymore." Bev's voice was hard, harsh. "It's over. He survived. He lived. It doesn't matter and don't you two let that evil bitch who bore him bring this shit up."

God, if his Mama hadn't convinced Marc to go, he could have been there and helped and that wouldn't have happened, Marc wouldn't have had to go through that. It hurt, knowing it had happened, that he could have stopped it. It hurt badly. He sniffed and wiped his eyes.

Marge dug in her purse, found a tissue. "We love him, Pablo, me and Bev. We're not trying to use him, to steal him. We saw him at his worse. He's part of our family."

"And I'm never going to be good enough for him," he said wryly, the revelation hitting him; they sounded just like his Mama.

Bev chuckled. "You're his muse, Pablo. His soul."

Marge nodded. "He used to sit on the street and draw you, over and over and over. Cry for you in his sleep."

He closed his eyes again. "I know how he felt," he said quietly, tears slipping from beneath his lids again, the memories strong.

"And he survived and so did you and you won't let her ruin that now." Bev nodded, lit another cigarette. "He made himself a life, Pablo. He came out strong and brave. You should be proud of him. It would have been easy to die."

He nodded. "I am. Could you not smoke those in here, please?"

Bev arched an eyebrow, but put the cigarette out. "What? Marc doesn't smoke anymore?"

Marge chuckled. "No, Bevv. Not for a long time."

It made him feel better that she'd done as he asked, that they knew how important he and Marc were to each other. "Look, I'll explain to Marc that you want to keep the drawings for the future, for history. But it's going to have to be his decision. They're his things."

Bev nodded. "At least let me get them in some archival paper, out of the box of..." She held up an old napkin with 'IOU \$2. Thanx Mommy. Marcus.' printed on it.

"Is it really going to ruin them? Another few days, maybe a week or two?" God, she would just push and push.

Marc's voice sounded from the kitchen door, tired and lost. "Just take them. I can't see them anymore. They don't mean anything anymore."

"Are you sure, Caro?" He got up and went to Marc, fingers sliding on one warm cheek. "You don't have to decide now."

"Bev. Marge. Go home. Please. Take the stuff and go home. I don't want company."

"But son..." Marge stood.

"Marge, I love you both. I do. Go home. Call me tomorrow. But right now, go home."

Pablo turned and wrapped his arm around Marc's waist. "He'll be okay. He has me now. Honor his request."

Bev stood up. "Come on, Marge. He's tired, had a shitty day. We'll all have lunch later in the week and visit. Pablo? Call us?"

He nodded. "We will. Thanks." He added the last word awkwardly, glad these two had been there when he hadn't, even if that emotion was guarded by the resentment he still felt at not having had the choice of being there.

Marc slumped against him as the back door closed. "Hey."

"Hey, Caro." He reached up and smoothed his hand over Marc's short hair. "How're you doing?"

"My head hurts and I want you to hold me and tell me it's going to be okay."

"Well let's get you something for your head and then I will hold you forever and tell you it's going to be okay -- because it is." He leaned up and kissed the corner of Marc's mouth.

"Okay." Marc's fingers twined with his. "Will you read to me?"

"Yeah. I'll even let you choose the book." He bumped their hips together, leading Marc to the counter. He got the headache pills out and a glass of water, passing them to Marc.

Marc took them, sighed. "I heard the end of your conversation. You mad at me?"

"At you? No, why would I be mad at you?" He wrapped his arms around Marc's waist and squeezed.

"I don't know." Marc leaned down and let him hold on. It shouldn't feel so good to have Marc need him, but it did.

"Well I'm not mad at you. I'm worried about you." He led Marc down the hall. "You want another shower? Or maybe a massage? Or just the cuddling and reading?"

"Mmm... I could go for a massage. I like the feel of your hands on me."

"Yeah? They like being on you, too." He got Marc naked again and down in the bed. "Back first and then front." Just in case one thing led to another. Not that it had to. But just in case.

The dragon tattoo was faded and soft now, the image making him smile as Marc stretched out, wiggling into the sheets.

He stripped his own clothes off and pulled some scented oil out of the drawer. Cinnamon and cloves, cool. He pressed a kiss in the small of Marc's back and warmed some oil up on his hands before starting to massage his lover's shoulders. Marc moaned, tight muscles easing under his touch.

"I love doing this," he murmured. "Sometimes I close my eyes and I imagine what it feels like, to create something so stunning with my fingers, as if I were sculpting you like you sculpt me."

"It's like magic." Marc's voice was husky, distant.

"Mmmm. You're magic, Caro." He moved down Marc's back, fingers pulling out the tension.

"No. I'm just yours, just a tall, skinny artist... Oh. Oh, there." Marc rippled, arched.

He dug in harder, working the tight muscle. "Yeah -- mine. You don't think that's magic? I do."

"Oh... Yeah. Yeah, we're magic. Don't stop."

He giggled softly. "I won't, Caro."

Marc gave him a moan, arching beneath him, finally really relaxing for him. Yeah, that was it. He shifted down a bit more and dug his fingers into the small of Marc's back, into the sweet ass.

Marc's thighs parted, hips shifting. He let his thumbs tease along Marc's crease, spreading it gently and bending to lick from top to bottom, tongue flat against Marc's opening.

"Oh..." Marc purred, shifting slowly, hips rocking. "Babe."

"This okay?" he asked, doing it again.

"Uh-huh." Breathy, gaspy -- yeah. Yeah, it was okay.

He spread Marc's cheeks wider, concentrating on the little hole now, licking and pushing at it with his tongue.

"Oh. Oh, babe. I... I can't think when you... Oh." Marc reached up, hands wrapping around the headboard.

"Not supposed to think when I'm doing this, Marc. Just feel." He pushed the tip of his tongue inside Marc.

"Oh. Just feel. Oh." Marc pulled his knees up under him, spreading wider. He whimpered, hand sliding to cup Marc's balls, to play with the hot, silky cock as he tongue-fucked his lover. Marc groaned, moving a little faster, luxuriating in it. He watched Marc's back ripple, moaning softly, pushing deeper.

"Love..." Marc arched, toes curling.

He hummed happily, hand wrapping tighter around Marc's cock, getting serious now with his strokes, with the shoves of his tongue into Marc's body. Marc groaned, bucking up into his face, giving him everything. Needing him. Harder and faster he worked, wanting to make Marc fly. The sharp cry filled the air, Marc jerking, heat covering his fingers. He moaned happily, hand moving slower, slick now with Marc's come, his tongue sliding lazily in and out.

Marc sighed, shivered, cuddled into the pillows. "Oh, babe. So good."

"Good." He snuggled up against Marc's back, pulling the covers up over them. "I love you."

"Love you. Love you, babe."

He hummed happily, fingers sliding on Marc's skin. "You okay, Caro?"

Marc nodded, snuggling back. "I just want this for a few days. Just us. Just loving."

"Oh, I could handle that, Marc." He could so handle that. Marge had been back a short time and already it felt like she was *always* there.

"I'll call Marge and Bev. Tell them we're taking some private time. I could... Well I could tell Marge we'd like her to keep coming and helping out a few days a week?" They'd obviously proven they could manage just fine without her, but having heard how low Marc had gotten, knowing the two of them had searched for him and helped him pull himself up out of the gutter, Pablo didn't want to just ask her to stop helping out.

Marc nodded. "Let's arrange a lunch out with them. I actually sort of have a plan. I got an email from Gwen, that chick in New York, asking if we could take two foreign exchange students. Now, I'm not interested, but there's this nurturing mom-type that I know..."

He giggled softly and hugged Marc. "Oh, that sounds perfect!"

Marc nodded. "She needs someone to take care of, to love. Sort of like you. Her husband and son were killed years and years ago and she poured herself into loving other people."

"Oh, man, that's rough." He hugged Marc tighter. He knew what it was like to lose the person you loved most. He wasn't sure if he wanted to be compared to Marge, but he maybe understood her a little more.

"Yeah, but she managed, sort of like we did."

Pablo nodded. It was kind of what you had to do. Deal with the bad stuff and go on. Like Marc's mom's little bomb. Marc would let him pamper and love and care and eventually the hurt would fade.

Then they'd be stronger for the next thing. Just like it was supposed to be.

Chapter Twenty Two

Marc's fingers moved over the tags on the hangers, reading quickly. Marge had organized a system for keeping them in order and it wasn't like he ever wore anything but white and blue and black anyway, but he still liked to know what he was wearing. It still seemed odd sometimes, to feel shirts and pants and jeans and jackets hanging in the closet, to know they were his. It had been easier to get used to the feel and smell of Pablo's clothes hanging on the other side.

Marc pulled out a shirt marked 'dk bl, shiny, nice' and shrugged it on. He turned to nuzzle into Pablo's clothes as he fastened the buttons, breathing in the smell that soothed and comforted and aroused.

"Hey, don't wrinkle my clothes -- not when you can wrinkle the real thing." Pablo's hands slid around his waist, his lover's body pressing close against his back and a soft kiss dropping on his neck. Turning up, Pablo's hands slid to his nipples, playing almost idly with the rings.

"I wasn't wrinkling. I love the way it smells in here -- love the way you smell." Marc grinned and turned, one hand sliding up Pablo's arm and shoulder to find his cheek. Once that landmark was found, Marc easily leaned down and took a soft, long kiss. "I love you."

"Mm." Pablo nibbled at his bottom lip. "I love you, too." Pablo rubbed his hips back and forth against Marc's. "Wanna take the edge off before we go?"

With a wicked smile, Marc sank to his knees, fingers quick upon Pablo's zipper. Before his lover's surprised gasp had faded, Marc had the hard, silky cock rubbing like velvet on his cheek as his hungry lips searched for the tip.

Pablo's hand slid over his head, the other guiding Pablo's erection between his lips. "Oh, Caro..."

He shuddered, the sweet salt flavor bursting in his mouth as the hot slit of Pablo's cock dragged over his tongue. His moan started somewhere down near his balls and curled up his stomach before sliding around the flesh in his mouth. Shuddering, Pablo whimpered. One hand stroked across Marc's cheek, the other stayed on his head, rubbing over his short hair. Marc slid one hand up to curl around Pablo's hip, encouraging his lover to move, to thrust. He sucked steadily, pulling and licking, searching for the right combination that would cause Pablo to cry out, to take him, to have more of those heady, salty drops fill his mouth.

"Marc..." The hip beneath his hand began to move slowly, softly pushing in and pulling out again as Pablo made sweet noises. The hands on his head and face were trembling, grasping ever so slightly. Marc hummed, surrounded by the scent and taste and sounds of pleasure and desire and love. His lips and hands tightened as he sucked harder, lost in the feel of Pablo all around him. Pablo gasped and his hands cupped Marc's head, holding him in place as he began to thrust, long strokes that spoke more of need than control.

"Oh, God. Marc." Oh, it felt good -- normal and exciting and achingly right to be in their house, making love because they wanted each other, Pablo's cries falling over him like spring rain. Pablo's hands tightened and his

hips lost their grace, jerking against him. He heard Pablo shout his name out and then his mouth was flooded with Pablo's seed, Pablo's pleasure. Marc swallowed, drinking his lover down, tongue searching to draw out each shudder, each possible moment of pleasure. "Oh, I love you, Marc."

He hummed again, chuckling as it made Pablo jerk and gasp. His lover's hands stroked over his scalp, Pablo's cock slipping from between his lips and then Pablo was sinking to bring their mouths together. Pablo's lips were warm and soft against his own. Marc sighed happily into the kiss, hands sliding over Pablo's shoulders to hold him close. The warm hands slid down his back and around to stroke across his cock.

"Mm... warm. Love you." He took another sweet, deep kiss, sharing the flavor of love between them.

Pablo nibbled on his lower lip and slid one hand into his pants, fingers dancing along his erection.

"Oh..." The word was breathed into Pablo's mouth as Marc spread his thighs, hips straining towards the touch.

Pablo chuckled softly, sweetly against his lips. "Oh, you like that do you?" The caress was repeated.

A soft whimper and a slow, pleasurable shudder was his body's response. The warm hand wrapped ever so slowly around his cock as Pablo deepened the kiss. Marc held on, head spinning, lips open and hungry. Tiny shivers traveled over his body, moving from his balls to sensitize his belly, his thighs, his arms, his nipples with their rings.

Pablo kissed him thoroughly, pumping his cock with long, lazy strokes. "Almost makes you want to give up dancing in public for ... dancing in private, doesn't it?"

"I'd give up anything to be in your arms. You know that." Marc's attention was caught in the rhythm of Pablo's hand, moving slow and steady.

"You will be in my arms, Caro. Either way. Always." Pablo's mouth returned to his, the warm tongue teasing his lips apart and then sliding deep. The hand on his cock tightened and moved faster, pulling him inexorably into pleasure. His orgasm was sweet, pouring over him in one wave after another, drawn out of him by Pablo's fingers, each gasp captured in Pablo's mouth. "Mm... so beautiful." A soft kiss pulled at his lips. "Pleasure makes you beautiful, Marc."

"Oh, babe. I love you." Pablo's lips were sweeter when he was happy.

"I love you, too." Pablo giggled, the sound boyish and joyful. "Come on, old man. I want to take my lover dancing."

"But what about me? What am I doing to do while you're dancing away?" Marc grinned as they stood; he'd been looked forward to dancing with Pablo ever since his lover invited him earlier in the week. They hadn't really ever dated, not really, and they'd never gone dancing.

"You're going to be trying to keep up." Pablo's lips captured his in a quick kiss.

"Hey, I'm not that old, babe." He pulled at his clothes. "Do I need new pants or maybe jeans?"

Pablo's hands covered his, stilling them. "Let me just get a cloth and I'll bet you don't even need to change your underwear."

He could hear Pablo walking to their ensuite. "Besides, then you'll be able to smell it all night, us and sex. And you'll know that the dancing is just foreplay."

"Pablo..." He stood, breathing in the smells of seed and sweat and fabric softener and it suddenly occurred to him that this closet would never be the same. He started chuckling, the odd, overwhelming joy that was Pablo ringing inside him.

"What?" He could hear Pablo's grin in his lover's voice.

"You make me happy down in my bones."

His cheeks were captured between two warm hands and Pablo's lips slid across his again. "Good."

"Take me dancing, babe. I want to feel you and the music." Marc rubbed his nose against Pablo's cheek. "Are we taking Piet or should we leave him here?" Marc had the cane, but hated it, had hated it from the beginning. Of course, if they took Piet, then he'd have to do something with him while they danced. And, as talented as Piet was, the pup was a terrible dancer.

"We can take him if you'll feel more comfortable, but I'll be with you all the way and I'm not too sure he's gonna appreciate the music and the all the people."

Marc nodded. "Well, make sure I'm presentable and I'll grab the old cane and we'll go."

Pablo tucked in his shirt for him and slid a warm hand across his scalp. A soft kiss and then Pablo softly said "perfect."

"Then let me take my lover and show him off." Marc slid his hand around Pablo's elbow with a smile. "I love you, you know that, right?"

"Yeah, I know. It's what makes me smile every morning when I wake up next to you snoring."

"I don't snore! That's the damned dog!" Marc chuckled, fingers reaching for Pablo's ribs.

Pablo giggled, trying to dance away from his fingers without abandoning Marc altogether. "You blame everything on that poor mutt."

"Poor? Between Bev and Marge and you that beast lives like a king!"

"Who, Piet? We wouldn't do that -- he's a working dog." He could hear the laughter lurking in Pablo's voice and could imagine his lover trying not to smile.

"He's spoiled rotten and I don't know what I'd do without him." They walked out of the bedroom and Marc heard the clatter of nails on the wood floors, Piet bouncing over to nuzzle his hand with wet, cold nose. "Would I, muttley?"

Marc bent down to pet and cuddle Piet for a second. "You've got the night off, pretty boy. Go chase squirrels in the backyard. Pablo's taking me dancing."

Pablo giggled. "I keep telling you he isn't pretty." Piet barked and Pablo's giggles got louder. "I didn't say you were homely, Piet, I said not pretty. There's a difference."

Marc hugged Piet tight and nuzzled the warm, fuzzy face. "Don't you listen to him. I think you're pretty, boy. He's just jealous that I don't take him for walks and buy him kibble."

"Got it in one." Pablo's hand slid across the back of his shoulders, squeezing gently. "Come on, Caro. We'd better get going."

"Okay. Be good, Piet. We'll be home later." As they headed toward the door, Marc grabbed his glasses off the bar and his cane from its hook by the door. "Ready when you are, babe."

Pablo's hands slid around his neck and tugged him down for a warm kiss. "I'll be the envy of every man in the club."

He grinned. "You say that, but you've never danced with me. What if I suck?"

"I'll still be with the best looking guy there." Pablo's hand was warm on his as it guided his hand to Pablo's elbow.

The night was cool, the wind brisk. It felt good on his skin. Someone was grilling, too -- the laughter of children and heavy scent of tarragon and rosemary pointed to the Eng's. Pablo got him to the side of the car and he slid in with a happy sigh, breathing deeply. The car smelled like his lover -- warm and woody from hours of driving to one interview or the next.

Pablo started the car and got them going. "So we're going to this club between here and Renneville. It kind of caters to everyone. They do big band night on Mondays, Jazz on Tuesdays, that kind of thing and they're rainbow friendly, but they let straight couples in, too. It's a really nice, easy atmosphere from what I've been told. Tonight's Latin night, so I get to hold you close and rub our hips together."

"Sounds perfect, babe." He reached over and stroked Pablo's thigh. "You're so good to me. Thank you."

"Thank you for coming with me, Caro." Pablo's voice was soft, full of love and admiration.

He relaxed for the short trip, discussing their upcoming vacation, his latest piece, Pablo's latest story, the last phone call from Pablo's Mama. Simple, normal, happy, everyday small talk that always brought it home to Marc that Pablo was his life, his heart. Eventually the car slowed, turned, turned again and then came to a stop, the motor going off. In the quiet it left behind the thump of base was quite audible.

"Ready, Caro?"

"For you? Always, babe." He slid out of the car, unfolding his cane and shutting the door. The air smelled like perfume and beer and gasoline and he could feel the music vibrating up through the ground.

Pablo hooked Marc's free and around his elbow and let them forward. "No stairs. No here, not inside. Lots of feet to trip over though."

"Okay. Lead on, MacDuff, and I will follow." Ten years he'd been blind and he still got nervous walking into a crowded place. He held onto Pablo's arm with one hand, his cane with the other.

Pablo's free hand came up to squeeze his and two steps later they were engulfed by noise and smells and Pablo squeezed his hand again. "I'm not going anywhere, Marc. You need anything, just ask."

Pablo let them through a crowd of people and a chair scrapped against the floor nearby and Pablo was guiding his hand to it. Marc eased himself into the chair, hands finding the little round bar table, moving quickly and discovering a stack of coasters, a jar candle and an ashtray.

Pablo pulled up another chair and sat close to him. "The dance floor's in front of us -- so we don't have to wander

through too many people to get to it or back to our table. The place is about half full now -- mostly couples in their thirties and up."

"You want something to drink?" The voice interrupted his lover.

"Marc?"

"A Coke, please." He made it a fine point to stay sober in unfamiliar territory.

"Yeah, me too, thanks." Pablo's hand slid over his, lightly twining their fingers together. "We can get something to munch on later if you get hungry. I've done most of my dancing at weddings and I always hit the buffet when I'm done, just starving." Pablo's shoulder nudged his. "You wanna go dance, or do you want to sit and get a feel for the place first?"

"Let's dance." He grinned. "You can tell me about everything after." He folded his cane and slipped the elastic band around it to keep it closed. "Dance with me, babe. I've waited for years."

Pablo took his hand and led him to the dance floor. His lover took his hands and guided them to Pablo's hips. Pablo's hands settled on his shoulders. "Follow the movements of my hips."

"You'll tell me if I look stupid?" His hands curled around Pablo's waist, enjoying the solid feel of his lover.

"You aren't going to look any stupider than the rest of us out here shaking our out-of-shape rumps. But if it makes you feel better, yes I will tell you if you look stupid." Pablo began to move his hips to the music, simple back and forth movements to start with.

"I happen to know that your ass is just perfect, thank you." Marc chuckled, thumbs stroking along the fabric of Pablo's slacks. It felt good, easy -- holding Pablo was one of the most natural things he knew.

Pablo giggled. "Flattery will get you laid later."

"In that case, have I mention how beautiful your eyes are? The bow of your lips? The coffee and cream color of your skin?" He grinned mischievously. "You haven't gone and gotten yourself bleached or anything have you? 'Cause then I'll have to change that last one to just cream, no coffee..."

Pablo's giggles turned into full blown laughter. "No bleach, you nut. I'm gonna add a step, watch my hips."

He could feel Pablo stepping toward him and then back again, hips doing a little flourish in between.

"Well, Elvis! Look at you!" Mark chuckled, attention focused on moving with Pablo, not tripping them both. It was easier than he imagined, almost like making love, Pablo's hips and hands telegraphing each motion.

"You are looking to get laid, you sweet-talker you." A quick kiss was pressed to his lips and then the music changed, grew slower and Pablo moved closer. Now his lover's hips brushed his own as they moved to the music. He smiled, relaxing in Pablo's arms. He'd imagined this, swaying easily with someone -- with Pablo -- so many times. Drawn it, painted it, sculpted his muse dancing. And now it was real.

Art and imagination had nothing on reality.

Another slow number followed the first and Pablo laid his head on Marc's shoulder, hands sliding up around his neck. "Te amo, mi Caro."

"I love you, babe." He let his arms slide around Pablo's waist, leaning his head down to rub against the soft, thick hair. "This feels good."

"Yeah, you do." Pablo rubbed his cheek against Marc's shirt. One hand trailed up to stroke across Pablo's face, tracing lips and eyes, assuring himself that his lover was happy. It was a motion his hand made a dozen times a day, just looking, making sure things were as they should be. As always, Pablo's head turned as he finished the circuit, lips nibbling for a moment against his fingertips.

