

A promotional image for 'The Russos' featuring three men. The man in the foreground is wearing a white tank top and has a serious expression. Behind him are two other men, one in a grey shirt and another in a patterned shirt, both looking off-camera. The background is a blue-lit stage or studio setting. The title 'The Russos' is prominently displayed in a stylized blue font with a white outline.

# The Russos

D.J. MANLY

Episode Six



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The Russos: Episode Six

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***Also By D.J. Manly:***

[\*Connor's Storm\*](#)

[\*Melting Ice\*](#)

[\*The Russos: Digital Soap\*](#)



## ***Dedication:***

To my readers.



*The Russos:*  
*Episode Six*



## *Previously on The Russos...*

**T**ony and Angelo make love. Tony's feelings are all mixed up, and he comes on to Drake Senior. Janet asks Johnny's advice about marrying Mac.



## *And Now... Episode Six of The Russos*

**T**here were well over a hundred people at Drake's Christmas party. Some of them Tony recognized, others he had never seen before. These were people who worked on the many facets of the rock scene: producers, sound people, video camera people and the list went on and on.

Frank was there with his latest girlfriend, a British fashion model named Trish. He took Tony by the arm and introduced him to face after face. Then Drake and Pepi took him around and introduced him to more people. He met two well-known rock stars and a Hollywood actor. That was cool, but he was too shy to ask for their autographs.

The liquor came around often on trays carried by four or five waiters. A huge bowl of rolled joints, courtesy of Frank Carr, sat in the middle of a buffet table next to the fancy sandwiches. By quarter to twelve, there were a lot of people who were drunk as well as stoned.

Johnny Russo was the centre of attention. He sat in a red velvet easy chair on a raised platform in front of the huge window. His chair was right in front of the grand piano in the middle of the huge living room, where the majority of the guests had gathered. Tony hadn't had more than a few minutes to talk to him all evening. He



was always surrounded by people and appeared to be having a really good time.

Just at the entrance to the living room in front of the curved gold-handled staircase sat the Christmas tree, the candles now all lit up and illuminating the big red bows. Many people stopped to admire the tree or stood pointing up at the mistletoe, demanding that their companion honour the tradition and bestow kisses upon them.

Drake often got caught under the mistletoe. People either lured him there or caught him by accident. The thought of catching him there himself occurred to him, but he didn't dare.

Janet and Mac were cuddled together on one of the sofas. They looked happy. His grandmother sat in the corner of the room, a little overwhelmed by all the people. Tony sat by her often.

It was almost midnight when Pepi stepped up onto the platform. Tony glanced over at his father, who was saying something to Drake. Drake handed his brother a microphone and then went to turn off the sound system. The music that had been playing all evening came to an abrupt halt.

Pepi positioned himself behind the piano and waited for Johnny to speak.

"Good evening. First, we would like to thank everyone for coming," Johnny said. "I look around and I see so many good friends and loved ones. I am thankful to be here."

There was a round of applause.

"I would also like to thank all of you who lent us



such support during the past few months. Thank you for your cards and letters, the flowers, everything. It will never be forgotten. I'd like to say also that this is the first Christmas that I have the good fortune of spending with my son. Tony?" he said, motioning for Tony to come forward.

Tony slowly walked over to his father and placed his hand on Johnny's shoulder. There was applause again as Tony smiled shyly.

"Every year, Drake hosts these Christmas parties and we are always so grateful when you all grace us with your presence," Johnny continued. "Please, continue to have a good time and if you end up sleeping in one of Drake's bathtubs tonight...well, it won't be the first time."

There was more laughter.

"Now, we're going to do something we have always done at these parties, and that is to sing Christmas carols. I invite you all to join in while Pepi plays for us. Drake, where are you?" He looked around with a grin. "Drake is always somewhere he shouldn't be."

Laughter, and someone shouted out, "That's Drake for ya!"

Drake shook his head with a grin as he stepped up on the platform and positioned a mike on top of the piano. He glanced out at the crowd. "I'll find out who said that, and you'll be punished."

"Please do!" came the taunt. Drake made a comical face in reply.

"Where's Mac?" Pepi enquired at the same time that Mac quietly stepped up behind Johnny's chair. He



patted Pepi's shoulder, and Pepi nodded in satisfaction. "The gang's all here!" he called.

Tony went to step down off the platform, but his father stopped him. "You're part of this family. Stay."

Tony felt a warm glow move through him. "Thanks, Dad," he said softly.

Pepi began to play 'White Christmas, singing the first verse on his own.

Tony was amazed at what a good voice he had. Pepi always sang backup.

Mac sang the next verse. Tony's eyes widened. He looked at his dad. "Wow, they both sing so well."

Johnny nodded as Drake's deep baritone voice completed another verse, and then Johnny himself sang. They came together in beautiful harmony in the chorus. Tony closed his eyes, listening to the blending of their voices. What talent they had.