"Pablo." Tears of sheer pleasure threatened for a minute and then the music and the insistent sway of Pablo's sweet hips drove them off, replacing the awe and wonder with less complicated emotions. The music changed again, this number faster, but Pablo barely moved away, only his hips followed the beat, moving wickedly against Marc's own.

"Oh, babe." Marc gasped, body responding to the rhythm of the music and the seductive pressure of Pablo's body against him.

"Is this what you thought it would be like?" Pablo asked, voice a whisper. "Was there Latin music? Did my hips move against yours to the hypnotic beat? Was it sensuous and all consuming? Was it like this when you imagined it?"

"I didn't think it would feel so right, so easy." He bent his head close to Pablo's, shivering just slightly. "I never thought about it being so much like making love."

"It is, isn't it? Latin dancing is all about making love on the dance floor." Pablo changed the flow of his hips slightly, bringing them into even closer contact. "It's amazing what you can get away with."

"Oh, God. You're going to get us arrested." Marc gasped, lips finding Pablo's ear. "Or you're going to make me hard." He shifted slightly. Of course, 'going' wasn't exactly the right word...

"I'll take my chances on the first and I'm counting on the second." Pablo's head came up and he took a long, slow kiss. "Let me know when you need a break, Caro, I could do this all night long."

Marc nodded, moaning softly when Pablo's hip pressed against his swelling erection. "All night? I can think of lots of things that take all night long..."

"I bet most of them don't take place on a crowded dance floor. Though it would become the stuff of legends to the customers of Dacy's Grill and Dance Bar."

"Ah, I like that, Pablo, the Legendary Lover of Dacy's Grill and Dance Bar. It's got a ring to it."

Pablo laughed. "You know we aren't going to get the title though. There's a couple practically dry humping in the corner. I do believe they think they're doing the lambada."

"Ah, the forbidden dance!" Marc's hand found Pablo's cheek, tilting his lover's face and taking a hard, quick kiss, sharing his happiness. "You make me happy. God, I love you."

He could feel Pablo's smile against his lips. "I love you, too."

"Where'd you learn to dance, babe?" Marc nibbled at the corner of Pablo's mouth. "In college?"

Pablo giggled. "My sisters taught me. I was their pet project for *years*."

"Really?" Marc snorted. "I can *see* you and Lucinda waltzing around your mother's kitchen."

"I was the emergency date for every single wedding they and my cousins were invited to. I swear I've eaten more wedding cake than any one man should have to."

"Well, good thing they're all taken. You're mine now. For every bizarre family outing they can dream up." The music slowed again, became sultry and heavy.

Pablo's head returned to his shoulder, his lover's hips moving slowly, moving almost more sensuously now as they dragged against his erection. He reminded himself that they were in public. He told himself that he was a middle-aged man. He tried to think of slugs and cold clay and leeches. Pablo still made him hard and needy.

Pablo was whispering, soft words against his neck. "You know what I never got to do in college? I never got to make out in the backseat of a car."

"Really? That's just wrong." Marc shivered at the feel the warm breath on his skin. "No hickeys? No groping?"

"None. Part of the problem might have been that I didn't have a backseat." Pablo's giggles vibrated against him. "Hell, I didn't even have a car."

"Yes, well, I was in basically the same boat." Marc began to chuckle, their shared laughter making everything hilarious.

Pablo licked the skin of his neck as his giggles faded away. "We've got a car now, Caro. It even has a pretty sizeable back seat..."

"Do I get a hickey?"

"I'll give you one if you give me one."

"Babe... how would I know if it worked?" Marc gave Pablo his best innocent look and waited for the slap on his butt.

Pablo giggled again. "You'll just have to ask Piet."

Marc chuckled. "Find somewhere for us to sit and do obscene things with each others' bodies, babe."

Pablo grabbed his hand and slipped it into the crook of his arm, leading him away from the dance floor. It didn't take very long for his lover to pay for the drinks they hadn't drunk, hand him his cane and safely navigate their way through the considerably more crowded bar. In a matter of moments they were at the car, Pablo closing his door for him.

"There was a lane about a half mile back, turned into the woods back beyond old highway 12 -- it shouldn't take us more than five minutes to get there. Unless you'd rather wait until we got home?" Pablo's hand slid across his thigh, stopping just short of his cock.

"Drive, babe." He fingers trailed over his watch. "Five minutes."

The car started, Pablo pulling out of the parking lot and driving sedately along the highway. "I do not want to get stopped by the cops for speeding."

"No. Although listening to you explain that you were in a hurry to give your blind, middle-aged male partner a hickey on a back road would be interesting."

Pablo giggled and the car slowed, turning a moment later. They continued on for another minute, the quiet thick with anticipation. Finally Pablo turned again and then drew to a stop.

"Don't forget to move your seat forward -- there's not going to be any room in the seat if you don't." Pablo's voice was calm, but excitement and happiness threaded through it. Marc leaned forward, fingers finding the lever and scooting the seat up, listening as Pablo did the same. Then he opened the door and slid into the back seat, waiting for his lover. Pablo sat next to him, breathy giggles filling the air. "I actually feel like I'm eighteen again."

He grinned, pushing close. "This is better than being eighteen, babe."

"Yeah, we've got a backseat!" Pablo was still giggling as his mouth closed over Marc's neck, the vibrations tickling gently.

"Oh, babe." He gasped, hands sliding over Pablo's belly. "Tickles."

Pablo shifted and was suddenly straddling him, pressing close. "Was that good tickles, or bad tickles?" he asked against Marc's neck, tongues sliding over his skin.

"Good... good, babe." Marc's hands found Pablo's hips, pulled their groins together. He groaned at the sweet hard pressure of his lover against him.

"Yeah..." Pablo's mouth wrapped around the vein in the side of his neck, the suction sweet. It matched the rhythm of Pablo's hips as they rolled, pushing again and again and again into Marc's groin. Marc made a noise -- something between a gasp and a whimper. One hand moved to unfasten Pablo's slacks, the other keeping its home on Pablo's hip, pulling them tight together. Pablo's hands were busy on his shirt, fingers fumbling and tearing at the buttons, finally pushing their way through to stroke over his skin.

Suddenly it was like they were kids again, new lovers desperately hungry for each others bodies, the world dark because the moon was new and the electricity stolen. He got their pants open, their cocks slid together and it was so hot and so intense that it made him cry out. Pablo made a strangled noise, arms wrapping around his neck, holding on tight and close as Pablo's hips pushed faster and faster.

Marc groaned, eyes blinking furiously, something in him fighting desperately to see Pablo's face -- just once. One more time. To see Pablo come one more time. "Please. Oh, please."

"Oh yeah, I've got you." Pablo's mouth met his in a deep, hungry kiss and a trembling hand wrapped around their cocks, sliding them together.

Marc's hand found Pablo's cheek, cupped it, felt the strong jaw working. He moaned, the taste and feel of his lover immediate and strong and exactly right, echoing inside him. He pulled Pablo against him hard, the solid body hot and heavy against him. Pablo jerked against him, coming with a shout. That cry, accompanied by the wave of heat and squeeze of Pablo's fingers sent him over the edge, sobbing Pablo's name as he fell.

It was Pablo's kisses that brought him back to awareness, hot, soft, sucking kisses spattered over his face. "Love you, Caro. So much."

"Oh, I love you, babe. I do." He buried his face in Pablo's neck, breathing in the scent of sweat and sex. Pablo's arms were around his neck, his lover's chest rising and falling against him.

"I want you to make love to me. But not in the backseat of the car -- I want it in our bed so I can curl up and fall asleep in your arms afterward." Pablo's hands pulled his head up and the full lips pressed against his. "Thank you for letting me be seventeen again. It was a nice place to visit, but I like where we are now. I like being thirty-two with you."

"I love you, Pablo." He blinked back hot tears. "Take me home, babe."

Pablo kissed each of his eyes, his nose and his lips again and then warm hands were tucking him back into his pants. "You need some help getting back into the front?"

"No, I can manage." He found the door handle and fumbled it open, sliding out of the back seat and into the front, cursing as his legs and the pushed up seat didn't work together.

Pablo's hand slid along his arm in a soothing gesture and then he heard the click of the mechanism and his seat slid back, letting him stretch his legs out comfortably. Another kiss was pressed to his lips. "I love you, Caro."

He smiled, one hand stroking Pablo's thigh. "I know, babe. I love you, too."

The motor started and he felt the car making a u-turn and then, soon after, a turn onto the smooth highway. Pablo laughed. "Now I really want to speed, get you home and out of those clothes. Somehow I think the cops would be just as unimpressed with 'I'm speeding so my lover can fuck me', as they would with the wanting to make out in the backseat excuse."

"Now, if I were a cop and you used that excuse with me, I'd be impressed." He grinned over, letting his fingers tease along Pablo's inseam.

Pablo made a soft, whimpering sound. "You keep that up and the back seat will have to do."

Marc's grin widened, fingers continuing to play. Pablo made him feel so sexy, so desirable, so *wanted*. "You've already come twice. You can't want me that badly."

"Pretty soon even the thought of getting arrested for fucking by the side of the road is not going to be enough of a deterrent and then you'll find out exactly how badly I do want you." Pablo's voice was low and rough. Pablo shifted, though Marc couldn't be sure if he was pulling away from or pushing into his touches.

"Fuck, you're sexy. Want to take you home and strip you down, taste your skin, sink inside you." His fingers brushed against Pablo's balls, as he moaned. "So soft. Want to taste you."

"Jesus, Marc, I'm gonna crash the car." He could feel the engine shift into the next gear as Pablo stepped on the gas.

"No crashing. That would derail my plans for having you ride my cock until you come on my chest." Marc shivered, he was teasing them both, whispers hot and hungry between them.

"Oh, God." His hand was picked up and very firmly placed into his own lap. Pablo's voice was barely audible. "I want you so bad, Marc. It's like I can feel you already inside me."

"I'm always inside you, babe. Always." He wanted to touch his lover, hands sliding over his own legs instead.

"Ten minutes. We'll be home in ten minutes." He wasn't sure which one of them Pablo was telling.

"And in eleven minutes?" He leaned over, rubbing his cheek against Pablo's shoulder.

Pablo's chuckle was shaky. "If you're fast enough -- fucking in bed."

"I love you." He turned his head, kissing Pablo softly. "So much it hurts."

"I know."

They drove the rest of the way in silence, sex and anticipation heavy in the air. It seemed like forever before Pablo slowed and the car turned, every second bringing them closer to home. When the car stopped, Marc pulled Pablo close. "Kiss me."

The words were barely out of his mouth when Pablo's hands slid around his skull, the warm, full lips covering his own. Pablo's tongue pushed into him, plundering. His lover was making soft, needy noises, feeding them to him one at a time in rapid succession. Marc sucked Pablo's tongue, body aching and hard like he hadn't come twice today, wasn't middle-aged. His hand moved back to Pablo's thigh, running up over the material to cup his lover's sacs. Pablo made a noise, hips shoving against his hand, body pushing forward.

Suddenly Pablo grunted and pulled back. "Hit my knee on the damn emergency break." The warm hands came back and another kiss was pressed against his lips. "Inside, Caro. Now."

"Yes." He got out of the car, opening his cane and hurrying for the front door. He heard the beep of the car alarm and the sound of Pablo's footsteps on the stairs behind him. He was fumbling with the key when Pablo's body pressed up tight behind him, his lover's hands guiding his own. He pressed his hips back, grinding against Pablo's hardness, with a groan. The key slid home with a click, and they fumbled the door open.

It slammed loudly behind them as Pablo slipped in front of him and pulled his head down, bringing their lips together in a hard, desperate kiss. His lover's hands were fumbling with the buttons on his shirt, Pablo stumbling back toward their room, bringing him along. Marc sobbed, hands caught in Pablo's hair. "Need you."

"I know." Another kiss, another few steps. "*I know*."

His shirt was finally undone, pushed open and Pablo's fingers began on his pants, fingertips teasing along his cock as they worked. Hips thrusting, soft whimpers and cries filling the air, Marc thought hazily that he should be undressing Pablo, but his hands were busy, holding and sliding and keeping Pablo close.

Pablo broke their kiss, bending in front of him to pull down his pants. "Step out."

His cock was sucked into Pablo's mouth for a heartbeat and then warm hands were pushing his shirt off his shoulders. It all happened so fast, Pablo's mouth returning to his, hands grabbing his hips and pulling him forward, turning them. The air changed as they moved into the bedroom, a soft breeze filling the air with the scent of grass and flowers from outside. He was spinning, lost to the touch and scent and hunger that spun over his skin. His hands had managed to untuck Pablo's shirt, running over the warm belly and sliding to stroke the curve of lower back.

Pablo guided him until the back of his knees hit the bed and then his lover stepped away. The sound of Pablo's breathing and of clothes sliding over skin and dropping against the floor were loud. Marc scooted back, head finding the pillows. He fumbled over the bed stand, grabbing the lube. He slicked his fingers and then began to rub it onto his cock, moaning at the heat of his own hand.

"Oh, God, Marc -- you're going to make me come just watching." The bed dipped slightly beneath Pablo's weight and then his lover's knees bracketed his legs, Pablo crawling up his body.

When Pablo's knees were on either side of his hips, his hand was taken, fingers guided to Pablo's entrance. He circled the muscles gently, fingertip sliding over each wrinkle. "So soft." He pressed inside, gasping at the sweet, tight heat. "So good, love."

Pablo's breath hitched and he rocked back onto Marc's fingers, taking them deeper. A long moan filled the air.

"So tight. Need you." Marc pushed deeper, finger fucking Pablo slowly.

Pablo's hands were warm on his chest, his lover's thighs sliding against him as Pablo's body rose and fell. "Oh, God, Marc. Please, I need you."

"Yes. Ride me, let me feel you." Marc's fingers slid out, wrapped around Pablo's waist.

Pablo's hand circled his cock, guided him until he could feel his lover's heat against him. A soft moan from his lover and then his cock was surrounded by tight, soft heat. He arched up, moaning desperately, cock driving deeper. Marc wasn't sure if he called Pablo's name, called to god or heaven or what. He just ached, pushing into Pablo's heat. Pablo sat still for a moment, breathing in short gasping pants, hands sliding restlessly over his chest. Then his lover began to move. Heat and pressure and musk and perfection -- Marc reached up, hands sliding over Pablo's skin, stroking and teasing.

"I love you." Pablo's voice was thick with emotion, love and joy and happiness and pleasure. He shifted slightly and then called out softly, body beginning to tremble. "So good."

"Oh yes, good. Pablo... so hot." Marc's knees raised, feet digging into the mattress as he met each of Pablo's thrusts.

"Love watching you like this." Pablo's voice was low, breathless, soft gasps filling the spaces between the words. "So hot, so sexy."

"Won't last, you keep talking like that. Makes me ache." Pablo's skin was like hot, damp silk beneath his fingers. He fought to remember it, he would sculpt this, make this for them so Pablo would know that Marc saw him...

Pablo moaned and his hands slid forward, fingers teasing across Marc's nipples. "I love you, Marc." Pablo's voice had dropped to a whisper, bare wisps of sound that slid against his nerves. "So much it hurts."

Marc gasped, a soft scream leaving his hips as his hips jerked gracelessly into Pablo's heat. A shiver went through Pablo's body at the sound and he dropped down hard, heat splashing across Marc's belly and chest. The sensation brought Marc over, sent him plummeting into pleasure, body jerking and hungry and flying.

"I love you, Caro." Pablo was heavy on his hips, one hand had found his own, was wrapped around his wrist, the other was smoothing come into his belly.

"Love you." He moaned softly, head shifting softly upon the pillows. "You melted me, babe. Into goo."

Pablo giggled and then sighed as Marc slipped from inside him. Marc could smell the seed and then warm, slick fingers pressed against his lips. "I goood, too," Pablo said softly.

He laughed and pulled the wet, salty fingers in, suckling them until the only flavor left was Pablo's skin. "Mm... yes. Very goood, very goood indeed."

Pablo's giggles filled the air, warm and happy, as his lover snuggled close.

The desire to go into the studio, to begin a new sculpture -- one of a man, strong and passionate, arched above his lover, hard and proud -- was strong. The need to stay here, loving and loved, wrapped in the warm, alive arms of his love was stronger.

A soft kiss was placed on his shoulder. "So which dance did you like the best?"

"The last one." He let his hand rest on the curve of Pablo's ass. "The one where you took me home with you."

Pablo made a soft noise and squeezed him tight. "Oh, Marc. I love you."

"I love you." Marc tilted his head, a random thought occurring to him. "Hey! Did I end up with a hickey?"

Pablo raised his head and then Marc's hand was taken and guided to a point on his neck, right where it joined with his shoulder. "See for yourself."

The skin was hot, just slightly swollen and Marc gasped, shivering and snuggling close. "Oh."

"Yeah. Looks great." Pablo's fingers played gently over the spot, sliding along it, making it ache and tingle.

"Oh... I can feel it."

"Feel good?"

"God, yes. Like electricity." Marc shivered. "You're lucky I'm out for the count or I'd jump your bones again."

Pablo stroked the spot again, rubbing against him like a cat. "Are you sure about that?"

"Oh, I'd definitely jump you, lover." He groaned, his cock throbbing and attempting to fill.

"And are you sure you can't?" Pablo's hand slid down along his chest, slow and hot. Fingertips stroked across one nipple, twisted the ring and then dipped into his navel and played with the ridges of his abdomen before slowly circling his cock.

"Pablo!" Marc snuggled close with a whimper. "You're trying to kill me."

"I just want one more dance." He could feel the wet heat of Pablo's tongue, tasting him.

"One more... Pablo... Oh, God..."

"I can't get enough of you, Caro. You make me greedy for you."

Marc's cock was steadily, unbelievably filling again. He gasped. "I can't believe... Babe... you make me so hard..."

"Mmm... that's the idea." Pablo's mouth closed over the skin of his collarbone. "I think you need a matched set."

He was spinning, balls aching as Pablo marked him. Just the thought was delicious -- that he wore a dark bruise

delivered by full, sweet lips, that Pablo would see it. The hand on his cock moved slowly, almost gently, teasing. Pablo's breath was hot against his neck, but not nearly as hot as the mouth that pulled at his skin.

"Oh... love..." He was making odd, gasping noises -- uncontrolled and needy. He couldn't believe this, couldn't believe he was hard again, hungry again, needy again.

Sharp teeth bit and then Pablo's tongue was back, soft and soothing. He moaned softly, hands searching for Pablo's face. "'s so good. Your mouth. Wearing your mark..."

Pablo moaned agreement against his skin, the vibrations adding to the sensations that were filling him. His lover's hand never stopped moving as Pablo began to rub against him.

He knew nothing but Pablo -- hands, lips, cock, come drying on his belly. He traced Pablo's cheek, feeling the suction within and without. Pablo continued to suck, to pull, to rub, to push him toward another climax. He couldn't speak, couldn't do anything but sob and arch and grasp and finally shatter, body convulsing against Pablo's as he fought for breath. Pablo was still sucking gently, easing him down and finally stopping.

"Love. Love you." He couldn't move, not so much as an arm or an eyelid.

A last, soft kiss made the spot on his shoulder tingle and then something soft was used to clean his skin and he was being covered, Pablo cuddling close.

"I love you, Marc." The words were whispered, spoken against his skin. "Always and forever."

"Forever. My muse." For a moment he was seventeen and warm and cuddled with his lover, the smell of sex painting over the scent of linseed oil. Then Pablo shifted and they were older and safer and together and home.

Chapter Twenty Three

He'd gone shopping without Pablo on purpose. He wanted to get some Christmas gifts without getting caught and maybe get himself a new sweater. He liked sweater shopping. He crept out fairly early, hopped the bus to the city proper and then caught a cross-town to the mall. He'd been fine on the bus, but he'd forgotten about the crush of people and noise and madness that was a shopping mall at the holidays.

Marc had found exactly one thing before Piet had to pee and then they'd both gotten turned around and finally he found a bench and sat, pulling out his cell phone and calling the house.

"Hello?" Pablo still sounded half asleep, voice warm and fuzzy.

"Hey babe." Marc grinned. "You still in bed?"

"Marc? You're not here." Pablo giggled. "Yeah, I was reading but I guess I dozed back off."

"Lazy-bones." He chuckled. "Good thing you have me to play alarm clock, wake that sweet ass up."

"Yeah, except I prefer it when you use the personal touch -- where are you, Caro?"

He relaxed into the bench, Piet settling at his feet. "Well, you see... I went shopping."

"By yourself? I mean -- wow, you must have gotten up early." He could hear Pablo deliberately push back his natural urge to worry.

"Yeah, took two busses to get here. And I'm fine, but..." Well, if Pablo could swallow the worry, he could swallow his pride. "Well, it's really way more packed than I expected and I'm having a shit time navigating." He cleared his throat. "You think you'd like to do some shopping with your old man and maybe give him a lift home? I'll buy you brunch?"

There was more worry-pushing, he could practically hear it, and he had to hand it to Pablo, his lover managed to tease instead of scold or fuss. "I don't know... I'm pretty warm and comfy where I am..."

"Oh..." Marc chuckled again. "Let's see if I can sweeten the deal... Leon's for an early lunch, then a walk in the park, maybe find a nice secluded bench for some warming up, maybe an afternoon making love in our bed before supper and then you can drive around and tell me about the Christmas decorations while I feel you up." He waited breathlessly for the counteroffer, listening to the sheets rustling.

"Mm... that's a pretty tempting offer." Pablo paused for a moment and then made a soft, needy sound. "But I could lie here and imagine all that stuff happening -- I have a very good imagination, you know."

Wanton. Tempting, sexy, happy, wanton -- God, Marc loved him. "Yeah, but is your imagination as good as my mouth, babe?"

Pablo's answer was immediate. "I can be there in twenty minutes -- where do I meet you?"

"We're sitting on a bench right inside the mall, facing east. I'm the tall, bald, blind guy with a dog. You can't miss me."

Pablo giggled, the sound deeper than usual, threaded through with lust. "I love you, Marc."

"I love you, babe." He grinned as Piet gave a quick, short bark. "And Piet says thank you for saving him from the madness."

Pablo's renewed giggles were the last thing he heard before his lover hung up.

Pablo set the table, humming quietly. They'd definitely made the right choice in staying home for Christmas this year. They'd slept in, made love and then gone back to sleep. Now they were having a nice, leisurely breakfast, with him setting the table and Marc making pancakes in the nude.

All right, his lover wasn't quite nude -- he wore a cute little apron around his waist. If Marge knew, she'd never wear it again. The thought made him giggle. The sight of that skinny ass topped by a white bow made the sound more of a whimper.

What was worse, Marc was unconsciously bouncing and wiggling -- just a little --to the Christmas carols pouring in from the front room stereo. If the microwave didn't ding soon, they were going to wind up making love again before they got to breakfast, let alone the gifts that were under the tree in the living room. He licked his lips, watching Marc move. God, he loved this man.

Marc was humming, pulling the stack of pancakes from the microwave. After they were arranged on the platter, healthy pats of butter dolloped on, Marc turned, eyebrows frowning a little. "Give me a hint, babe?"

"Just walk straight toward my voice -- you've got a clear path here." He giggled. "You can sit on my lap while we eat."

"That was my plan, babe." Marc grinned and brought the platter over, setting it on the table and humming as Pablo's arms wrapped around him. "Mm... that feels good."

"So do you." He leaned forward, pulling one of Marc's nipples into his mouth and tugging on the ring, on the flesh. "Taste good, too," he whispered before going back to sucking the small bit of hard flesh.

"Oh, babe!" Marc's gasp was sweet, hands wrapping around his head, fingers tangling in his hair and tugging him closer.

He made a happy noise, sucking harder, letting his teeth graze the tip of Marc's nipple and then his tongue soothe it. His hands wrapped around his lover's waist, fingers stroking the warm skin. Marc's lips brushed against his hair, soft little whimpers sounding as a hard, hot cock slid over the silky material of his robe. His thumbs teased the skin of Marc's stomach, just above the apron as he moved over to give Marc's other nipple to the same treatment, lingering on the ring this time.

The little whimpers became hungrier, louder, Marc's fingers pulling at him. "Oh, fuck. Babe. That's... oh, the pancakes are gonna... So good..."

"Reheat," he muttered, one hand sliding beneath the little apron to stroke the heat of Marc's cock.

"Yeah..." Marc started pushing his robe away, rocking into his hand. "Kiss me."

He put his other hand around Marc's neck and pulled his lover's head down to meet him, mouth open and eager as their lips met. Marc took his mouth in a hard kiss, moaning into his lips. The long cock was throbbing in his fingers, hot and hard and so needy. He answered that need, squeezing tight and pulling, stroking.

"Pablo!" Those blue eyes were so wide, body shuddering in his hands.

"Love you, Marc, love you so much." He murmured the words against Marc's lips and then pulled his lover's lips against his again. Marc came with a cry, heat spreading over his hand, sliding over his fingers. He continued to stroke Marc's flesh, reveling in the shudders that shook the long body.

"Oh, babe. You make me so hungry, make me want." Marc nuzzled close, purring. "Love you."

He smiled, feeling warm and happy and right all through. Raising his hand, he licked at the come on his fingers. "Mm, delicious."

Marc undulated against him, gasping softly. "Insatiable."

"When it comes to you? Yes." He wiped his hand on the edge of his robe and grabbed Marc's buttocks with both hands, tugging his lover close. Marc's hands reached down, shifting and sliding so that his cock fit along Marc's cleft. He gasped, pressing up with his hips, cock sliding along the warm flesh. "Marc, we don't have anything..."

"Butter, babe. Don't let me fall." Marc raised up, fingers sliding over the softened butter and then reached back and... Oh, God. Marge would never forgive them if she knew.

He moaned softly, hands trembling as they helped Marc balance, one on his lover's hip, the other on Marc's back. In no time at all, Marc was lowering himself again, such heat sliding against his cock.

"Mm... yes. Yes, babe. Fuck me." He got a warm, happy, sloppy kiss. "Gonna make you fuck me in every room in this house."

"Today?" He giggled and then he moaned as Marc kept moving down, taking him all in. He held onto his lover's hips and thrust up hard.

"Yes!" Marc arched for him, pleasure echoing through the kitchen. "Oh, again, love. Pablo. Babe. Again!"

He thrust again, whimpering as the tight heat of his lover swallowed him eagerly. Again and again he pushed up into Marc's body, pulled his lover back down.

"Love you." Marc rode him with abandon, body moving faster and faster, filling cock bobbing.

"Oh, God. I love you, too." Pablo kept his eyes open, watching Marc's face, his body.

"Love this." Marc looked so happy, silly apron pushed aside, one hand around Pablo's neck, the other pumping own cock.

He nodded, knowing Marc could feel the movement, too breathless to find words. He thrust harder, letting his body, his need, speak for him. Marc came with a cry, squeezing his cock tight, muscles rippling and hot. Whimpering, he shot deep into his lover.

Marc settled around him, lips trailing over his face. "Merry Christmas. Again."

"Yeah." He giggled. "And we haven't even gotten to the thanking for gifts yet."

"Mm... appreciation sex!" Marc was laughing into his kiss, body still holding him tight. "Lots of little gifts, right? You promised."

His giggles got louder. "Yes, Caro. A whole lot of little gifts. Tons of them. You should probably take your vitamins."

Marc laughed, eyes alight with love and pleasure.

His hands slid up and down along Marc's back, enjoying the hot glide of skin on skin. "You got me lots of gifts, too, right?"

"You know it, babe."

"Then you'd better let me eat, so I can thank you properly, Caro."

Marc stood with a groan, reaching for the napkins. "Okay, babe, go ahead. I'll be right back."

"You want some company?"

"Yeah, babe. That and some proper lube. I don't want to spend the day smelling like toast."

Giggling, Pablo led Marc back to the bathroom. At this rate they weren't going to get to the presents before tomorrow.

Somehow, that didn't seem like a problem.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Pablo tried to concentrate on the review he was writing. Supposed to be writing, because, really, he had redone the opening paragraph a half dozen times and was currently without even that, the little black line blinking furiously at him alone on the white screen.

The problem was that he was worried about Marc. And every time that he managed to push that away long enough to write, his concentration would be shot by a loud sneeze, or a coughing fit, or Marc spending a good two minutes blowing his nose. And the swearing.

It had been going on for two weeks, the cold invading and slowly cutting Marc off from the world he knew, a world already missing a sense. First to go had been smell, followed very closely by taste. And now Marc's ears were blocked and his hearing was all wonky. It made his lover miserable. Cranky. Incredibly hard to get along with.

So Pablo was worried and annoyed by turns.

Marc was in his studio, stubbornly trying to work, trying to ignore the cold. "It's only a cold, babe. I don't need a doctor -- I'm fine." That discussion had become an argument, both of them proving to be short-tempered.

Whenever he pushed, Marc pulled away, and when he tried to give Marc his space, his lover clung. He was tired of reading Marc's signals wrong, feeling guilty for feeling that way and had finally retreated to his office to try to get some work done. That was working *so* well. Sighing, he clicked open solitaire and began to play Vegas rules.

He'd just turned over the ace of hearts when he heard a round of coughing that went on too long and only ended by something crashing to the ground in the studio and series of furious curses. He was up like a shot, not caring what signals Marc was sending out right now -- he would sooner bash himself repeatedly on the shores of Marc's crabbiness than not go to his lover after that series of noises.

He knocked on the open door to let Marc know he coming and walked in.

Marc was sitting next to the overturned top of one of his long working tables, tools and raw clay and random shit scattered everywhere. Red-faced and sweaty, Marc looked furious, but he also looked lost and devastated and just a little scared.

It broke Pablo's heart.

"Oh, Caro..." He knelt next to Marc and stroked his lover's forehead. "You look miserable -- let me get you into the shower and then hot tea in bed?"

"Pablo, babe. I..." Marc sobbed and pulled off his glasses, rubbing the bridge of his eyes. The blue eyes were red and swollen. "Oh, fuck, I fell. Help me up?"

"You fell?" His voice squeaked and then he shoved the panic and the fear down inside a little box in his stomach.

Marc didn't need him to have a hissy fit just now. He took Marc's hands in his own and helped Marc to stand, arm going immediately around Marc's middle. He slung one of Marc's arms around his shoulders and encouraged his lover to lean against him. "All right, tell me what you need, Caro. Doctor? Bed? Shower? Shot of whiskey?"

"I didn't *fall* fall. I was coughing and got confused and walked into the table and *boom*." Marc sighed. "How about that shower, tea and bed? You could read to me?" The pitiful question was punctuated with another series of coughs and Marc stumbled, pushing them both into the wall.

Pablo bit his lip. He hated seeing Marc like this, knew his independent and proud lover hated it, too. "Come on, let's go get that hot shower. Maybe it'll loosen your chest and you won't be coughing so much."

"Yeah." Marc wagged his eyebrows. "Gonna soap me up, babe?"

"I am." He gently bumped their hips together. "But that's as far as it's going -- you aren't up to shower acrobatics today."

"Oh, no fair..." Marc pouted and sniffled. "This bites big hairy balls, babe. I can't fucking hear right, I can't taste, I can't smell, and now I can't fuck?"

What wasn't fair was Marc pouting, looking about as miserable as possible, his glasses already gone, affording Pablo ease of viewing the blue eyes. "I did say no shower acrobatics. I haven't vetoed the bed. Yet."

Marc's grin was grand, sweet and eager and relaxed. "Before or after the tea?"

Pablo shook his head. "Let's see how you're feeling after your shower first."

"God, you're so responsible." Marc nudged him gently, taking the sting out of his words. He sighed, shaking his head and stumbling slightly. "Babe, I'm sorry about this."

"What for being sick? Oh yeah, you're such an evil jerk -- I know how you planned for months, trying to figure out which weeks would be the most inconvenient, and then you hung around sickies and sucked in their air until you got infected. Don't apologize. Just get better."

"Asshole." Marc chuckled, stumbling into the bathroom, hands searching over the labels on the dozen boxes of over-the-counter medicines that he'd conned Marge into buying for him. "Dayquil or Sudafed? I can never remember which one's for what."

Pablo frowned. "I thought you just took something -- you've gotta wait at least six hours between doses." He started the shower, making it really hot, steam already rising, and then turned to Marc and started to peel off his lover's clothes.

Marc was fairly helpful -- for Marc -- hands still working over two boxes as they worked to get his shirt off. "I don't feel better, babe. Maybe I took the wrong one..."

He grabbed the boxes from Marc as he pulled the shirt off his lover's arms. "Double dosing isn't going to help you feel any better -- at best it's just going to make you feel even fuzzier. Come on, the hot shower and the tea will make you feel a whole lot better."

"Meanie. Always taking my fuzzy drugs." He stilled as Pablo slid his sweatpants down. "Babe, stay with me? I... I don't want to fall in the tub, you know?"

Pablo looked up at Marc's face, heart breaking once again at the vulnerability there. "I know you can't smell, so you didn't notice -- but I stink and need this shower almost as badly as you."

The smile he got was grateful and warm. "Oh, then we can conserve precious bathwater, huh? Let me soap your back?"

"Sounds wonderful."

Pablo stood and grabbed Marc's hand, stepping into the shower with its almost too hot spray. He pushed Marc into the flowing water, casually guiding his lover's hand to the bar that ran along one side of the shower stall.

"Staying in here forever." Marc relaxed against the wall with a soft moan, head resting upon the grey-green tiles. Pablo frowned, Marc looked like he'd lost a few pounds too, eating nothing but soup and coffee and not sleeping well. He was going to insist they see the doctor soon. This wasn't right and he didn't think he could stand watching Marc suffering and wasting away like this much longer. He picked up the soap and started working it into a lather. When he reached out to rub the soap over Marc's shoulders, his lover jumped, startled. "Jesus, babe! You scared me." Marc leaned into his touch a bit. "With the water and my ears stuffy, it was like I was alone in here."

Pablo's frown got bigger, usually the scent of the soap lathering was enough to let Marc know what was coming. "Sorry, Marc. Maybe I should keep up a running patter, you know? A play by play so you know where to find me."

"Huh? Oh, yeah, that'd be nice, babe." Marc sneezed again, groaning miserably as the muscles beneath Pablo's hands tightened and jerked. He kept soaping Marc up, fingers working the muscles he knew had to be aching. "Oh..." Marc's head fell forward and he hummed slightly. "Oh, that feels wonderful."

"Turn around and I'll do your back, too." He kept his frown out of his voice, but he was definitely feeling ribs he shouldn't be feeling and Marc's hips were sticking out and his belly was almost non-existent.

"Mmm... sounds like a plan." Marc turned and leaned against the wall, head on his folded arms, stretching out, long and lean.

Pablo's body reacted to the sight of his lover and he frowned sternly down at his growing erection. Making love was *not* on the agenda. Not with Marc so sick. He massaged Marc's shoulders and back, buttocks and thighs, soaping and soothing at the same time. Marc was making soft, appreciative noises, thighs parting, pushing into his hands. He groaned softly and forced himself to stop after one last slide of his fingers across the small of Marc's back. Pulling the showerhead off its stand, he rinsed Marc clean of soap.

Marc raised his head, turning lazily. The long, thin cock was filling, not hard, but definitely interested. "My turn."

"Why don't you just relax and enjoy the hot water? Won't take me long."

That earned him a pout and a not-entirely faked sniff. "You don't want me to touch you?"

"Oh, Marc..." Pablo slid his hand along Marc's arm, feeling like a first class jerk. "Of course I do -- but you're sick. You need to be taking it easy, getting better."

"Nothing easier than touching you, babe." Marc found the soap and started rubbing it over his belly, too-warm cheek resting on his shoulder. "Nothing's ever been so easy."

Sighing, he let his head rest against Marc's, worry strong. He slid his hand along Marc's spine and reminded himself that it was just a cold. Just a cold that had lingered longer than it should and was making Marc absolutely miserable, but just a cold, nonetheless. Unless it was something more. They hadn't been to see the doctor, after all.

Marc washed his stomach and back and arms before the coughing started again, deep, rattling horrid sounds that turned Marc's face deep, dark red and left his lover panting. "Damn, I hate this stupid cold."

"I know, Caro. Maybe it's time we took a trip to the clinic, just to make sure it's only a cold, you know."

"I hate the clinic, too. There's people running around and so much to knock over and the doctor touches you and stuff..." Marc stopped, as if realized he was whining. "I'll just give it a while. Chicken soup and orange juice and stuff will fix it. It'll stop."

"Marc, it's been over two weeks -- how much longer makes up 'a while'?" He let his hand continue to stroke over Marc's back, soothing his lover.

"It's what? January? How does April sound to you, babe?"

"Marc..." He sighed and placed a soft kiss on Marc's forehead. "Look, it's Friday. If you aren't feeling better by Monday, we'll just drop in and see if they can see you, okay? Please?"

"Okay. Monday." Marc nodded. "If I don't feel better."

The water was starting to get cool and Marc nuzzled close to him, all elbows and knees.

"And I'm the judge of whether or not you're feeling better." He reached back and turned off the taps and then walked them awkwardly out, not willing just yet to relinquish his hold.

"Oh, now that's cheating." Marc stayed close, just shivering and snuggling as Pablo dried him -- a sure sign of the stubborn hardhead's exhaustion.

"I'm not taking you today, Marc. Don't push your luck." He dried Marc as quickly as he could and then wrapped another towel around his lover's shoulders, slipping his arm around Marc's waist to lead him into the bedroom.

"What're we going to do now, babe?" Marc followed along, free hand out, searching for landmarks, equilibrium.

"You're going to bed. And don't waste your breath arguing with me, because it'll only give you another coughing fit and that'll make me insist on the clinic today." He turned them out of the bathroom and insisted on helping Marc get into bed. "I'm going to go make you some tea and find a book and if you promise to drink it all up and rest quietly, I'll read to you."

"I'm not a child, Pablo..." The complaint was interrupted by a sneeze. "Can it be orange tea and a good thriller? Please?"

He smiled and smoothed the comforter over Marc's limbs, placing a soft kiss on his lover's forehead. "I know you're not a child, Caro, but you're sick and that gives me an excellent excuse to coddle you. And yes, it can be orange tea and a thriller. Though you might need to specify what you mean by good."

"Mm... we haven't started that new Koontz book. That sounded good. Want me to call Marge to come cook and pick up? I haven't been much help lately..."

"You getting tired of my cooking already, Caro?" he teased.

"Nah... getting tired of you having to take care of everything, babe. It's got to be exhausting."

He sat on the edge of the bed and stroked Marc's cheeks. "Don't worry about me. I think I can take care of you for a couple of weeks without falling apart." The truth was that aside from the worry, he liked taking care of Marc. He liked feeling that he was doing something to make Marc's life better.

Marc curled up around him, cheek on his naked thigh. "Mm... you feel good. You're pretty good at coping, babe. I mean, we haven't even burnt any popcorn or overfilled the washing machine yet."

Pablo giggled. "Not for lack of trying though."

He let his hands slide through the short fuzz on top of Marc's head. There were times when he still missed the riot of bright curls, but he was used to the short hair now, used to who they were now and wouldn't want to go back to when they were kids. He and Marc had built something wonderful together and he wasn't convinced they would have been able to build it if they'd stayed together all those years ago.

Marc gave him a soft sound and curled closer, closed the sightless eyes. Pablo shook his head and grinned. In less than five minutes, Marc had managed to disrupt the covers *again* and leave the long spine and bony butt bare *again* and managed to nod off without drinking or eating anything *again*. Pablo stood carefully and pulled the comforter up around Marc's back *again*. Bending, he placed another soft kiss on his lover's cheek.

"I love you, Marc," he whispered. Grabbing his robe, he headed out, leaving the door open so he would hear if Marc woke up and was looking for him. He took care of their clothes first, shoving them into the hamper and then went to let Piet in from the backyard. The big dog bounded in happily, shaking himself and sending water all over the kitchen.

"You're lucky Marge isn't here," he told the dog with a giggle. "Go on, go lie in front of the vents in the living room -- you know you want to."

He turned the heat up just a little, enough to have the furnace come on, blowing hot air up through the vents for the dog. He was lucky Marge wasn't here either, or she'd have had something to say about spoiling Piet. With a grin he set the kettle on and went in search of the new Koontz book and his new palm book, maybe he could peck out his recalcitrant review while Marc slept. He made a sandwich for himself and put a bunch of clementines into a bowl while he was waiting for the tea to finish steeping. Two cups and the sugar were added to a tray and then he headed back to the bedroom.

Marc seemed to be breathing a little easier, sleeping restlessly, blankets pushed back down at the bottom of the bed. He swallowed his giggles as Marc snored, mouth wide open, body stretched out on the mattress. He set the tray down, glad he'd put the tea in a thermos, and covered Marc back up again. Letting his robe drop, he settled carefully in bed next to his lover and picked up his palm ebook and started to work.

He worked for twenty, maybe thirty minutes when the deep, booming coughs started again. Marc struggled upright, reaching out for him. As Pablo took his hand, Marc kept hacking and gasping, face going dark red for the two or three minutes that the fit lasted. He rubbed at Marc's back with his free hand, trying to keep his fretting to a minimum, but this was starting to scare him now.

"Wait," he said as Marc started to sink back down again. He quickly piled the pillows altogether on Marc's side of the bed. "Sit back against those instead of lying down."

Marc leaned back with a sigh. "Oh, better. I was dreaming about running in a train, looking for you because there was this amazing pen and ink artist in the club car who I wanted you to meet. Did you know I can still see in my dreams, babe? Do I smell oranges?"

No, he hadn't known Marc could still see in his dreams and it choked him up for a moment. "Yeah, clementines -- that's great that you can smell them. Maybe you're getting better."

"course I am. Great personal care, you know?" Marc's hand went to his wrist, looking for the watch that was still either in the studio or on the bathroom cabinet. "Is it morning?"

"Just past lunch time -- you were only asleep about an hour." He poured Marc out a cup of tea and put it in his lover's hand. "Can I peel you some clementines? I bet they'll taste great with the tea."

"Oh, would you?" Marc's grin was wide and pleased -- maybe the happiest and most relaxed Pablo had seen him in days. "Have I ever told you about the trip that Marge and I took to Florida? She drove me through some orchards -- oh, babe, my nose was just drenched in the smell. We went to the ocean on that trip, too. All sun and coconut oil. Sally and I got to play in the ocean and she liked that though."

"I bet you liked that, too." He started to peel the clementines, their pungent aroma filling the room. "Hey, maybe we could go on a trip -- show Piet the ocean." He grinned and poked Marc gently in the ribs. "See if making love on the beach is as good as all the movies make it out to be."

"Oh, I'd like that -- maybe Hawaii, even. Or Mexico. Somewhere exotic where we can touch the shells and the sand." Marc took a drink of tea and snuggled into the pillows. "Oh, do you think there's enough room in the budget for that? A trip to Maui?"

"I think we can find a spot for it. Let me go over the numbers for next year and see what we can do." He smiled at Marc and started in on another clementine, planning on peeling several and then feeding the sections to his lover piece by piece.

"Oh, cool." Settled and occupied and still, his equilibrium found for now, Marc was in a playful mood, hot legs sliding over to rub against Pablo's. "We could play in the waves, make love in the water, be sharkbait."

Pablo giggled. "Are you trying to talk me into it -- or out of it?" Before Marc could answer, he popped a piece of clementine into his lover's mouth.

"Mmm... not bad. Is there more?" Marc turned toward him, mouth open like the world's biggest baby bird. Giggling some more, he popped another section into Marc's mouth and brought his knee up, letting his foot rub along the length of Marc's leg. "Oh, that's right. Post-shower and nap snuggles!" Marc took another piece of orange, nibbling the tips of Pablo's fingers. "Feels so decadent, you spoil me."

"I try." He let his fingers slide over Marc's cheeks, please that the skin didn't feel quite so feverishly hot as it had earlier. "You don't make it easy."

"I just..." Marc shrugged and grinned, nuzzling into the touches. "How do I look?"

"A little bit better. The resting is making a difference."

"No, silly. Close your eyes." Marc grinned and pressed his face more firmly into Pablo's hands. "How do I look?"

"Oh!" He giggled and let his eyes close, fingertips moving slowly over Marc's face. "You're beautiful, Marc."

"Keep them closed." Marc turned slightly and those fingers touched his face. "Okay, now, move your hands with mine." Then Marc started tracing his features.

"Oh..." He let Marc's fingers guide his own in a thorough exploration of his lover's face.

Marc grinned, hands moving down to search Pablo's neck. "See? Isn't it fabulous? The shapes, the skin, the way smiles feel?"

He had no clue what had suddenly put Marc into such a good mood, but he was going to hold onto it for as long as possible. "It's wonderful."

"Yeah." Marc leaned forward and gave him a hug, hands sliding over his back. "Love you, babe."

Fingers still following Marc's, he slid them down over the long back. "I love you, too, Marc. A whole lot."

Marc leaned back and took Pablo's hands in his own, burying his face in them. "Before, when I... when you weren't here and I'd get lonely or frightened or just needed you, I would go and put my face in the hands of one of the muse pieces and just let you hold me."

Pablo stroked Marc's cheeks gently. "I used to dream I was holding you, being held by you... maybe we were doing that at the same time."

"Maybe. It doesn't matter now, because you're real and here and when I'm scared or need you, you're right here."

"Always, Marc." It was a statement of fact as much as a vow or promise.

"Yeah." Marc leaned back against the pillows again, sniffing. "Is there anymore orange?"

He giggled and popped another section of clementine into Marc's mouth. "I've got another dozen of them here, Caro. Do you think it'll be enough?"

"Maybe. I'll let you know." Marc sniffed again. "You know what the worst part of having a cold is?"

"Ouchy nose? Sore ribs? Nagging lover?"

"Nope. I can't give you a blowjob."

He giggled and pushed himself into Marc's arms, kissing Marc softly. "I think we'll survive until you're feeling better, Caro."

"But we might not." Marc held him close. "We might die of terminal blueage-ballitis."

He giggled all the harder. "Blueage-ballitis?" It was awhile before he could speak again. "You know, blow jobs aren't the only way to deal with TBB."

"No?" Marc's eyebrows raised, fingers tickling his belly. "What other remedies have you heard of, my brilliant babe?"

"Oh, lets see, there's handjobit and rubalotum, not to mention dickupbumus."

Marc fought the laugh, lips pressed hard together as he reached for control. "D...dick...dickupbumus? Oh... oh, fuck... that's..." The laughter came, Marc cackling madly until the coughing took its place.

Pablo rubbed Marc's chest until he'd stopped coughing. "Sorry, I didn't mean to start another coughing fit."

"s'okay. Oh...that was glorious. God, you're funny, babe." Marc rested back onto the pillows, cheeks bright red. "I'm thinking I might enjoy participating in a little rubalotum, you know?"

"Oh..." He felt his cock twitch. They hadn't made love in days, possibly even weeks. "Do you think you're up to it?"

"If I get worse, we'll stop." Marc rubbed up against Pablo, warm and lazy. "Please, babe. Nothing athletic. Just a slow and sweet come?"

"That sounds wonderful." He shifted until he was lying on top of Marc, their erections sliding together. "You have to promise you'll say something if you're feeling tired, okay?"

"Promise, babe. Just... yeah." Marc reached around and squeezed Pablo's ass. "Right there."

"Uh-huh..." Oh, yeah, he knew it was right there, could feel it in the way Marc's cock slid alongside his own, could see it in the way the blue eyes rolled back in Marc's head.

"Love you," he whispered, dropping a soft kiss on Marc's lips, letting his tongue dip inside for a moment.

"Mm... love you. Oh, so good. Like hot satin, but just a little different..." Marc's body was moving beneath him, slow and languorous.

"Oh, Marc..." He moaned softly, lips moving along Marc's jaw and then nibbling down his lover's neck.

"Yes, babe. Yes." Marc's thighs parted, hands gripping his ass harder.

He whimpered, moving faster. He'd missed this, missed the feeling of need and urgency slowly building as they worked together for pleasure. He'd been so worried about Marc he hadn't even realized how long it had been, but his body knew and his body was rushing headlong toward his climax.

"You're going to make me come, babe. Can't hold it..." Marc's voice was harsh, holding the urgency he himself felt.

"Me, too," he whispered against Marc's shoulder, body starting to tremble.

Marc groaned, undulating beneath him. "Pablo, babe, oh..."

Heat splashed on his belly, Marc shivering beneath him. It was exactly what he needed and he cried out, pushing a few more times against Marc, the slide of flesh on flesh slick and easy and then came, adding his own heat between them. Marc was holding him close, humming and stroking his back. "Just right, so good, making love with you. Just what I needed."

He nodded and kissed Marc's skin, the fine sheen of sweat tasting salty and like Marc, except it was just a little bit off. "And now you need some sleep. I think I might even join you."

"kay. Stay here. I'll hold you." Already mostly asleep, Marc's hands settled on his back, keeping him close.

"Best offer I've had in weeks." He kissed Marc's shoulder again and then laid his head against it, feeling heavy and sated and good. One of Marc's hands came to rest near his cheek, looking for just a moment and then trailing back down.

"I love you," he whispered, smiling softly.

His response was a snuffle and a hug and a nuzzling murmur that faded into a snore.

Chapter Twenty Five

A dozen show openings in less than a week, reviews needed five minutes after the opening started, to hear his editor tell it. Pablo didn't know if this New York Times gig was going to work out. Sure it was prestigious, a step up, a promotion of sorts, really. But he'd been away from home twenty two days out of the last thirty and those just weren't numbers he could live with. He missed Marc so much. It was like a hole in his stomach that got worse the longer they were apart. It felt too much like before, like Marc was gone from his life again.

He sent his latest review off to the Times and closed down the laptop. It only took a moment to get ready for bed and then he was picking up his cell phone. He glared at the time as he started dialing. Shit, he hadn't realized it had gotten so late. He stared at the phone, thumb hovering over the last number. He needed to hear his lover's voice. It was as simple as that. He pressed the nine and waited as the call went through. It started ringing. Four rings in and he cursed. "Come on, Caro, pick up the damn phone."

He got a click and then music blared in his ear, heavy and screaming. "Hello? Hey? Oh fuck, hold on. Lemme turn down the fucking stereo, 'kay?" There was a thud and then the music softened. Pablo grinned; Marc was working late too. "Hey, sorry about that."

"Marc..." He poured all his love and his loneliness and his need into the word.

"Oh!" Marc's surprise and pleasure was a balm. "Babe! Love! How are you? Where are you? When you coming home? What time is it?"

"It's late. I'm supposed to be on the road another week, but I don't know. I just miss you so much, you know?"

"A whole week?" He smiled, he could see the orange eyebrows frowning, the pout in that full bottom lip. Then he heard Marc pushing up his glasses. "I can survive and just think of how wonderful this is for you." Ah, yes, the 'I will not ruin Pablo's career by being needy' voice.

"Yeah, it's terrific -- weeks and weeks of not being with the one person who means more to me than anything." He sighed -- Marc didn't need to hear him bitching. "Gonna have to rethink this whole New York Times thing when I wrap up this round of openings, Caro. In the meantime, talk to me, okay? I want to hear your voice. What're you working on?"

"Finished #1 and #2 on the hand series, started #3. Bev took the final piece in the Romance series to get cast. She's tickled pink. I think she's in league with your editor." Marc took a breath and a drink. "Hell, if you're gone another week, I'll finish Hands and start with a new set -- Rain, I think I'll call it."

"Maybe I shouldn't give up the Times job so you can keep producing -- I can't remember the last time you got so much done at a time." He bit back his sigh and lay down against the pillows, trying to find a comfortable spot. "Tell me about Rain."

He heard the old leather couch creak as Marc landed on it. "It's going to be two or three different body parts in

different wet situations -- a swimming foot and hand, your back and leg in the shower, your face and cock when you come in the rain. What do you think?"

His cock leapt to attention and he couldn't stop his soft moan. Oh, God, it had been so long. "I think I'll skip the show that one's going to be in." His voice was husky, thick with his need.

"Oh? But babe, you're so beautiful when you come for me." Marc's voice was deep, rich. "I can see you in my fingers -- your mouth open as the water fell on our lips, eyes closed. It was stunning."

He swallowed, mouth dry, short of breath.

"I didn't say don't make the sculpture." No, he wanted Marc to make it, wanted to see himself how Marc did.

"Then what? You don't want to watch people touching your cock?" Marc chuckled, the sound merry and tinged with wickedness. "I was thinking about making it life sized and keeping it."

Pablo laughed, growing more turned on by the second. "So you have something to play with while I'm off on a whirlwind tour of gallery openings?"

"Fuck no. So you can watch it go into my ass while I'm sucking you, babe. So you can watch me ride it."

He moaned, hips jerking and he dropped his hand to his erection. "Oh, God, Marc, I'm so hard for you."

"Mm... love that noise." Marc hummed, so soft and sexy. "You like that? The idea of me on our big bed, riding a thick, hard dildo just for you to watch?"

He whimpered. "You know I do." The sound of his own voice surprised him, broken and so needy.

"Me, too. Love it when you watch me. Love the sounds and the heat and how sexy you make me feel, babe." Marc whispered. "Want you, babe. Want you to fuck me, want to taste you. Want to kiss you. Need to see you."

"Oh, god, Marc... Yes." He let his hand move on his cock, closing his eyes and imagining Marc riding a dildo, performing for him. "You look so amazing like that, Caro."

"You like it best when I'm on my back fucking myself or sitting up riding it?"

He was making soft noises now, whimpering and moaning and he could almost smell Marc there with him. "S..sitting and riding," he managed.

Marc groaned, low and soft. "Yeah... and my other hand, babe? Cock or nipples."

"Oh... Oh, Marc..." His hips were pushing up into his hand as the scene played out behind his closed lids. "Nipples first," he gasped. "Then cock to make you... make you come."

"Oh, yeah. Play with the rings? Pull them, just a little, enough that you can see them stretch?" Marc's voice was hungry, so sexy.

"Yes!" More whimpers left him. "Are you doing it now? Are you pulling on them, Marc? Are you fucking yourself with the dildo?"

"Yeah, babe. The smooth one in the studio. The one hidden in the cabinet." Marc whimpered, the sound made him ache. "Fuck, my nipples are sensitive. I could almost come from that alone."

"You aren't going to though, are you? Because you know I want to watch you touch your cock. God, the way you pull on it and I know how it feels when you do that to me and," he moaned. "Oh, God, Marc, I'm so close."

"Fuck, you're so hot, babe. Want to come for you, let you see while I'm sliding this into me and wanting it to be you." That was all it took and he was moaning, hips driving his cock into his hand as he came.

"Oh, babe..." The whisper was full of hunger and need and love and the soft gasps that followed told him that his lover had come too.

"Oh, Marc. I wanna hold you so bad."

"You gonna be down there all week?"

"I'm supposed to be," he whispered. He wanted nothing more badly than to check out right now, find a car rental and get home to his lover. Where he belonged.

"Can you pick up a blind man and his dog at the airport in the morning?"

"Oh..." Tears filled his eyes and he blinked them back, wiping at his eyes with the backs of his hand. "Just tell me what time to be there, Caro."

"I'll call you from the cab." He heard the sofa creak as Marc stood. "I've got to pack and make some arrangements. I'll call you. Get some sleep, babe. I'll see you in the morning." Marc's voice was hyper, full of energy and excitement. "Oh, and babe? I love you."

"I love you, too. See you soon, lover."

He pressed the button to hang up the phone and lay there, come on his hand and stomach, grinning like a fool.

Marc woke up with a jerk, the smells and sounds around him strange and wrong. "Pablo? Marge? Piet."

Piet's bark answered him at the same time as Pablo's hand grabbed his. "Hotel, remember? You flew in this morning?"

"Oh, shit. Yeah. Yeah, I remember. Sorry." He relaxed, rolling over into Pablo's arms. "Hey, babe."

He'd flown in on the red-eye and they'd managed a frantic quickie before collapsing. Now he was awake and needy and all he needed was right here and naked and smelling so good.

Pablo giggled. "Hey, Marc." And then his lover's lips covered his own and Pablo pushed close, proving he was awake and needy, too. He pulled Pablo on top of him, thighs parting to cradle the warm body, bringing their cocks together. Pablo made a soft noise, hips beginning to move immediately.

"Need you to fuck me, babe. It's been weeks since I've felt you inside me." Marc's hands ran over Pablo's face, looking at him, seeing him again. He could see how much the idea excited Pablo, his lover's face changing with arousal and need. His hands looked quickly, remembering the lines around Pablo's eyes, the curve of lips. So beautiful.

"Damn -- Marc did you bring anything?"

"Backpack, front pocket." He arched up into Pablo's heat, moaning. "Need you now."

"I know, Caro." Pablo's heat disappeared, the bed shifting without his lover's weight and then it was dipping again and there was Pablo, hot and eager and two slick fingers pushing into him. There was no fanfare, no teasing, just Pablo's need.

"Yes." He ground down on Pablo's fingers, groaning as the bright blue and green burn filled his stomach. "Need your cock inside me. Need to feel you."

Pablo made a soft noise and his fingers disappeared to be replaced by the insistent heat of Pablo's cock. Marc arched, hands sliding down to pull Pablo deeper into him, loving the slickswellinghotpushingbright feeling of his lover inside.

"Oh, God!" Pablo gasped, a sweet shudder passing through his body. "So long Marc -- feels like forever since I've been inside you."

"Yes. Need this. Don't know how I did without you." Marc stretched, body tightening, squeezing Pablo's cock. Pablo leaned down to nuzzle his neck, his lover's hot tongue moving softly over his skin. Murmuring, soft half-words in English and Spanish, Pablo began to move, sliding into him over and over again, almost gently, stretching out the sensations, making them last. His hands moved constantly, restlessly, looking at the passion and strength and need that was his lover.

Pablo rode him with long, easy strokes that slowly grew in pace and force. Soft kisses fell over his skin, face and shoulders and chest, Pablo loving his skin. The air was full of the smells and sounds of Pablo's pleasure. He could stay right here like this forever. Always. Lost inside Pablo's touch and Pablo's love.

"Love you." Pablo's strokes grew harder, faster. His lover's breath was coming fast.

"Love... love you." He tilted his hips, shuddering as Pablo's cock hit his gland. "Oh God! Love you."

Pablo's hands slid to his hips, holding him in place as Pablo thrust into him, hot cock sliding across his prostate every single time. Marc arched, the groan pouring through him. "Babe. Coming. Oh, fuck!" His cock jerked, hot seed spraying over his belly and chest.

"Oh, Marc!" Pablo's thrusts became jerky, soft sounds becoming louder, almost desperate. Pablo called his name again as he came.

He pulled Pablo down into his arms, hugging his lover tight. "Yes. Needed this. Needed you."

"Yes." Pablo's mouth covered his, the kiss sloppy and needy.

Marc let himself drown in one kiss after another until the kisses slowed, eased. "Mm... glad I flew out." He grinned, mischief filling him. "You gonna let me stay the night, stranger? Maybe the week?"

Pablo giggled. "I don't know... my lover might get jealous."

"I won't tell if you don't." He nuzzled the curve of Pablo's jaw. "I'm afraid I've become quite attached to you, though. I may have to keep you."

He could feel Pablo's grin. "Maybe you can share me. It gets lonely on the road you know."

His fingers found Pablo's hair, stroking and caressing. "No, you're mine. The others can wait."

A soft kiss landed on his shoulder. "There are no others -- there never have been." Another kiss graced his skin. "Although you coming with me on the road -- that's not a bad idea, Marc."

Marc nodded, considering. There were some benefits to the idea. "You sure you want me hanging around? I'm not the best in new places, I'll need your help."

"I can't think of anything I'd like more." Another kiss warmed his skin. "All I do is go to the showings and write up my reviews and spend most of my time missing you."

"And it's not like I can't head home if I need to work." Marc pushed close. "You sure I won't cramp your style?"

"Caro... do you know how close I was to telling the New York Times to go fuck themselves the other night? Loving you *is* my style -- the rest is just details."

"Then I'm afraid, Mr. Cervantes, you have a traveling companion." Pablo actually squealed. The sound was sweet and joyful and Pablo's arms slid around him holding him tight, kisses raining over his face. Marc chuckled, nuzzling close. "I did good, babe?"

"Oh yeah. Oh, Caro, thank you." Pablo kept on kissing him, each one growing longer than the last, slowly morphing into soft passion.

Moaning, he arched into the kisses, hands sliding around to cup Pablo's head. "Love you."

"I love you, too, Marc. Forever."

"Yes, babe. Forever."

Pablo gave him another kiss and then giggled. "I have an opening in an hour and a half. You wanna come along -- I'll introduce you as my groupie."

"Groupie, huh?" Marc chuckled. "I can do that."

"Yeah, art show groupie." Pablo was still giggling, the sound bright and happy. "You can start a new trend."

God, he loved that laugh, and if feeling a little awkward in new situations meant he'd get to hear it more often, then it was worth the cost. Besides, he was willing to bet having Piet along was going to give most of the gallery owners and artists hives.

And that was worth the price of admission on it's own.

Chapter Twenty Six

Pablo hung up the phone and resisted throwing it across the room. There were days he wished he smoked, so he could light up and take a deep calming breath like he'd seen Marc do when they were young. Instead he just growled at the phone and contemplated throwing it across the room again.

"Babe? You in your office?" Marc appeared, bare-chested, a shirt in each hand. "Which one of these is green? I dropped them."

Pablo spared another glare at the phone and focused on the bare skin in front of him. "If I don't tell you will you stay as you are?"

That earned him a soft chuckle. "I'm not sure that the manager of the grocery store would appreciate it, but sure." Marc tilted his head. "Everything okay, babe? You sound... stressed."

A small smile pulled at the corner of his lips, cheering him; his lover knew him well. "Bev called."

"And this makes you stressed because..." Marc took a few steps in, hands searching for the edge of his desk.

With a sigh he stood and met Marc, sliding his hand across the thin belly as he leaned back against the desk. "Ever since she found out I had your paintings she won't let up. I won't sell them, Marc. I won't!"

"Oh, babe..." Marc moved closer, shaking his head. A bright blush flared across his cheeks as a wide grin bloomed on his face. "You don't have to sell anything. She's just looking to make us some money. She thinks they might be worth something."

"A small fortune - neither of us would have to work again." He let his arm loop around Marc's waist, drawing his lover between his outstretched legs. "That's not the point."

"No?" The shirts discarded, Marc's hands moved over his face, the touch familiar and relaxing. He tilted his face further, letting his eyes close as nuzzled into the touches.

"No. The point is that they're my paintings they're worth far more to me than any amount of money and I've told her no a dozen times."

He could feel himself getting all worked up again. "What's it going to take to get her to understand that I genuinely do not want to part with the paintings?"

Marc chuckled, hands sliding down to massage his shoulders. "It's *Bev*, babe. She'll haunt you after she's dead and gone. I'll have Marge talk to her again, that'll call off the dogs for a few months. She isn't trying to make you crazy, Pablo. Honest."

"No, she's just trying to make me give up something that means a lot to me so she can bring this wonderful new discovery to light and make lots of money."

"Pablo, the paintings are yours and will always be yours. I would never ask you to part with them." Lips ghosted over his forehead, his temple. "How can I make you feel better, babe?"

"You're not the one asking," he grumbled with a pout, knowing he was being silly, hanging onto his aggravation. Especially with Marc in his arms.

"No. I'm not." Marc's tongue teased at the corner of his mouth. "Want me to call her now? Tell her to leave you be? Want me to take you to bed and make you forget that those paintings even exist?"

Marc's hand cupped his groin, beginning to massage slow and easy. "Want me to take you right here?"

Oh... He moaned and pushed up into Marc's touch. "What paintings?" he asked quietly, pulling Marc's face down for a kiss.

Marc chuckled, tongue pushing deep, kissing him hard and long and stealing his breath. One of Marc's hands cupped his head, tilting him so that the kiss could deepen. The other continued rubbing his cock. He whimpered, sensation moving from his cock to his mouth and back. He clutched at Marc's shoulders.

Marc hummed, pushing closer. "Undo your pants, babe. Want to touch you."

"God, Marc..." His fingers were trembling as he worked open the button and pulled down the zipper.

Marc moaned against his lips as a warm hand wrapped around his cock. "Oh, fuck. So hot, babe. Want you."

"Yes, Marc, yes, please." He pushed up into the tunnel of Marc's hand. It was so good, Marc made him feel so damn good.

"Love you." Marc's lips left his as his lover sank to the floor. A hot tongue swiped over the head of his cock and then Marc's mouth took him in, surrounding him in wet heat.

He cried out, hips pushing hard up into Marc's mouth and then he relaxed back against the desk, letting Marc set the pace.

Marc's arms bracketed him, hands resting on the desk. The tight lips held him, sliding up and down over his shaft, suction sweet and right. He whimpered and moaned and let Marc know exactly how good it felt.

Soft, steady vibrations poured over his cock, the bobbing of Marc's head speeding. He slid his hand along Marc's skull, the shorn bristles tickling over his palms. He heard Marc groan, felt Marc's hands push his slacks and briefs down and wrap around his ass, pulling him deeper, asking him to move. He held Marc's head still and began to rock, long slow slides, pushing his cock deep into his lover's throat.

The hungry moans increased, Marc's lips tightening.

"Oh, God!" He made soft noises and pushed harder, faster, deeper.

Marc took him in, swallowing hard around him, hands gripping tight.

"Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh God." He held on tighter to Marc's head, almost sobbing from the pleasure that raced through him. Marc's mouth felt so good. It felt so good doing this. Always had.

Marc hummed, pulling him in deep, lips greedy on his flesh.

He wanted it to last longer -- it never lasted long enough. He thought that after having Marc do this so many times, he wouldn't come so quick from it, but it always felt so good and it always made him cry out and come so quickly.

His hands tightened and he called out Marc's name as he came. Marc's mouth was tight around him, hot and good and right. The pressure eased, becoming soft pulling, gentle touches of tongue to his sensitive flesh. He just leaned back against the desk, hands stroking over the short bristles, letting Marc bring him down.

Marc finally let his cock slide free, lips nuzzling in his curls. "Love you, babe. God, you taste good."

He slid down, ass planting on the floor and nuzzled into Marc's neck. "Love you, Marc."

"Mmm... feels good." Marc chuckled and scooted into his lap, legs wrapping around his waist. "Hi, babe."

He chuckled and met Marc's mouth, tasting himself there, loving the way his and Marc's flavors mingled and worked together. "Hi."

Marc pulled at his shirt, tugging it up and off and then snuggling close, skin on skin. Soft kisses covered his face and he pulled Marc's glasses off, setting them on the desk.

"Gonna find a pair you like one day."

"Not unless you get a pair that don't hide your eyes." He kissed each one softly.

Marc snorted. "They're ugly. They don't look normal."

Pablo laughed. "And how would you know, Caro?"

"Somebody told me they were scary." Marc was grinning, pleasure still showing in those sightless eyes.

"And you believe some random idiot over me?" He shook his head, knowing Marc could feel the motion. "I love your eyes -- they're beautiful and they talk to me."

Marc's cheeks flushed dark, eyes sparkling. "Oh..."

"Yeah, just like that." He leaned back in and kissed each eyelid again, and then Marc's cheeks and his nose and finally his mouth again. Marc's lips were hungry, tongue pressing deep.

He let his hands slide into the back of Marc's jeans, pulling his lover closer. Marc's arms twined around his neck, holding on tight, the kiss deepening. He made a soft noise and opened his mouth wider, taking Marc's tongue inside. Marc shuddered, moaning into his lips, ass muscles clenching in his hands. He shifted around until he could fall onto his back on the floor, taking Marc down with him. Marc chuckled into his lips, moving with him easily.

"Want you to make love to me," he murmured against Marc's lips, pulling on his lover's ass, pressing Marc tight against him.

"Oh, God! Yes. Yes." Marc's hips pressed down against him, his lover's cock hard and hot even through the denim.

He drew his hands around to the front of Marc's jeans, fingers pulling the button apart, sliding the zipper down so he could grasp that heat in his hands. Marc's cock leapt into his hands, throbbing and burning as his fingers moved. Marc was whimpering, moaning for him, soft little sounds that meant hunger and need and love. He pushed at Marc's jeans with his other hand, his lover helping by wriggling, hot skin rubbing against his own as the jeans were slowly worked off the long legs.

Marc pulled his slacks the rest of the way off, bringing their bodies together, cocks sliding against one another. "Got lube in here, babe?"

He shook his head. "Just do it, Marc," he begged, spreading his legs wide and tilting his hips.

A groan sounded and Marc's head fell forward. Marc licked his palm, slicking his cock with quick, needy motions, and then the slick head bumped against Pablo's entrance. "Want inside you."

He grabbed his legs behind his knees and pulled himself open wider. "Yes, Marc. Please."

Marc pressed inside, moaning as he pushed his cock inside in short, pulsing motions of his hips. "Tight. Hot... so good."

He moaned at the stretch, whimpered at the burn and pulled himself open wider, hips pushing up, trying to make Marc take him faster.

"What do want, babe?" Marc raised himself onto his hands, pushing in deep.

"Oh God!" He slid his arms and legs around Marc, holding on tight. "Just like that, Caro. Oh, just like that."

Marc smiled, hips pulling out and then pushing back inside in a deep, strong stroke. "Like this?"

He whimpered as the sensation moved all the way up his spine, lodging at the base of his neck and vibrating out over his skin in ever smaller waves. "Yes!"

"Love the sound of your voice." Marc began rocking, thrusting hard again and again.

Another whimper was pushed out of him. "My voice?" he asked breathlessly.

"Yeah, babe." His hips were tilted and Marc's cock pushed deeper.

He called out as the sensations grew intense. He'd intended to talk, to let Marc hear his voice, but as his lover began to fuck him, he lost track of everything but the pleasure. Marc's head was bowed, eyes closed as he pushed hard and deep, groaning again and again.

He kept his eyes open, wanting to see, needing to see. His lover was flushed, sightless eyes wide open. His bottom lip was caught tight in his teeth, stomach muscles rippling as his hips worked. He could feel every inch of the hot cock as it pushed in and out of him, could feel Marc's balls as they hit against his ass.

"Love... love you. Love you." Marc's hand slid down his stomach, reaching for his cock. The thrusts grew faster, deeper.

"Oh!" He whimpered. "L...love you, too." He couldn't see Marc anymore, his eyes rolled back into his head as he started to tremble.

Marc cried out, the rhythm of his hips stuttering. "Coming. Babe, so good. Coming."

He called out Marc's name on a sob, body pulsing around Marc's cock as he came. Marc arched, heat filling him as a low sob filled the air. He held on tightly. He was never going to let Marc go again. Never ever.

"Love you." Marc sank down on him, body heavy and warm. "Love you."

"Love you, too." He pressed his lips against Marc's neck, nuzzling the warm, sweaty skin.

"Good." Marc sighed, the sound satisfied and sated. "You okay now? Better? Or do I need to keep distracting?"

"Oh, by all means, keep on distracting." He laughed and nuzzled some more and held on tight.

Marc settled on the floor beside him, hands sliding over his skin. "I won't leave you again. You know that, don't you? There won't be the day where you wake up and there is only your paintings and your sculptures. I will never leave you again, Pablo."

He nuzzled close, pushing into the wandering hands. "Promise?"

"I promise. I... I have a question for you, babe." Marc's lips brushed against his head, hands drawing him close.

He looked up in surprise. "Go ahead, Caro."

"Marry me?"

"Oh..." Tears filled his eyes and he blinked them away, eyes on the beautiful blue of Marc's. "Yes."

Marc grinned, eyes filling. "Really? I mean, you will? A real wedding in front of God and everybody with rings and cake and promises?"

He laughed, half crying as he nodded. "Whatever you want, Marc. Whatever you want."

"You, Pablo. I want you every single fucking day for the rest of our lives." A tear slid down Marc's cheek.

He wiped it away with his finger and stroked his thumb across Marc's lips. "I like the sound of that, Marc. The rest of our lives."

Marc nibbled on his thumb, eyes closing. "We need a honeymoon, too. You inviting your parents?"

"On the honeymoon? No way!"

Marc's eyes, so bright, so blue, flew open and then the laughter started, filling the room. He grinned and then giggled, burying his face in Marc's chest, breathing in the musk of his lover as he laughed.

"Oh, babe. I can't believe..." Marc wrapped him in a hug. "I had a night planned -- dancing, dinner. I even have a ring for you. But I just... I had to know. Had to let you know."

"Oh..." He was speechless. He loved this man so much and this... this was just perfect. "I love you, Marc."

"I love you, babe." Marc kissed him, face relaxed and warm and happy.

He stroked Marc's cheeks, feeling great and close to his lover and he didn't want this moment to ever end.

Marc nuzzled close, rumbling softly. "You're going get me excited again and I'll miss my next bus for the grocery store, babe."

"And this would be a bad thing because..."

"Uh..." Marc's eyes closed as he thought. "Because we wouldn't have fresh raspberries to feed each other with our fingers?"

A pulse went through him at the thought, his cock starting to firm. He rolled Marc over onto his back, following and rubbing against the pale skin. "Tell you what -- I'll drive you in later."

"Oh, good plan." Marc moaned and arched beneath him. "Take me for pizza and a walk too?"

"It's a deal." He grinned and rubbed some more. "After all, I wouldn't want to deny my affianced."

"Oh, I like that." Marc leaned up and nipped his shoulder. "You can wear your ring tonight. My ring."

"I'll have to get one for you."

"I'd like that. I've never worn anyone's ring before, never." Marc's face was alight, so excited. Like the day they bought their first Christmas tree, Marc was flying on them together, them as a family.

"Do I get a sneak peek at mine, or are you going to make me wait all day?"

"It's in the bedroom." Marc was vibrating in his arms, cock firming against his leg. "I've had it for weeks. I hope you like it. Marge said it was good."

"What does it feel like?" he asked as he stood and grabbed Marc's hand, encouraging him up. The bed was in the bedroom, too. Far more comfortable than the floor.

Marc followed along, fingers linking with his. "Smooth. Silky. The stones are set deep in the platinum and there's no rough spots."

"Sounds gorgeous, Marc -- what color are the stones, did you pick it out yourself?" He bounced down the hallway, excited and happy and just full of Marc and love.

"The stones are emeralds and I did pick it out. Marge went with me and helped, but I felt around until I found the right one." Marc's voice was full of laughter, full of sweet pleasure. He wandered into the bathroom, cleaning himself off and bringing Pablo a cloth as he came out.

"Cool, Caro -- then it doesn't matter what it looks like -- I'm going to love it because you chose it for me."

Marc dug through his underwear drawer and came out with a tiny black box. He found Pablo's shoulder and then knelt on one knee, opening the box to offer up a beautiful ring, a thick silver colored band with a deep green, square-cut emerald in the center.

Bright blue eyes shone up towards him. "I love you, Pablo. Marry me?"

His hand was trembling as it slid along Marc's cheek. "Yes, Marc, I will."

Marc turned his head, kissing the center of Pablo's palm. "Thank you."

He slid to his own knees, kissing Marc. "Put it on me?" he whispered.

Marc pulled it out of the box and slid it on his left hand. It fit beautifully, like it was meant for him. Marc's hands slid over his fingers, looking. "Do you like it?"

He watched as Marc looked at it, the long fingers making it belong, making it perfect. "I do, Marc. It reminds me of you."

"I like how it feels on your hand. I knew I would."

"God, I love you." He pressed close again, kissing Marc and wrapping his arms around his lover's neck.

"I love you." Marc chuckled, rubbing his nose against Pablo's. "We're on the floor again."

He giggled. "So we are. But this is where you were..."

"We're hopeless." Marc took another kiss, grinning wide. "And disgustingly mushy."

"I think you're supposed to be mushy when you ask your boyfriend to marry you -- it's like a requirement or something."

"Oh, then I'm doing this right. Good." Marc's eyes were dancing, hands tickling along his arms. "It's my first time to propose to my boyfriend, you know."

"Really? I would never have guess so based on how well you did with this one." He shivered as Marc's hands moved over him. "I have it on very good authority that your boyfriend is quite overwhelmed and unbelievably happy."

"Happy works. Come to bed and we can add orgasmic and mad with desire to that list."

"I can do that." He giggled again, feeling light and alive and in love.

"Good." Marc's lips were warm on his, promising forever and always.

He realized suddenly that he loved the paintings, but he didn't need them. He had the painter.

It was everything he'd ever dreamed or hoped for. And more.

"Pablo?" Marc reached out, stroking Pablo's blanket-covered thigh. He hadn't heard the book shut or the lamp click off, so he knew his lover was still awake. "What do I look like?"

"Hmm?" Pablo's answer sounded distracted. The book closed and Pablo sat up a bit. "What?"

"What do I look like?" He kept stroking, eyebrows drawing together in a frown. "I was trying to do a piece of us - us together -- and I can't. I just... I don't know what I look like."

It was weird, he hadn't thought of it before, but now... Well, it felt weird, not knowing. He thought he ought to know.

"Wow, a piece of us together? That would be so cool." He could hear the excitement in Pablo's voice. His lover snuggled closer.

"Well I can tell you what I see, but shouldn't you look yourself? I mean..." Pablo's hands took his and pressed them against his face. "Look."

"I tried, babe, but it... it wasn't real. Please. Just humor me. Tell me what you see." He was getting upset, eyes tearing up -- silly, really, but he needed to hear it, needed to know how Pablo saw him.

Needed to know Pablo saw him.

"Okay, Marc. Sh. It's okay, I can do that. Okay?" Pablo's hands were moving over his face, soft and gentle, stroking his skin.

"You're tall." He got a little giggle. "I know, I know, but I'm short and it's always been one of the first things I notice about you."

The blunt fingered hands stroked along his cheeks. "And your eyes... they're blue, like really startlingly blue because you look like you should have green eyes, because of the red hair and the freckles and the pale skin. But they're blue and even though you can't see... your eyes talk to me, they tell me everything you don't. They tell me how you're really feeling and they tell me if you're relaxed or nervous or happy."

A soft kiss landed on his nose. "The Marc MacAllen ski jump." Pablo giggled again. "Do you remember that?"

He laughed, wrapping an arm around Pablo's waist as he nodded, upset fading as Pablo spoke. "God, yes. That made you laugh so fucking hard. You remember the first few times we kissed, we used to bump noses all the time. You were so adorable."

Pablo giggled and bumped their noses together. "We learned how to get around it though. And you know, it is a big nose, but it fits in your face."

Pablo's hand slid over his head. "You have bright red hair with all these amazing curls. I still kind of miss them, you know. I don't know, just... you look older with the hair short like this. And despite what you think you aren't actually bald and there's not all that much grey. Just a bit of silver here and there among a darker red. And your eyebrows are still the bright color your hair used to be."

Pablo's fingers traced each feature as he spoke about it, voice warm and affectionate and distracted at the same time, only now, instead of being distracted by his book or the article he was writing, Pablo was distracted by Marc himself.

"Your lips are thin and really red, almost like you've got lipstick on. I think it's because your skin is pale, so they stand out as redder than I'm used to, 'cause all my family has olive skin."

"Really? Does that make me a natural drag queen, babe?" He could feel his cheeks heating, grin growing wider. His hand moved over his head -- maybe he'd let it grow out, just to see what Pablo thought.

Pablo giggled again, wriggling against him. "I don't know -- your hands are amazing, long-fingered and unbelievably graceful, but your legs... you've got a man's legs, Caro -- knobby knees and big huge feet. Of course, big nose, big hands and big feet, you know what they all mean." Pablo's hand slid between them, finding his cock beneath the covers. "They're right, too."

Their joined laughter sounded so good, natural and familiar and right. He reached out to find Pablo's face, pull their lips together for a soft kiss. "Your hand feels good."

"It does?" Pablo's fingers slid along his flesh, encouraging it to fill. "Do you want me to go on or do you need me to see you awhile longer?"

"Ummm... yes?" He grinned against Pablo's mouth, breathing in the soft giggle.

Pablo's lips slid against his own, the kiss staying light, letting Pablo keep talking. "You've got two ears. They stick out a bit and that makes them very tempting for nibbling. You have lines around your eyes and mouth and they've changed in the last few years. They look like they were made by laughter now. And that makes me love them because I did that. I brought you laughter and joy and happiness back into your life and that makes me feel so good."

Marc nodded, tongue sliding along Pablo's bottom lip. "You are my muse, babe. Nothing makes me happy like you. Nothing ever has."

"You've got freckles. Not so many right now, but in the summer they explode across your face and it looks like you've got a tan unless you come up close." Pablo was taking kisses now, long ones in between every few words. "You're skinny and you have these two little indentations just after your belly but before your hips. It's fucking sexy. In fact all of you is fucking sexy and looking at you makes me want you."

He pushed up against Pablo, rocking slow and steady against the warm, soft skin of his lover. He took one of Pablo's hands, drawing it to one of the dimples. "These? Sexy?"

Pablo's fingertips trailed over his skin, each finger taking its turn. "Yeah, Marc. These. Sexy." Pablo's voice was husky, a soft shudder moving through his lover's body.

"Oh, that felt good." Marc dipped his head, fastening his mouth of Pablo's shoulder. "So sexy, babe."

Pablo moaned, fingers tightening against his skin. "Very sexy."

"Want to do a series with us together -- you fucking me, you sleeping in my arms, showering together, your cock in my mouth..." He licked and lapped, moaning as he tasted.

A shudder moved through Pablo's body. "Oh, Marc... they sound perfect."

"Yeah. They're us." Their lips met again, tongues sliding and licking, tasting each other.

"Have I told you recently that I love you?" Pablo asked, breathing into his mouth.

"Mmm... yes. Tell me again." His tongue slid into Pablo's mouth, tasting a hint of hot chocolate and mint and cinnamon.

Pablo shifted, rearranging them both and the covers until his lover was lying on him, skin against skin, sliding slowly. "I love you, Marc. So much."

He wrapped one long leg around Pablo's hip, hands stroking up and down Pablo's body. He couldn't stop smiling - - God, this felt good. "I love you, babe."

"Good, I'm glad." Pablo kissed him awhile longer, tongue stroking in his mouth, lips soft and warm and good. "Do you want to know what you look like now?"

"Same as I did five minutes ago?" He chuckled, searching for another sweet hot-chocolate kiss.

Pablo pulled away though. "No. I mean, you do, but you look different, too. Now your skin is all flushed and your lips are swollen from our kisses and you've got this look in your eyes. My look. All hot and hungry and happy." Pablo rubbed against him and let their mouths come together. "Fucking sexy, Marc, unbelievably sexy, that's how you look right now."

"You just like to watch." He blushed, pleased all through, lips parted wide as they shared one hot kiss after another. Making love in their bed, just as natural and familiar and right as he'd ever imagined. "Love you."

Pablo giggled, body rocking against him. "I don't like to watch, Marc. I love to watch. You make me so hard..." A shudder went through his lover's body.

"Yeah, what do you like best? Watching me get myself off? Watching me fuck myself on a dildo and wishing it was you?" He reached down, started stroking Pablo's cock. God, making love to this man was the most fun, most wonderful thing.

"Oh, God!" Pablo pushed into his hand, breath coming in soft little gasps. "Those are all good, Marc. Really good. But you know what would be the best? Watching you get fucked, watching myself fuck you." Pablo went still. "My God, we could rent a video camera!"

Marc grinned, ran his palm over the tip of Pablo's cock. "Babe, if you want, we can buy one."

Pablo shuddered again. "We'd need a tripod to set it up on, too."

"Sure, okay." He tilted his hips, rubbing Pablo's cock over his entrance, teasing. "Zoom lens too?"

Pablo whimpered, pressing. "We'll have to make sure we hide the videos. Can you imagine Marge's face if she accidentally put one in?"

"We'll mark them clearly -- Pablo fucking Marc. Marc sucking Pablo off. Marc riding Pablo's cock. Marc fucking Pablo 'til he screams." He started rocking a little harder, teasing them both a little more.

Pablo was half giggling, half whimpering. "I'm sure... oh god, you're a tease... she'll appreciate that."

Marc nodded. "We can keep them in a box marked "Pornos". She'll like that even better."

He groaned as the head of Pablo's cock popped into him and then slid out.

"Oh God, Marc. Fuck." Pablo whimpered and tried to press in again.

"Yeah, babe." He tilted again, bearing down and letting Pablo in deep, moaning at the sweet, familiar burn.

Pablo made sweet noises, only stopping when his ass was kissed by Pablo's balls. "Marc..."

"Mm... Good, babe." He slid his hands over Pablo's face, looking at the sweet passion. "Love you."

"Love you, too, Caro." Pablo groaned and turned to put a kiss in his palm. "Gotta move now, need to fuck you."

That made him jerk, balls tightening. Oh, fuck, he got off on that, when Pablo talked, when Pablo told him that he needed. "Oh, yeah, babe. Yeah."

"Yeah," agreed Pablo, groaning as he pulled almost all the way out and then pushed in again, movements long and slow.

Marc pushed up into each thrust, moaning each time he was filled, spread wide.

Pablo moaned and whimpered, short gasps filling the air as he was fucked.

He rolled them both, ending up on top, riding Pablo's cock, hands sliding up over the warm belly, hard little nipples. "Oh, fuck. Feels so good, Babe."

Pablo bucked and thrust beneath him. "Yeah. Oh god, yes. Marc." The words were incoherent, desperate.

"Yeah..." His hands found the headboard and he rode harder, faster, so fucking close. "Touch me, babe. Please!"

"Huh? Oh, yeah." Pablo's hands wrapped around his prick, squeezing tight and stroking.

"Pablo!" He came with a cry, jerking and dancing on Pablo's cock.

Pablo jerked up into him several times and then followed him, filling him with liquid heat.

Marc whimpered, sinking down against Pablo's chest, licking at the salt on his lover's skin. "Wow."

"Yeah," agreed Pablo, voice just a little shaky. "That was... wow." A soft giggle shook Pablo's body. "Course it almost always is."

He grinned and nodded. "Yeah, and sometimes it's super-wow."

Pablo giggled and hugged him tight. "Oh, I love you, Marc MacAllen. More than anything ever."

"Good, 'cause you're stuck with me." He grinned and grabbed one of the hand towels they kept by the bed, cleaning them both up. Then he settled down, curling around Pablo's body. "Sleep well, love. We're going shopping tomorrow."

"For video cameras?"

"And a tripod."

Pablo giggled. "And zoom lenses and lots and lots of blank tapes. Lots."

"Mm...yeah. Dozens." He pressed a kiss over Pablo's heart. "And I need to order some clay in the morning for a new piece or two. Night babe. Love you."

Pablo grabbed his head and tugged him up, giving him a long, slow kiss. "Night, lover."

He wrapped a hand around Pablo's jaw, sinking into the pillows. His free hand settled on his own stomach, stroking lightly. Using Pablo's words to see.

Pablo had a whole bunch of lists. He had one for guests and another for food. He had one for the contingency plan if it was raining. One for everything they needed to get catered. He had a list with dates. A week before the

wedding they needed to pay the minister. The day before the wedding they needed to pick up Mama and his sisters and everyone from the airport and get them checked in to the hotel.

And on and on and on.

It was chaos. It was *organized* chaos though.

And in two weeks they were going to be married in the back, out by the lake. All the trees were putting on their finest show and the long term forecast looked good.

He grinned and looked out the kitchen window. Married. He and Marc were going to get married.

Okay, so it was a commitment ceremony, but still.

"Pablo? Son?" Marge called through the front door, hands full. "Are you here? We brought wedding cake samples and the flowers Marc wanted to smell. And Bevv's arranged a photographer." Her voice dropped. "The one Marc wanted so badly, that does the interesting 3-D things, too."

He went and let Marge in. "Cool. Can I take something?"

"Please." She grinned over, handed him a huge box. "Cake samples. How's the catering plan going?"

"I gave in and called Bev's guy. Henri? Only where you don't pronounce the 'h'. He made noises about the short notice, but I threw 'Mac Allen' into the mix like Bev told me to and he started drooling. I could hear it over the phone -- giving Piet a run for his money."

He took the box and grinned at her. "We get to try these, right? It's nice and heavy -- are there a lot of varieties?"

"Yes. There are ten different kinds of wedding cake and fifteen varieties for the groom's cake! I didn't think they made that many."

Bev came in, carrying a huge basket of flowers, sweating and chuckling. "Who's the groom in this party, anyway?"

"I don't know -- neither Marc nor I were willing to wear the dress. I tried to convince Marc it would be okay if he did -- because he couldn't see the people looking at him, but he didn't go for it. And I still don't understand why we have a wedding cake and a groom's cake."

He put the box on the kitchen table and called for his lover. "Marc! Bev brought the flowers for you to smell."

"Mainly it's so that people have two choices, really." Marge chuckled, "I brought some sodas over, you were low the last time I was over."

Marc laughter preceded him. "You're too good to us, lady. Oooh... the flowers..." He stopped, inhaled. "Oh, wow."

Pablo took a breath and stopped, sat to watch. God, he loved this man. Which would explain the whole marriage/commitment ceremony thing.

"We haven't gotten to the grocery store this week." He giggled suddenly. "I forgot to put it on any of my lists."

Marc moved toward the flowers, hands out. Bev took his wrist, brought it to a long-stemmed purple flower. Pablo

watched, entranced and falling in love all over again. There was something about Marc that made him feel young and happy. Marc looked blissful, face buried in the mums and roses and carnations and greenery.

Marge chuckled, shook her head. "Lost in his own little world."

Pablo nodded. "Yeah. He's beautiful."

"I like them all. Babe? You like them?"

"I do. The purple ones especially. You choose though and then we'll taste cake. There's 25 different kinds!"

"Twenty-five?" Marc looked shocked. "Kinds of cake?"

He giggled. "Yeah, ten wedding cakes and fifteen grooms cakes. I'm thinking we should have two grooms cakes. But we have to try them first. Are you hungry, Caro?"

Marc blinked. "Yeah. Yeah, okay. Someone should make notes, though."

"I'll make notes. Come sit by me and we can share bites. Like we will on the day." They were only going to do this once, he wanted to enjoy all the bits and pieces of it.

Marc grinned, nodded. Bev helped him around the flowers and into his arms. "I want all the different flowers. Bunches of them."

"That sounds lovely. Inside and out? And in the tent?" He put Marc on the chair and sat in his lover's lap.

"Everywhere there's a place." Marc's arms wrapped around his waist, cheek on his shoulder.

"You two are basking." Bev went to stand at the back door, smoking.

He blushed and pushed against Marc. "Maybe just a little."

"Basking? Us? We're not the basking type..." Marge snorted, eyes rolling playfully.

That made him giggle and if the ladies weren't there he'd be kissing all over Marc. Instead they'd eat cake. It wasn't too bad of a payoff.

Marge opened the box and he gasped -- there was white cake with various fillings, chocolate, yellow, carrot, red velvet.

"Wow, Marc. It's amazing. It's like this gorgeous cake with all these yummy fillings. Oh, man, brown and yellow and white and orange, red. It's like Christmas." He giggled. "Which one do you want to try first?"

"White, I guess. Is there raspberry filling?"

"I don't know -- a couple of them are red." He took a forkful of the white cake and held it up to Marc's lips.

Marc opened up, ate the bite and wrinkled his nose. "Too sweet, babe. It's like strawberry or something."

He nibbled at the crumbs on the cake and nodded. "Yeah. Next one's chocolate. I'm taking first bite."

Marc nodded, nostrils flaring. Bev finished her cigarette as Marge made coffee.

They tried the different flavors, Pablo ignoring the ladies and sharing his favorites with Marc mouth to mouth. God, this was fun.

They decided on a white cake with raspberry filling and a red velvet cake.

Pablo reached for his list and wrote down which cakes they were getting and made a note to call the caterer with the information. "We've got cake for like the next week. Do we get to do this with the main courses too?"

Marge nodded and stole a bite of one of the leftover pieces. "Yep. There's a big tasting to schedule."

"This is so cool. Can we taste test lobster and shrimp and stuff? I guess we have to do it soon."

"We can't, but you can. I'm allergic, remember?" Marc rubbed his back.

Marge nodded. "We'll have to be careful. If it's in a sauce."

"Oh yeah. Well never mind then. I want to be able to kiss you." He leaned up and kissed Marc and then made a note to tell the caterer no shellfish.

"We can have shellfish if you want, babe. It's our wedding." Marc took another kiss. "What other business do we have, ladies?"

He kept the no shellfish note. He could have shellfish anytime. Then he checked over the rest of his notes. "We've got to decide between the string quartet, the dj and the live wedding band."

"How about the string quartet for the ceremony and a dj for the party after?"

"Cool. I'll call them and let them know." He went through his papers. "Most of the rest of the stuff is done or calling people. Am I missing anything, Marge? Bev?"

Bev gave him a tilt of the head. "I have a museum who'd like to do a show of Marc's paintings." She held up one hand. "Not a sale, a show. They're willing to pay fairly well and buy the latest series -- the angel series? Straight out."

"Actually." He glanced at Marc and took a deep breath. "I was thinking you could sell some of them for us. There are six of the seventeen I want to keep. Because they're special. Along with the half dozen Marc gave me over the two years we were together. But the other eleven? I don't need them anymore."

Bev actually dropped her coffee cup.

"That's mean, Pablo." Marge shook her head. "Teasing Bevvie like that."

He shook his head. "I'm not teasing. I was holding onto them because they were my link to Marc, but I have him here now. With me. And he's a lot warmer than the canvases."

"Oh. Oh, God. I have to make some calls. Oh, shit. Son. I'm going to make you both wealthy men..." Bev was out the door like a shot. "Margery, if you don't come on, you'll have to get a cab."

Marge looked at him, at the broken cup on the floor. "Pablo?"

Marc chuckled. "Go on, Marge."

He shivered. "Man, she's like a vulture. Are you sure she and Marge are sisters?" It felt good though, to have made the choice, trusting in Marc.

"She's our vulture, babe. She fights for me in a most serious way. My career will die when she does."

He kissed Marc. "But your art will live on forever -- she's made sure of that."

"Yeah." Marc's frown faded and he got a warm hug.

"Are you okay? There's a lot to do -- does it still feel worth it?"

"Oh. Oh, yeah. Yeah, babe. I just had a moment of 'oh, my God, Bev and Marge are mortal' and then the next thought is you're mortal and..." Marc shivered.

"Oh, Caro. You're not getting rid of me that easily." He brought their mouths together, kissing Marc hard.

Marc moaned, tongue sliding into his lips, a little desperate, a little too needy. He shifted, straddling Marc's thighs and pushing against his lover's belly. The hand at the back of his neck was hard, tugging him down for another kiss and another. He pushed his own hands up under Marc's sweater, moaning at the sensation of warm skin against his fingers.

"Yeah. Need, babe." Marc nipped his bottom lip.

"And we can make love here with all the cake. There's no way Bev's coming back today -- she's a woman on a mission." He giggled and pressed close.

"Perv." Marc chuckled, rubbing a little. "Hey, let's put the flowers in the bedroom, all around..."

He giggled happily. "And you call me a perv. Of course I think it's an excellent idea, so maybe you're right." God, he was happy.

"You are a perv. And I? Am going to be Mr. Perv."

His giggles got louder. "Mr. Perv. Oh, God, I love you."

Marc nodded, face so serious. "Senor Perv."

He pushed his fingers into Marc's ribs as he dissolved into laughter, the scent of cake and flowers all around them.

"Marc, lift your chin."

"I don't want to wear a tie, Marge." He hated ties.

"Pablo wanted formal, son. You said yes." She sounded gleeful. Bitch.

"But it's choking me. And there are people everywhere and..." He frowned. "Pablo knew I was going to wear my glasses, right?"

"You're fretting."

"I'm getting married, Marge. It's allowed." He rolled his eyes, pacing a little. "Where's Bev?"

"In the bathroom and Pablo told her he'd beat her if she let you smoke."

"Damn it."

"My car's right out front, Marc. If you need a getaway vehicle. I'll even let you smoke." Bev's gravelly voice heralded her arrival and she smelled of cigarette smoke.

"Getaway?" He shook his head, grinned. No. No, he'd lost enough time, thanks. He wasn't getting away from anything.

She cackled. "Truly hooked. So remember it's all worth it."

"Fuck off." He grinned, winked. "I make him happy, don't I?"

"You do, Son." Bev squeezed his arm. "Marjory and I were leery at the start -- this kid coming back, broke, trying to break into the writing business with you loaded and successful. But you can't deny the way he looks at you. Those brown eyes just light up like nothing I've ever seen. Almost enough to make a cynical old bitch like me believe in love."

He covered her hand in his, smiling. "Oh, lovely. You know you only believe in me and my money."

"You got that right, Son."

Marge tsked and finally finished fussing with his tie. "There. Now you're perfect."

"Yeah?" He turned, hands shaking a little. "I'm nervous. Why am I nervous?"

There was a knock on the door. "Marc? Can I come in, Caro?"

"Oh." He nodded, almost falling as he turned toward that voice. "Yeah. Yeah, babe."

Please.

"I thought it was bad luck for the groom and... groom to see each other before the wedding." Bev's hand squeezed his shoulder one last time and fell away.

Pablo giggled. "No, that's bride and groom and we definitely are both grooms. I checked just this morning."

"Besides, Bevvyy. I haven't seen anyone in years. I'm safe." He reached out. "You get your folks settled?"

Pablo's hands were warm, solid, holding onto his. "Yeah. And the rest of the brood is here now from the hotel. The backyard is full of people." Pablo giggled. "I think some of your artist friends shocked my folks."

"Yeah?" He shook his head. "Don't tell me... Alicia wore her fairy wings."

Pablo giggled. "And Rich is in full piercing regalia and multi-colored spiked hair."

"Oh, go Rich." He cupped Pablo's cheek. "Happy?"

Pablo nodded, smiling wide. "Yeah, Caro. Today I stand up in front of everyone I know and tell them how much I love you."

"Oh. Oh, yeah." He leaned down, kissed his lover slow and deep. "You smell good."

Pablo pressed against him, moaning into his mouth. "You look amazing."

"Honest? I don't look like a dork with the tie?"

"No. You're the most handsome man here today. The most handsome man ever."

"No. I'm just yours." He squeezed Pablo's hands. "Do you have your... my ring? All that stuff?"

"Yeah, I have everything I need right here." Pablo kissed him softly. "You?"

"Just need my glasses, babe."

Pablo pressed them into his hands. "Will you take them off for me while we're doing our vows?"

"If you want me to, yeah." He put them on, nodded.

"I'd like to see your eyes, Caro." Pablo reached up and stroked his cheek. "Ready? We'll walk out together -- Marge will have the quartet start our song when we get to the deck."

"Tell me what it looks like." He took Pablo's hand, held it.

Pablo started to lead him from their bedroom. "The trees look magnificent. And it's sunny. The tent is on the right side of the garden, it's white and the flaps are all up. Chairs and tables, but no assigned seating so people can mingle.

"Your flowers are everywhere -- you'll smell them the moment we step out.

"Here's Piet. He's wearing a big green bow. I don't think he's impressed, but he needed to be included."

He reached down, pet Piet's head. "Is he coming down the aisle with us?"

"I thought you'd be more comfortable with him. He's harnessed up."

"Yeah." He stopped as they hit the kitchen, squeezed Pablo's hand. "I love you, Mr. Cervantes."

Pablo's fingers slid along his cheek and pulled him down for a long, slow kiss. "I love you, Marc MacAllen."

"Okay, then. Let's get married."

They opened the door and stepped out, the sun warm on his face.

Pablo's jaw actually hurt from smiling so much. He couldn't help it though -- he was just so very happy.

He and Marc had said their vows and exchanged their rings, under the open sky and in front of God and his Mama

and Papi and everyone. There had been cheering and toasts and laughing and dancing and hugs and love from everybody. When it got dark, multi-colored lamps were lit and the dj started playing more slow songs than fast ones and nobody left early.

Pablo was pretty sure he'd talked to everyone there and he'd done most of it while holding tight to Marc's hand, though his lover had been drawn off by Bev and Marge a bit ago. He looked around, knowing his tall lover shouldn't be hard to spot.

Marc was leaning against the wall, talking to Bev, shoes gone already. Pablo grinned and wandered over, drawn like a moth to his very own flame.

It took him awhile, people stopping him, congratulating him, but then he was there. Marc was chuckling, fingers sliding on the stem of the champagne glass. He loved the way Marc touched things -- god it was sexy. And this probably wasn't the place or the time, but damn, he'd just married the man of his dreams and he wanted to celebrate that.

"...going to spend tonight at a hotel and then fly out to the cruise. We'll be back in two weeks. Are you sure you two don't mind taking care of Piet?" Marc was worried about functioning so long without the lab, worried about driving him crazy with needing things. Piet didn't fly well, though, and God knew how he'd be on a boat.

He slid his hand along Marc's arm as Bev reassured his husband. His husband. Oh, God, that was amazing.

"Mmm..." Marc's face broke into a warm smile. "Hey babe."

"Hey, Caro." He leaned into Marc and pushed up for a soft kiss. "How're you doing?"

"Good." Marc grinned. "How're your folks doing? Having a good time?"

"Yeah, I think so -- they even danced. That? Was strange."

"We should dance once or twice, before we head out."

"I'd love to dance with you." Especially if they were going to keep playing those slow songs.

Marc nodded. "Going to dance, Bev. I'll call you from the hotel tomorrow, check on my baby."

"Don't worry, Marc, I'll only teach him how to make highballs and fetch my cigarettes."

Pablo giggled and squeezed Marc's hand. "He'll be fine, Caro."

"I'm not worried about him..." Marc followed him onto the part of the yard they'd designated at a dance floor.

"You'll be fine, too. I promise I won't lead you into traffic." He moved into Marc's arms, swaying against his lover.

"Promises, promises." Marc's arms circled him, and they moved together, nice and slow.

He giggled softly, head on Marc's shoulder. "God, you make me happy."

"Yeah? No regrets?" He could feel Marc's smile against his temple.

"Maybe one or two," he teased. "We should have gone with chocolate instead of red velvet for the second cake."

"No way. Although the roast beef was not as good as your Mama's, apparently."

"Oh, no, she didn't complain to you, did she?"

"Not complain." Marc actually laughed. "She said, 'Now, Pablo's Marc. You listen to Mama now. You like this? You come home and I'll cook for you and show you real.'"

He giggled. "She called you Pablo's Marc?" Oh man, that meant she really did accept Marc. Pablo beamed up at his lover. "That's great."

"Yeah. She and your pop seem to be relaxed. Alicia is trying to seduce Anna, though." Marc winked.

He giggled. "Yeah, but Anna's trying to con her into babysitting and my money's on my sister."

"Oh, wow. Alicia? With babies?" Marc laughed, shook his head. "You've got brave family, babe."

"Nah, they're just desperate to get away from their brood for a few hours." He giggled. "Like Mama would let anyone else but her look after those kids."

"Yeah..." Marc looked a little dreamy, a little soft around the edges. "I love that sound..."

He tilted his head. "Where? What sound?"

"Your giggle. It's... Art."

Warmth filled him. "You're a little biased... husband."

"Husband." Marc stopped dancing, tilting his head. "Wow."

"Yeah. Husband. Mr. Perv, remember?" He giggled softly.

"Senor Perv." Marc grinned.

His giggles got louder again. "That's right. My Senor Perv."

"How much longer until the limo comes, babe?" Marc leaned down. "I want to touch you."

He swallowed hard, pushing close for a moment. "It's been here for an hour. I had it come early so we could go when we wanted."

Just him and Marc. In the limo. At the hotel. Oh, they'd been with their friends all day long and it had been wonderful, but suddenly he ached to be alone, to touch and kiss and make love.

"I want. I'm ready to go." Sure, wanton, his. His.

"Me, too, Caro. And we did the cake thing already -- that means we can just slip away now." He took Marc's hand and led him in the general direction of the front of the house, hoping to mostly avoid too many people -- if it spread they were leaving, it'd be hours before they said all their goodbyes.

The bags were already in the limo, all they had to do was escape and let Bev and Marge deal with the party

aftermath. Marge got one last hug, as did Papi and then they were in the cushy quiet of the limo, moving towards the city.

Pablo sat cuddled up next to Marc, fingers stroking his lover's belly. "Did you ever think you'd be going on a honeymoon?"

"No. No, I always thought I'd be alone." Marc's fingers stroked his ring. "It feels good."

"It does. You do. You make me happy, Marc."

"Good." Marc settled them together, humming softly.

"I think everyone had a good time. I think they were all happy for us, too. I'm glad we decided to go all out and invite everyone." He slid his hand inside Marc's shirt and rubbed his wedding ring against the warm skin.

"Yeah." Marc purred, fingers looking at his face.

He nuzzled into Marc's fingers, kissing them whenever they wandered near his mouth. He wanted to ravish his lover, to see if making love to his husband was somehow different than it used to be before today, but the city was coming up fast.

"You look happy. God, I need some clay. I need to capture this, so I'll remember forever..."

"You'll remember, Caro, because this look isn't going anywhere -- this feeling is here to stay."

That got him one of those wondering grins, an expression that Marc didn't even know about. "Oh. Yeah."

"Yeah." He leaned up to take a kiss, keeping it soft, light, just tasting the love and happiness they shared between them.

Here to stay. He liked the sound of that.

Chapter Twenty Seven

It had been an hour since the last trick-or-treater had rung their bell. Pablo figured that was it for the night. He blew out the jack-o-lantern, turned off the porch light and locked the door. The MacAllen/Cervantes house was officially out of the candy handing out business.

He grabbed the big bowl of treats, crowing happily. There were a lot of mini-chocolate bars left.

He could smell the popcorn wafting in from the kitchen and met Marc in the living room. "All ready for the Jamie Lee Curtis scare-a-thon?"

"Yeah, babe." Marc was grinning, vampire cape still on. There was a bright blue, glittery lip print on his cheek from one of the trick-or-treaters. Or possibly from one of the dozen men who stopped by to get candy and a beer and a hug from Marc and show off their costumes to Pablo.

He grabbed Marc's hand and led him to the living room where they settled on the couch, snuggled together, bowl of popcorn on Marc's lap, bowl of chocolate on his.

He turned on the tv and grinned as Elvira introduced the first movie of the evening -- Carrie. "This thing scared the hell out of me when I first saw it. Of course I was what? Twelve? And up watching the midnight movie while my parents were out. Which I wasn't supposed to be doing."

Marc chuckled and turned on the sofa, leaning against him. "You? Doing something you weren't supposed to? I don't believe it."

"Oh, please, how long did I sneak around with you before finally confessing that I wasn't spending time in the library anymore?"

Another laugh sounded and Marc put the bowl of chocolate beside Pablo, head coming to rest on his lap. "Seemed like forever. We had fun though, sneaking."

Grinning, he started to stroke Marc's head, fingers sliding over the soft stubble. "Yeah, it seemed illicit, you know? Made it more exciting."

"Mm... yeah. Although this is better. Making love whenever. Not having to hide. Letting everyone know that I love you." Marc removed the dark glasses, put them on the coffee table, then nuzzled into his touch. "Spending all night with you. I used to hate that, waking up alone after I feel asleep with you."

"You have no idea how hard it was to leave you and go home. That's why I told them, you know?" He loved Marc's eyes, even when his husband was wearing black eyeliner, even if Marc had threatened to put it on himself.

He brushed away the shiny blue lipstick, fingers lingering to stroke across Marc's lips. "Sometimes I wish I hadn't. I wish we'd run away together or something equally romantic and stupid."

"Yeah, but it was better for you -- you went to school, got a degree, a career." Marc kissed Pablo's hand. "I couldn't have given you any of that and you deserved it."

He wanted to argue that the only thing he'd ever wanted was Marc himself, but they'd been over the argument more than once. "I guess it doesn't really matter now, does it? What's done is done."

He leaned down and kissed Marc's nose.

"Yeah. You're home. I'm home. Life is fucking wonderful." Marc's smile was blissful and so warm and happy that it made his stomach clench.

"So should we lay that ghost to rest? That's what Halloween, or all hallows eve, was supposed to be for, you know? Well, depending on which religion you're following of course." Pablo giggled. "I suppose the lecture of Halloween's past should wait until after the scream fest."

Marc grinned, eyes closing. "I love you, babe."

"Yeah, me too."

He linked his fingers with Marc's and grabbed a handful of popcorn, eyes moving between the tv and his lover's relaxed, happy face.

Piet wandered over, nudging Marc's fingers, looking for popcorn. Pablo laughed as Marc grabbed some, feeding them to the black lab, one kernel at a time. The scream from the tv made him jump, which made Piet bark and Marc laugh.

Giggling, he squeezed Marc's hand.

"What's happening? I can't remember this one and stop hogging the chocolate, I can smell it." Marc's eyes were open, rolling up towards him. It was funny, how those eyes could still be so expressive, even now.

Giggling, he popped a chocolate into Marc's mouth. "They just dunked her with the pig's blood and she's setting the place ablaze."

Marc made his "ew, icky" face and chewed the chocolate. "That's gross, babe. I mean, how did they keep the blood from coagulating? And was it cold or hot?"

"That's disgusting, Caro. It's not really pig's blood, it's paint or something."

"Well, I know it's not real. I mean, in theory, babe." The light, comfortable, happy banter continued through Carrie massacring the high school population.

Halloween came next and Pablo shifted, sitting lengthwise on the couch, Marc between his legs, head resting on his belly.

"You remember what we used to do when it was really cold? Go to the movies and make out in the back? All nice and warm."

"Mm... yeah. You remember the time I went down on you in the theatre. Made you squeak."

He giggled, face growing warm, just like he was still sixteen. He'd been half hard for awhile, but now his cock was definitely interested, getting hard against Marc's back.

"Or the time you fucked me in the bathroom of that restaurant?" Marc's hand came up, rubbing his cock. "You just turned me around and took me hard. I came everywhere."

"Oh, God! I was so embarrassed. And so turned on. I didn't know what to do." He watched Marc's hand move on his cock and started to rock slowly, rubbing himself against Marc.

"Mm... sure you did. You knew exactly what to do." Marc chuckled. "You were so hot. Not as hot as that first time I jacked for you in that hotel room, but pretty fucking hot."

He whimpered. "Are you trying to make me come without even touching me? 'Cause I have to tell you -- you're doing a pretty good job."

"Am I?" Marc turned over, mouth sliding over his fly. "I feel so sexy when you're watching me, when you gasp and call my name and need me. And that day, god, I was flying for you."

He gasped, body arching. "Marc!"

It made him giggle, but he was moaning, too and he could feel Marc's breath, so hot, pushing through his jeans.

"Oh, babe." Marc's face turned up, almost as if his lover was looking at him, lips parted, breath coming quick. "I can smell you."

"Can you? Can you smell my need, Marc? My hunger?"

"Fuck, yes. You make me hard with the way you smell." He was given a sweet, soft, hungry smile. "You don't know how much it means to me, to walk into our room and smell you, babe."

He reached out to touch Marc's face, fingers tracing cheek and eyebrows and chin and lips and nose. "I think I have an idea," he whispered, thumb wiping away some of the eyeliner. Even though they'd been together a few years now, were married, it still amazed him sometimes that they were here together.

"Yeah?" Marc groaned, biting his bottom lip, eyes closing.

"Yeah." He slid the thumb of his other hand along Marc's lip and teeth.

"Want you." Marc's lips slid over his thumb, head bobbing as Marc sucked.

"Oh, God. Yes." He watched as Marc fellated his thumb, head going up and down, so close to his cock. Gasping, he pushed his hips up.

Marc started opening his jeans, humming over his thumb, eyes falling closed. He watched, as fascinated as always with everything Marc did. The man could lie there and breathe and he'd be turned on. Once Marc got his jeans open, his thumb was released, Marc's open lips finding and surrounding his cock.

He loved this, loved Marc sucking him. Loved watching Marc suck him.

The shorn head bobbed, lips pulling and tongue working his flesh. Marc loved this too, loved sucking him, loved tasting him, loved him. His hands slid over Marc's head, along his cheeks, around his lips, where they were joined, moaning as his fingertips trailed along his cock, came away wet with Marc's spit.

"Love you, Caro," he whispered.

Marc hummed soft and low, purring around his cock. Those clever fingers reached up, sliding over his skin -- looking and stroking and touching. So good. It was so good. He wrapped his hands around Marc's head, holding him close. He arched his back, pushing up into the wet, sucking heat.

Fingers pulled his nipples, then slid around to his back, pulling him close. Pulling him deep. The suction grew more intense, pulling from deep inside him. He gave Marc everything, soft gasps and quiet whimpers, his control,

his seed, his love. Marc swallowed around him, soft sounds of pleasure filling the room. Marc's hands were warm and hold, loving and tracing.

He took a deep, shuddering breath, hands moving over Marc's head and face, coming down slowly. Marc nuzzled his cock, his belly, his hips. Loving him.

Jamie Lee Curtis chose that moment to scream and he giggled. "She just saw two hot men and realized they were taken."

Marc snorted, nipping his belly. "You think? Maybe she saw the size of your cock and got scared."

Pablo giggled harder. "Oh, yeah, Pablo and his wunderprick."

"Oooh!" Marc pulled part of his cape around his cock and giggled. "It's a bird! It's a plane! It's superprick!"

Oh, he could hardly breathe, he was wheezing he was laughing so hard. The sight of his cock, with its one eye, wrapped in the cape was so silly. Marc's face, alight with mischief and love was wonderful.

Marc dropped his forehead onto Pablo's belly, laughing hard enough to shake the sofa.

Pablo sighed as he caught his breath. "You know some guys might not take it the right way if you laughed at their cock. Lucky for you, I'm not one of those kind of guys."

Grinning, he slid his hands beneath Marc's armpits and tugged. "Come on, your turn to get some... candy."

Marc grinned and clambered up his body. "You got some candy for me, little boy?"

"You have to say trick or treat first."

Soft lips trailed along his chin. "Trick or treat."

"Oh... Um..." He arched his neck a little, trying to guide Marc's mouth down toward his neck. "How about one of each?"

"Is it a mean trick, babe?" Marc took the cue, mouth sliding down his throat.

"I don't know, Marc -- I'm giving you the treat, you're giving me the trick."

"The trick?" Marc's tongue slid over his Adam's apple, hot and slick.

Pablo smiled. "Isn't that how it goes? If I don't give you a treat, you trick me?" He giggled softly. "Though I suppose you already have and it's more than past your time for a treat..."

"Mm... yeah. Touch me." Marc's voice was raw, rough, open mouth moving over his skin.

He slid his hands down, pushing them beneath the waistband of Marc's sweats and wrapping round the long, hard cock. "Like this?" he asked as he began to stroke the hot flesh.

Marc nodded, whimpering against him, body arching and shivering. He continued to pump, mouth finding Marc's neck, lips fastening around the warm skin and sucking.

The whimper this time was louder, needier; the shiver more pronounced. "Good, babe. Oh..."

He murmured against Marc's skin and pulled faster, letting the palm of one hand slid across the top of Marc's cock, spreading the drops that flowed from there. Marc jerked up against his hand, a sharp cry sounding. Those blue eyes were wide, open, rolling as if they were searching for something, searching for him. He grabbed one of Marc's hands and pulled it up to his face, his other hand still working Marc's cock.

Marc's fingers slid over his cheeks, the long body shaking. Marc gave a long cry, fingers tracing his eyebrows, his lips, and then heat sprayed between them, the scent of Marc's come flavoring the air. He wrapped his free hand around Marc, pulling him close, his other hand still holding Marc's cock, sliding slowly, gently up and down, bringing Marc down.

Marc moaned, soft and low. "Oh Pablo, babe. So good. Love you. So good."

"I love you, too."

More screaming came from the tv and he leaned forward enough to lick at Marc's lips. "Want some more candy?"

"Just want you." Marc pushed up closer, trying to deepen the kiss. "Only you."

His breath caught in his throat and then he was pulling Marc's head close, kissing his lover for all he was worth.

He could taste himself in Marc's mouth, along with salt and popcorn and chocolate and Marc and it was so good. Right.

Jaime Lee was still screaming. 'Yeah, scream lady,' thought Pablo. 'All this is mine.'

He searched for the remote with one hand, turning off the tv when he found it, never breaking the kiss he shared with his husband. Marc moved to straddle him, fingers stroking his cheeks as the kiss grew and deepened and made his head spin. He dug his fingers into the back of Marc's sweats and pulled on that sweet ass, pulling Marc closer.

His own legs were spread wide and he was rubbing his cock up against Marc and his ass back against the couch, the seam of his jeans pressing against his crack.

"Oh, God, Marc! Need you. Want you."

Marc nodded, grunting low. "Gonna fuck me, babe? Fuck me hard?"

He shook his head. "Not tonight, Caro. Tonight you're going to do me."

"Oh, God." Marc pushed against him, groaning low, half-hard cock filling against his belly. "Yes, babe. Yes."

"I want you to bend me over the couch, Marc." He watched his lover's face as he spoke, drinking in each expression. "Bend me over the back of the couch and fuck me as hard as you can."

"Fuck..." Marc's hands tore his shirt away before pushing off the dark cape with trembling fingers. Nothing made Marc so hot as his voice; the effect was stunning, Marc needy and almost desperate. "Now. Want you now."

"Yeah, Marc. Now. I need to feel you inside me, making me come." He slid out from beneath Marc and stood up, getting rid of his own disheveled clothing. "Come and get me, Marc."

Marc slid off the sofa, stripping quickly. He stepped forward carefully, pushing aside the bowl of chocolates, calf pressed to the edge of the sofa, hand trailing along the cushions. "Give me a hint, babe."

"Oh, I'm not trying to play Marco Polo with you, Caro. I'm behind the couch, waiting for you to bend me over it. Wanting." His voice broke and he took a deep breath. He was almost vibrating.

Marc chuckled, rounding the edge of the couch. "Wouldn't that be Marc, Oh, Pablo?"

He giggled, the sound breathless. He reached out, taking Marc's hand and pulling him close. "God, I love you."

Marc bent down for a kiss, pulling their bodies together, as that warm tongue pressed deep, stealing his laughter.

He slid his hands over Marc's hips, rubbing his palms against the prominent hip bones, rubbing against his husband.

"Mm..." Marc hummed against his lips, then pulled away from the kiss, turning Pablo towards the couch. He settled on his upper arms, groaning and shuddering as Marc's hands spread him. He closed his eyes, waiting for the press of Marc's fingers, Marc's cock.

What he got was the slick-hot slide of Marc's tongue against him.

"Oh God!" He jerked and pressed back, whimpering.

A moan vibrated against him before that hot tongue pressed inside, opening him, spreading him. He took a sobbing breath, legs and arms trembling as pleasure coursed through him. Marc's tongue moved inside him, slow and steady, slicking him. Driving him mad. He tried to rock back, but Marc had his legs spread wide and he was bent at an awkward angle for taking control. He just hung his head and tried to find his breath.

The tension built, growing higher and higher, until Marc stood, body hot behind him. The long, hard cock nudged against his opening. "You ready for me now? Want me to fuck you?"

"Oh, God, yes! Need you so bad, Marc." He sobbed, rocking back, trying to get Marc inside him. Now, he needed it now.

With a soft sob, Marc pushed deep. He didn't wait, didn't tease, just set up a fierce, long, hungry rhythm that set off lightning bolts inside him.

"Marc! Oh! Oh!" He cried out, pushing back into each thrust, taking Marc into him, loving it, wanting it, needing it.

"Yes. Babe. Tight. Hot. God, Pablo!" Marc's hands were hard on his hips, pulling hard, making him shudder.

He couldn't do more than gasp and moan and push back into it. Marc bent him further, reaching around for his cock and shifting until that long cock nudged against his gland over and over and over. He screamed and he screamed every time Marc's cock hit his prostate, giving Jaime Lee a run for her money.

"Close, babe. So close. Come with me. Let me feel you." Marc's voice was hoarse, as if it had been him screaming instead of Pablo.

He screamed again, long and loud and his body shuddered, his come spraying from his cock like a shot. Marc grunted, shoving into him hard a few more times before stilling, heat filling him, hands trembling on his hips. He

could hardly breathe, just gasp and shudder and make these funny little moany noises. He was trembling, hanging over the back of the couch for dear life.

"Wow. Happy Halloween." Marc was gasping, forehead resting on his shoulder.

He giggled, the sound breathy and sexy for once. "Yeah, I think we should celebrate it like this from now on."

"Oh, yeah. Dress you up as SuperPenis, decorate me with eyeliner and fuck like monsters. Long as we don't forget the chocolate and don't discuss the coagulating merits of pig blood, we'll be fine."

He giggled harder, the joy going all the way to his bones. He preferred laughter to screams of terror any day.

"Come on. Let's clean up and watch the rest from the bedroom." Marc kissed his shoulder. "I'll bring the chocolate. I'd better. Piet already stole the popcorn bowl."

"Oh, yeah, the popcorn is gone. And you've got a deal." He pushed himself up and turned to give Marc a quick kiss. "Love you, Marc."

Marc grinned, wrapped an arm around his waist. "Love you too, babe."

"Good."

He leaned into Marc and got them moving toward the bowl of chocolate, which Marc scooped up, and then on to their bedroom.

As they cleaned and settled, Marc curling up, cheek on his thigh, chocolate bars beside him, laughing hysterically as Marc used the music to explain what was going on, Pablo thought that maybe they were doing a damned good job of laying old ghosts to rest.

Christmas was one of Pablo's favorite holidays. Not in the least because it was the first holiday he and Marc had celebrated together in their home.

So every year, they would go together and pick out a tree -- Pablo would describe them to Marc and Marc would nod and listen and tease him about knowing which one he wanted by the tone of his voice. And then Marc would walk up to the sorriest looking tree there and insist they bring that one home.

Pablo would wheedle and play up its faults and remind Marc that he was the one who could see, but Marc would just laugh and say that this one had 'called' to him.

The tree always looked good once it was decorated, even if this year's was a bit sparse in the middle. Decorating was fun -- Marc would hand him each decoration and he'd describe it and then put it up, sometimes with guidance from Marc "that one has to go near the bottom", sometimes not.

The angel on top was always Marc's job, Pablo's hands on his waist, voice guiding his lover.

And after, the house would smell of pine and winter berries and he and Marc would sit and drink eggnog and sing Christmas carols until Piet started howling along, like he was now.

Laughing, Pablo shifted and settled with his head in Marc's lap, legs propped up on the arm of the couch. He closed his eyes and let the smells of home and Marc fill him.

Marc's hand moved over his face, familiar and warm, smoothing over his features. "Happy, babe?"

He smiled and put a kiss into Marc's palm. "Yeah. You?"

"Oh, yeah. Just right." Marc traced his lips and settled deeper into the couch cushions. "What are our plans this year, babe? Staying home? Going to see your folks? What do you want to do?"

"Mama started with the 'so when are you coming for Christmas this year, the 23rd or the 24th?' two days before we left last year."

Pablo shook his head. "I told her then we maybe wanted to be just the two of us this year. I'd kind of like that, you know? I mean I love going home and seeing the kids and all, but we haven't had a real just us Christmas in too many years."

He played with the wedding band on Marc's finger, sliding it around. "What do you think?"

"I think that, as much as I like visiting your folks, I love making love Christmas morning and opening our presents together and then making love again." Marc took a deep breath. "I want to be cozy and lazy and home, babe. No wondering where the bathroom is or whether I remember which room they gave us. Just you and me and home."

He pushed up, wrapping an arm around Marc's neck and bringing him down to meet the kiss halfway. How he loved this man.

"That sounds exactly like what I want, too, Caro. Except..."

One red eyebrow arched. "Except?"

"Well I'd add a few more instances of love-making in there -- like maybe in between each present. A proper thank you, you know."

"In that case I want lots and lots of teeny presents -- individually wrapped." Marc chuckled, unfocused eyes shining.

"Yeah, that's kind of the idea." He giggled, one hand stroking across Marc's belly as he brought their lips together again.

Marc tasted creamy and nutmeggy-y and happy. There was little as wonderful as relaxing here, kissing and talking and being wrapped in Marc's love, Marc's peace. He slid his hand beneath the nubby sweater Marc was wearing, finding soft, warm skin. He made a happy sound into his husband's mouth.

"You starting your unwrapping early, babe?" Marc groaned and licked at his lips, body stretching beneath his touch.

"Gotta make sure I'm in good shape for the festivities." He giggled again, feeding the sound into Marc's mouth. He wasn't needy, just nicely horny, wanting to touch and taste and be as close as he could be to his lover.

Marc nodded, offering him long, easy kisses, one hand mapping him with light touches. Face, shoulder, hip -- Marc looked closely, making him warm deep inside.

"I love you," he whispered, licking at Marc's lips, free hand sliding through the shorn hair, tickling his palm on the stubbly scalp.

"Mm... I love you, too." Marc rubbed against his hand. "I like your touch. Makes me melt."

He giggled as he let the hand playing with Marc's belly drop lower. "I don't know, Marc -- I don't think melted things are quite this... hard."

Marc nipped at him. "Maybe that's what needs your touch, Pablo. I bet you can... melt it."

He giggled all the harder at that, hand sliding over the soft material of Marc's sweats, rubbing his cock.

Marc swallowed up his laughter, thighs parting for his touch. "You'll never know 'til you try..."

"Well then I guess I'd better try."

He was still giggling as he shifted, sliding down onto the floor between Marc's legs, hands pulling down the grey sweats, freeing the long, red cock.

"Where're you going?" Marc gasped, reached down for him, cock throbbing and swollen.

"Not very far, Caro." He breathed on Marc's cock, tongue coming out to tease the tip. He gasped as the bitter flavor of Marc's pre-come filled his mouth

"Oh!" Marc jerked. "Your tongue's so warm!"

He giggled some more and took Marc's cock into his mouth, sucking as he went down on it.

Marc gave a strangled cry, hips pushing up into his mouth once before settling back.

He stroked Marc's belly and hips as he sucked, setting up a slow rhythm that saw him taking his lover's cock in as far as possible.

"Oh, babe. So good. Fuck, you make me hot." Marc groaned, head falling back on the sofa, thighs parting as those long, brilliant fingers combed through his hair, slid over his face.

He watched Marc as he sucked him, watching the beloved face twist with unselfconscious pleasure.

Marc loved him, loved the feeling coursing through that long, thin body, loved touching and laughing and being made love to. He could see it all, hear it. Hell, even taste it.

Closing his eyes, he focused on what he was doing, sucking harder, head bobbing faster, pulling Marc's pleasure from him in long shudders.

"Pablo... Oh, babe. Love you. Feels... Fuck! Feels so good." Marc rocked up, groaning, hands gripping his shoulders.

He slid his own hands between Marc's ass and the couch, palms cupping the round buttocks and encouraging his movements.

Marc's voice grew rough, non-words pouring out over him as that long cock pistoned in and out of his throat, fucking him with abandon. He just went with it, loving the feeling of it, the smell of it, the sound of it, the taste of it.

"Love! Oh, now! Love!" Marc gasped and convulsed, seed pulsing hot and bitter into his mouth, into his throat.

He swallowed what he could, letting the rest trickle from his mouth and wiping it off on Marc's sweats. He placed a soft kiss to the tip of Marc's cock and then laid his head on one thigh, making a happy noise.

"Oh, God... So good." Marc stroked his hair with trembling fingers. "Come kiss me."

He pushed himself up, straddling Marc and taking his lover's face between his hands. He kissed Marc with everything he had.

Marc groaned, opening wide for him, tongue pushing deep. His shirt was tugged up and off, breaking the kiss for only a moment.

He shivered, but not from the cold.

His jeans were next, Marc opening them easily, hand wrapping around his cock. As the kiss deepened, Marc shifted, knees raising and hand directing his cock to that tight entrance, spreading pre-come around the wrinkled flesh, teasing them both.

"Marc..." he whispered, whimpering softly.

"In me, babe. Let me love you." Marc pushed himself down on Pablo's cock, groaning into their kiss.

He pushed forward as Marc bore down, swallowing the sweet noises his lover made. Marc was so hot and tight and good around him.

Marc rode him, lean muscles rippling as they moved together, his cock held tight and hot.

He loved this, loved this man. With a moan he shifted them, pushing Marc onto his back on the couch and started to thrust hard.

"Oh, fuck yes!" Marc pulled his knees back, rocking up into every thrust with a sob.

Harder and harder he pushed, watching Marc's face, watching the sightless eyes as emotion and want and need made them shine for him.

Marc reached up, stroking his face, looking at him. "Love you."

He cried out and convulsed, body jerking as he filled Marc with his come.

Marc rocked against him, hand working furiously. His lover rode his aftershocks, coming with a soft grunt, ass clenching him.

He collapsed against Marc, breathing heavily. "Oh, God. Marc. Love you. Love you so."

"Oh, good." Marc held him close, stroked him. "I'd be in real trouble otherwise."

"Why's that," he murmured, feeling heavy and good and lazy.

"'cause I'm in love with you and would be broken without you." Soft, serious -- the words were whispered before Marc brushed a kiss on his head.

"Oh..."

He hugged Marc tight, fighting back tears. There were times when Marc just blew him away.

"I love you," he said the words again, hearing them, feeling them in his heart, in his bones.

"I love you, too." Marc was smiling, happy, the lights of the Christmas tree shining in his eyes.

Oh yes, Christmas was definitely his favorite holiday.

Pablo slipped on the silk boxers, grinning at the feeling of them against his skin. Marc was going to love the way they felt.

Next were the new jeans. He bought them just a little tighter than was strictly comfortable, fairly certain his lover was going to appreciate the way they hugged his body. And then he slipped on the shirt he'd found at the thrift store. It was suede, but thin as anything and the softest thing he'd ever felt.

He brushed his hair and stayed barefoot and then headed for the kitchen to get the champagne and glasses ready.

They usually wound up accepting one of the many invitations they received to attend New Year's parties, but this year Pablo had invited Marc to ring in the year with just him -- now he had to make sure that Marc had the best New Year's Eve ever.

He slipped a tray of hor'd'oeuvres into the oven and started the stereo, soft blues filling the house.

Marc wandered in, dressed only in a pair of jeans, toweling off his hair. "Babe? You in here? Something smells good. What shirt should I wear?"

"Oh... what if I turned up the heat a little and you wore the one you're wearing now?" He licked his lips, admiring the way the jeans rode low on Marc's hips, the way his waist cut in. The plan was to make love at midnight, but he had a feeling the plan was going to get rethought just a little.

Marc grinned and draped the towel around his shoulders. "I can handle that, babe. Assuming you're going to keep me warm if I get a chill."

"Oh, I don't think that'll be a problem."

He went over to Marc and slid his hands around the thin waist, pressing his sudden hard-on against Marc's thigh. "You ready for the best New Year's Eve ever?"

"Mm... you smell good." Marc wrapped his arms around him, eyes widening as his fingers found his shirt. "Soft!"

He beamed, pressing his face against Marc's chest. "I got it just for you," he murmured, tongue sneaking out to take a taste of Marc's skin.

"You did? It's wonderful." Marc fingers explored his back, tracing his spine. "Oh, it's so warm, so soft. Feels so good."

"Feel free to keep feeling it." He rubbed his cheek against the warmth of Marc's chest, shivering slightly at the way Marc's fingers were moving on his back.

"Mm... love your back. Love the way it leads to the curve of your ass." Marc's voice was husky, almost a purr.

He giggled. "As opposed to it leading to the sole of my foot, like most people's backs do?"

He got goosed for that, good and hard. Marc's laughter filled the kitchen, blue eyes twinkling. "Don't make me beat you, Pablo."

"Oooo, that could be fun!"

He rubbed against Marc, horny, but nicely so, just enough to feel it.

Marc's laughter tasted good, pushing into his mouth along with a playful tongue. The pinches gentled, Marc teasing and playing along his cleft.

The kiss and playing might have turned into something more serious if it hadn't been for the timer dinging. He broke away reluctantly, hands lingering on Marc's skin. "I've got munchies and drinks and I was thinking a bit of dancing in the front room. Does that sound good?"

"Wow. You've been busy!" Marc grinned, cheeks flushing. "It sounds perfect. Thank you."

"All right let me just get these on a plate. Do you want to grab a couple of sodas out of the fridge? I thought we'd save the champagne for closer to midnight."

"Sure." Marc headed to the fridge, grabbing a pair of sodas from their shelf, humming along with the music, looking about as happy as he could be.

Pablo carefully set the bite sized bits and pieces on the plate, watching Marc out of the corner of his eye. He loved it when Marc was happy like this, his lover's whole body relaxed and right. It made him feel good all the way through.

He headed for the front room, looping his arm around Marc's waist as he caught up with his lover in the hall.

Marc gave him a smile, soft and relaxed and happy, thin hip bumping his. "Love you, babe."

He kissed Marc's bare arm. "I love you, too."

The music was a little louder when they reached the living room and he set down his plate, grabbing a crab cake to pop into Marc's mouth as he took the soda's from his lover.

"Wanna dance?"

Marc swallowed, an expression of bliss on his face. "I'd love to and whatever that was was damned good, babe."

He grabbed another crab cake and put it in his own mouth, hand going around Marc's neck to bring him down for a tasty kiss.

Marc moaned into his mouth, tongue sliding deep, stealing tastes. "Even better."

"Yeah."

He wrapped his arms around Marc's middle and started to move, swaying gently to the music playing.

Marc cuddled close, resting their cheeks together, a soft moan filling the air.

"I love you," he whispered, eyes dropping closed so there was nothing but Marc and the music.

"Good, given that we're married and stuff, beautiful man."

Marc dropped a soft kiss on his cheek.

Pablo giggled. "And stuff?"

He licked the skin closest to him, eyes still closed. "You mean this kind of stuff?"

"Dunno. Try again so I can tell for sure."

He giggled again and licked up along Marc's neck. "You taste so good, Caro."

"You do too, babe. So good." Marc nuzzled, head tilting to give him better access.

He nibbled slowly, still swaying with the music. "Thought you wanted to dance..."

"Mm... aren't we dancing?" Marc's hips rubbed against him, slow and easy.

He giggled and brought Marc's mouth to his, rubbing back.

Their kiss was lazy, gentle, lasting song after song. Marc was close and warm, holding him as if he were precious. "Love you, babe."

"I know," he murmured, hands sliding up and down along Marc's spine.

"I want you." The whisper wasn't desperate, just a flat, bald fact.

His hands moved down, cupping Marc's ass. "I want you, too, Marc. Now, at midnight, in the New Year. Always."

"Always. I promise." Marc lifted his face, lips covering his, tongue pushing deep.

He pulled Marc's ass, kissing as hard as he could.

Marc's lips slid away, his husband sinking down, sliding down before him. Long fingers slid into his waistband, popping the button open. "Want you, babe. Want to taste you."

"Oh God, Marc. Yes." He slid his hands over Marc's head, the short hairs tickling along his palms.

"Oh... silk. Yummy." Marc's grin was infectious, even as the silk was pushed down away from his cock, Marc's tongue sliding up his shaft. "Oh yeah. Taste so good."

His giggles turned into a whimper. "Feels good, too, Mr. Perv."

"Good." Marc grinned and then swallowed him down to the root in one quick, sharp motion.

"Oh... Marc..." He grabbed onto Marc's shoulders, holding himself up as he shook.

The bald head started bobbing, vibrations sliding over his shaft. He whimpered and moaned, letting Marc hear his pleasure. Marc worked his cock steadily, tongue and lips sliding, suction fierce. Hands slid over his balls, squeezing gently, rolling.

"Oh, God, Marc... gonna come." He started pushing with his hips, driving his cock into his lover's mouth, gasping. Marc made a happy sound around his cock, taking him in deep, pulling hard.

He cried out, calling his lover's name as he came hard. He was swallowed down, Marc's eyes closed, face happy and horny and full of love. He stroked Marc's cheeks, pleasure moving through him in wave after wave.

Marc sucked him dry, cleaned him, nuzzled his pubes. "Taste good, babe."

"And you feel amazing. I love you."

"Love you, babe." Marc kissed his belly, licking gently. "So much."

He slid to his own knees, tongue playing with Marc's lips. Marc groaned, chasing his tongue, hands sliding down to cup his ass.

"We still dancing?"

"Oh, yeah. Definitely."

"Oh good." He giggled and rubbed against Marc, one hand sliding down to rub at the bulge in his lover's jeans.

"Yeah. Good." Marc's hips pressed up against his hand. "Love how you touch me."

"Yeah? Does that mean I should keep doing it?"

"You're such a brilliant man." He got another kiss, Marc's mouth hungry and flavored with him.

He moaned into Marc's kiss, hand sliding up and down the long cock trapped by denim. Whimpers sounded, Marc shifting, sliding. He could feel Marc's belly rippling against him, feel the hard points of those tight nipples and the smooth hardness of the rings.

"God, I want you." He pushed Marc backwards, straddling his lover's hips and taking control of the kiss.

"Show me." Marc held on, hips rocking up against him.

He ground down against his husband, tongue pressing deep into Marc's mouth. He tore at the buttons of Marc's shirt, stripping it away.

Marc's hands were helping, kisses met with an equal hunger. Sweet noises filled the room, mingling with the music, low and desperate and needy.

They kicked off their pants and he whimpered as his hand wrapped around Marc's prick.

"Pablo!" Marc's thighs parted, hips jerking up, pushing into his hand.

"I want to fuck you," he told his lover, shifting to settle between Marc's spread legs, hand still moving along silken heat.

"I'm yours." Those long legs spread wider, hips tilting.

He whimpered and shifted, letting Marc's cock go.

He kissed the tip of Marc's heat and then pushed his lover's legs back, rolling the thin hips and exposing Marc's hungry hole.

"Babe..." Marc's voice was a sob, throbbing with need.

"Yeah, I've got you," he murmured, tongue sliding out to lick at Marc's skin. So hot, so soft.

"Hot. So hot." Marc was shifting, groans almost constant.

He took his time, licking and teasing the wrinkled flesh around Marc's opening. He stroked Marc's inner thighs with his fingers, pressing and sliding against the warm skin.

Pleasure-filled gasps filled the air, Marc rocking in his hands.

He pointed his tongue and pushed it into Marc, wetting the sweet hole.

"Babe! Fuck!" Marc's scream echoed through the room.

A shudder went through him at the sound and he pushed in again, finding a rhythm and fucking Marc with his tongue. Marc's long fingers appeared, holding the thin ass cheeks open, the tight little muscle reluctant to let him slide free. He covered Marc's fingers with his own and kept doing it, kept making his lover crazy, pulling sweet cries and sounds of need from Marc.

The pleas and whimpers were echoed by the shudders rocking the long body in his hands, Marc's tension and heat growing. He rose up over Marc, replacing his tongue with a finger, just to make sure his lover was stretched. He rubbed the tip of his cock against Marc's hole.

"Oh, fuck! Babe, please!" Marc's hips tilted, trying desperate to push them together. "Hard. Want to feel you everywhere."

"Yeah. Yeah, Marc."

He pushed in and in and in until he was pressed up tight against Marc's body and then, with a whimper, he started to move, not playing or teasing, just fucking Marc hard.

Marc was stretched out beneath him, stomach taut, nipples hard as little rocks, their rings shining. The high cheekbones were stained red, swollen lips parted and gasping as he sank into that tight heat again and again.

"Oh, God, I love you, Marc. Love you." It wouldn't be long now, it was too good, too tight, too hot, too urgent to last.

Marc pumped his own cock furiously, heels digging in as a dark red flush covered the flat belly. "Love! Yes! Love you!"

Marc's come sprayed, splashing against Marc's belly and chest, empty blue eyes lost in pleasure. It was the sight of his lover as much as his own pleasure that sent him over the edge and he pushed hard into Marc, crying out as he lost it, filling Marc with his pleasure, with his heat.

He slumped down against Marc, listening to his lover catch his breath. Long fingers stroked over his head, his shoulders. Loving him.

He kissed one gently as it went by his mouth, nibbling at the fingertip. "I love dancing with you, Caro."

"Good, because your dance card's been filled for the rest of your life."

A shiver went through him, pleasure and happiness filling him as it always did when Marc said stuff like that. "Just the way I want it."

"You and me both, babe. Happy new year's eve, Pablo." Marc grinned at him, a look that only belonged to him -- happy and easy and pure Marc. "Love you."

"I love you, too." He gave Marc a long, slow kiss, getting lost in it, in his lover, his husband.

Just where he wanted to be on this night of new beginnings. Just where he always wanted to be.

Epilogue

He closed the box lid and put it on the bed beside Pablo's pillow. He'd had a blast putting the box together. After the main part of Pablo's anniversary gift was finished and delivered, Rick and Steven had picked him up and they'd spent the day downtown, cruising adult stores until he was satisfied that the box was filled. A chain for his nipple rings. Chocolate flavored lube. Edible body paints. A fur glove. The most interesting vibrating anal beads. A stuffed giraffe with a huge dick. Things to keep them amused for months and guaranteed to make Pablo hard and giggly all at the same time. He'd added the replica of Pablo's cock, molded in bronze, life-sized and heavy in his hand at the last moment, nestling it among the other goodies. Marc chuckled and shook his head, listening to Pablo move around the house, closing up, trying to be patient. "I'm going to jump in the shower, babe."

He hurried into the bathroom and stripped, half-tempted to not turn on the water so he could hear Pablo's reaction to the gift. Of course, if the reaction was half what Marc was hoping, he was going to need a shower now. And later.

He turned on the shower and stepped in. He'd done his hair and was soaping up when Pablo joined him, hands sliding over his skin, helping to spread the slick soap.

"There's a box on the bed," Pablo said casually.

"Is there?" He fought his grin back, going for innocent.

Pablo giggled. "Like you don't know! It's a very suggestive box, Marc -- I have a hunch it wasn't Marge that left it there."

"I don't know... she's a woman of hidden depths, that Marge..." He wriggled as Pablo pinched him, both of them laughing merrily.

"She might have hidden depths, but she's also got a great fear of catching us with bits dangling. Try again, Caro."

"The merry elf of kink snuck through our bedroom window, delivering joy?" God, he loved this man.

Pablo pressed against him, giggling merrily. "Oh, I like that one -- so the box is kinky, is it? Is that all the hints I get?"

"Yep. The rest you'll have to discover for yourself." Marc wrapped his arms around Pablo, enjoying the slick slide of skin, the wood and musk of the soap, the heat of the water against his back.

Pablo bounced against him and then pulled him into the spray, rinsing them both off. "You're done, right?"

Marc nodded and chuckled, as eager for Pablo to open his box as he was. Pablo turned off the water and tugged him out of the shower, throwing a towel at him instead of the more usual drying him down. Pablo indulged in whenever they showered together.

He dried himself off quickly, Pablo dragging him out of the bathroom as soon as he stopped dripping. "Anxious to see what's in the box, babe? Don't want to wait 'til tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?" Pablo sounded shocked. "Why would I want to wait for tomorrow?"

Marc crawled onto the bed, grinning so hard it felt like his face would split. "To heighten the anticipation?"

"Oh, trust me -- the anticipation is pretty damn high already, Caro." Pablo giggled and the bed bounced and he suddenly had a lapful of warm skin.

"Hey, stranger." Marc took a quick kiss and then settled his cheek on Pablo's shoulder blade, hands wrapping around Pablo's waist so he could **watch** as his lover opened the box.

Pablo wriggled back against him just a little and then he could hear the soft glide of wood against the sheets. "Did you make this yourself, Marc?" Pablo asked as he ran his fingers over it, the sound of flesh on wood soft, subtle. "It's beautiful."

He nodded. "I carved the pieces and then put them together. It's not perfectly even, you can feel here..." He took Pablo's fingers and showed him the tiny imperfections. "And here. But I thought it was a good result for my first try ever."

Pablo's hands slid over his and then along the wood again. "You can't even see it -- it's wonderful!"

Then Pablo was opening the box. And giggling. And saying "Oh my god" in a shocked and scandalized and delighted tone.

Marc grinned, lips tickling Pablo's back. "Happy anniversary, babe."

His fingers stayed on top of Pablo's, following along.

"Oh my god," Pablo's voice dissolved into giggles as he pulled out the very well endowed giraffe. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

"I thought you could put it on your computer monitor, remind you that all work and no play makes Pablo a headachy boy." His fingers ran over the plush neck, down to the bulbous cock and balls.

Pablo giggled again and pressed back against him. "I don't think watching you play with that should be turning me on quite as much as it is..."

Marc grabbed the toy and made it hump Pablo's arms until they were both laughing madly, the sound filling up the whole room and making it warm.

"So the rest of this stuff..." Pablo was moving stuff around, checking everything out without actually taking it out. "I'm pretty sure I know what it all is, though we haven't ever used some of it, like these ana- oh my god, what's this?"

Marc's fingers touched the cold, smooth metal and he grinned. "Remember when you started working for the Times? We talked on the phone about me sculpting your cock? About me riding your cock while you watched?"

"Oh my God!" Pablo was definitely scandalized. And turned on. Marc could feel Pablo touching the metal cock,

fingers tentative, barely touching it and then with more confidence, sliding over it and holding it. "Are you sure this is me? It looks bigger."

He nodded. "It's you. Trust me." He reached down to slowly pump Pablo's erection, fingers sliding and squeezing. "All you. You like it?"

"I don't know..." Pablo made a soft noise and pressed up into his hand. "Are you really going to ride it while I watch?" Pablo's voice was husky.

"If you want me to. If it turns you on." He kept stroking, slow and easy, words whispering over Pablo's skin. "Would you like that, babe? Watching me fuck myself?"

"Oh my God!" Pablo made another noise and his hips moved faster, fucking Marc's hand. "Oh, Marc..."

He groaned, desire making him ache. He loved this, feeling Pablo sink into passion. "Imagine it, babe. On my knees, that little chain holding my rings together, the cold tip of that cock pushing into me as I sink down. I'll fuck myself on it, push it in deeper and deeper so you can watch."

Pablo whimpered, hands grabbing his thighs, using them as leverage as Pablo pushed harder up into his hand.

"I figure it'll fill me like you, be wide and thick, but cold and too hard and not alive like you are." He started licking Pablo's skin. "I could suck you off, sitting here on the bed, my ass full of that hard cock."

"Oh, God, Marc, oh God!" Pablo stiffened in his arms, come spreading over his hand. He loosened his grip, lips moving over the sweet curve of Pablo's shoulder, nostrils flaring as he smelled his lover's pleasure. Pablo twisted, shifting around for a kiss, lips hungry, eager and wanting. "Did you mean it, Marc. Do you want to do that? Or were you just trying to make me come?"

"I want to make you come. I want to fuck myself and know you're watching and wanting me." His cock rubbed against Pablo's belly. "You make me feel sexy, babe. Hot."

Pablo moaned and kissed him hard. "Oh, God, Marc -- you make me wanton."

"Do I?" Marc pressed closer, hard and aching. "What are you wanting, babe?"

Pablo giggled and kissed him again. "You -- I want to watch you while you fuck yourself on me and suck me off at the same time. Oh, God, Marc -- that would be so hot."

"You want me here on the bed?" Marc knelt up, one hand on the headboard. "Like this?"

Pablo made another one of those sweet noises and the cold metal cock was pressed into his hands.

He rubbed it slowly between his hands, warming the metal. Oil trickled down on it, making it slick, and Marc grinned. "Thanks, babe."

Pablo's hands joined his own, helping to warm and coat the cock. His lover's hands were trembling, just a little bit, Pablo was excited. He slid one hand behind himself, pushing his slick fingers deep inside, getting himself ready. Pablo's hand, slick with oil, slid over his cock and then down to cup his balls before teasing it's way beyond them. One of the blunt fingers joined his own inside him.

"Oh! Oh, God..." He straightened, body beginning to rock onto their fingers, the burn sweet, the weight of Pablo's eyes sweeter.

"You're so hot, Marc. Inside and out." Pablo's voice was breathless and needy.

"Babe..." Together they moved the metal cock back and he put the end of it against the bed, slowly pushing down against the metal.

"Oh, my God, Marc..." Pablo whimpered, fingers tracing his skin where the cock stretched him.

"Fuck..." He gripped his cock hard at the base, whimpering. "Feels... God... Your fingers..."

"Yeah?" Pablo kept touching him, feeling him as his body swallowed up the cock. "I've watched you do this kind of thing before, but the fact that I know that cock is mine... that you made it from memory... Oh, God, Marc."

"I know all of you. How you feel." He began to slowly ride the metal, taking more and more in. It was hard, impossibly hard, but warm now, sliding in and out of him, the shape so familiar.

Pablo's fingers stayed around his opening a moment or two more and then Pablo began to caress him, touching him all over, making sweet soft noises. He was moaning, lips parted, hand moving from squeezing his cock to stroking it. Electricity shot through him, making him shiver. Pablo continued to touch him, fingers hot and shaking. Then the bed shifted as Pablo stood and the hard cock, the exact double of the one inside him, was pushed against his lips.

Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God... He fastened his lips around Pablo's cock, sucking hard and steady as his ass rode the dildo, pushing against the mattress. Pablo's hands found his head, holding him tight as his lover fucked his mouth. He was going to fucking lose it -- he could feel the orgasm so deep inside, shaking him. Reds and greens and blues flashed inside his head, passion made color.

"Oh, God, Marc. You're fucking me and sucking me..." Pablo sobbed and came down his throat. At the first splash of hot, salty wetness on his tongue, Marc arched, seed shooting from him, body clamping on the hard cock inside him. Pablo's cock slipped from his mouth and then Pablo's lips covered his in a long kiss.

He pushed up into the kiss, moaning and shaking. "Love you. Love you, babe."

"Oh, God, Marc. Love you, too. I do." Pablo's kisses continued, hands stroking over his body, fingers tracing his spine.

"Happy anniversary, babe." He cuddled close, holding his lover tight.

"Oh, Marc... Happy anniversary to you, too."

The cock slid from his body as Pablo eased him onto the bed, tremors still periodically rocking him.

"God, I love to watch you -- you're so beautiful. Especially when you come."

He felt his cheeks heat. "Me? Beautiful?"

"Oh, yeah. Why do you think I like watching you so much?"

"I never really thought about it, babe." He nuzzled Pablo's neck.

Pablo giggled. "I love you."

"I know." Marc snorted. "That's why you married me."

"No." Pablo was shaking his head. "I married you because you asked me too."

"I'll ask again, if you want. Everyday, if it lets you know how much I want you in my life."

"I know," Pablo said softly. "Every time I see the ring, I remember you on your knees in front of me, asking. You were beautiful then, too."

He was given a kiss, warm and soft and long. "I married you because you asked me to, I stayed in the first place because I love you."

Marc heard the clicks as Pablo set the box and the dildo aside, then he was taken in warm, familiar arms.

"I've never regretted it either, Marc. The staying or the marrying or the loving." A hard, square package with a bow was pressed into his hands. "Happy anniversary, Marc."

"Oh!" His fingers slid over the paper, removing it quickly to see the object it held.

"It's a book. I thought I could start reading it to you tonight." There was a tremor in Pablo's voice, a cross somewhere between excitement and nerves.

Marc arched an eyebrow, fingers trailing over the cover, curious as hell. "I'd love that. What's the book about?"

"It's a mystery set... well, let me read it to you, okay?" Pablo shifted until he was leaning against the pillows Marc's head on his chest. "Ready?"

"Yes, babe. Read away." He settled in, wrapping himself around his lover.

Pablo took a deep breath and began to read.

"The Painting Did It by Pablo Cervantes. Dedication: This book is dedicated to the man who opened my eyes to the world of art and the world of love Marc MacAllen. Together, we have fulfilled our dreams. I love you always."

Marc went perfectly still, tears filling his eyes and sliding down his cheeks. "You did it. Oh, babe. Oh, God."

"Yeah, I did." Pablo held him tight, a trembling hand wiping away his tears.

He lifted his face for a kiss. "I love you."

He got his kiss and then settled back down, cheek on Pablo's chest, honored beyond belief. "Read. I want to hear it all."

"It's an early copy," Pablo warned him. "The final edition doesn't go to print 'til sometime next month, but I wanted to have one to read to you tonight."

"It's wonderful. I... I don't have words. It's perfect." He wrapped his arms around Pablo and squeezed. "Tell me a story, lover."

Pablo dropped a kiss on his head and began to read, his lover's voice soft and happy, familiar and loving.

Marc stroked the smooth band on his hand, losing himself in the pleasure of Pablo's words, Pablo's voice, Pablo's love. Losing himself in the pleasure of Pablo. Of all the gifts given and received, his favorite was Pablo himself. Real and alive and in his arms.

End.