Pepi began to play 'I'll Be Home for Christmas' and Drake sang the verses, with the rest of them helping out on the chorus. Drake had the sexiest of voices, and it was perfect for that song.

They were now singing 'The Christmas Song'. Johnny was trying to encourage Tony to sing, but he was too shy.

The guests in the hall stood perfectly still while they sang. Although Drake kept urging everyone to join in, no one did. They were lost in the beauty of those voices echoing in the hall.

Pepi stopped playing. He looked at his two brothers. "Do 'Ave Maria'," he said.

There was applause.



Pepi smiled out at the crowd. "Drake and Johnny sang this song in church when they were both little boys. Although I was too young to remember, our mama tells me that it brought everyone to tears. Sing it for us now."

Johnny smiled at Drake, and then looked at Pepi. "This is for you, Pepi, and for Mama," he said.

He stood up. Drake took his arm and smiled at him.

Pepi began to play. Drake began to sing and then Johnny joined in. You could have heard a pin drop. Their voices filled the room. There was no need for a microphone. Drake's deep baritone blended perfectly with his brother's higher-pitched tenor. Tony shivered as their voices built together into a perfect crescendo. A lump filled his throat.

Sophia moved forward in the crowd. Tears fell from her eyes as she watched Drake and Johnny. They were both so beautiful, their voices were like angels voices. Her angels, her sad angels.

She clutched her heart, staring at her beloved Drake. Then she looked up and saw his son, so like him. He was him. He was her Drake, and she couldn't just give him away, give him to Johnny. He was hers. He was Julia's first, then hers.

Janet came and took Sophia's arm. "Are you okay?" she asked her.

Sophia nodded. "Am I doing the right thing? Should I tell them? Would you? You never lied to young Drake. I admire you for that, Janet. I do."

Janet took her over to a chair and sat her down. "Do



you need your nitro?"

She shook her head. "No. I need only my two sons, and Drake. I need Drake most of all, but you've always known that, haven't you, my dear?" She reached up and touched Janet's face.

Janet nodded, noting her raspy breathing. She patted her hand. "You have three sons, Sophia, not two."

"Yes, three...three..." She closed her eyes. "I'm tired. I need to rest."

They broke into a chorus of 'Jingle Bells' now, and everyone joined in.

Sophia asked Janet to take her to her room. Janet helped her up and led her off.

\* \* \* \* \*

Drake had placed her in a bedroom on the main floor so she wouldn't have to climb the stairs. Janet opened the door and switched on the light. Sophia's suitcase sat in front of the bed.

It was a nice room with a beautiful view of the ocean. The walls were pastel mauve with a floral border around the ceiling. The down comforter and curtains matched the flowers in the border, shades of mauves and greys and light blues. There was an adjoining bathroom, where Sophia went in to change.

Janet was about to leave when Sophia asked her to stay a minute. Janet stood by the door.

A few minutes later, Sophia emerged in a cotton nightdress and matching housecoat, a hairnet over her hair. She sat down on the bed. "Bring my suitcase to me, will you, dear? I want to show you something."



Janet picked up the small green case and placed it on the bed.

Sophia opened it, reached inside the pocket and took out a black and white photograph. She hesitated for a minute, and then handed it to Janet.

Janet studied it. It was a man, a tall, handsome dark-haired man in black dinner dress, standing beside a grand piano. From the look of the picture, it might have been taken in the late fifties or early sixties. There was something familiar about it. She recognized the man in the picture.

"It's Drake...I mean, of course it's not Drake, but Drake looks like him. Was this Drake's grandfather?" Janet asked.

"That was the love of my life," she whispered. "Just like Drake is the love of your life, he was the love of mine."

Janet's eyes smarted with tears. "Sophia, I'm going to marry Mac, and--"

"I know that." She took the photograph and put it away. "You will marry him and you'll make great memories and you'll love him, but Drake will always be your love."

"Why say this to me now, Sophia, and who...who is that man?" she demanded.

"My love. He's my love."

Janet placed a hand over her mouth. "My God...oh my God. Joseph wasn't Drake's father, was he? That man in the picture...he was...that is Drake's father. That's why Drake doesn't look anything like his brothers..."



"Listen to me. I'm going to die soon, and I have to..."

"Don't talk nonsense!" Janet snapped.

"It's not nonsense. Listen to me. I have to say this. I thought about telling them, but if I did, there would no longer be any reason for them to be apart. There is...it's Johnny. He has loved Drake in a...well...unnatural way since he was a child. They can't know. You...must keep this secret. I pass it on to you."

"Keep what secret...that Drake's father wasn't Joseph Russo? Drake has a right to know who his father was. Is he still alive?"

Sophia shook her head. Tears stung her eyes. "He killed himself, drowned himself in the river after Julia died."

"Julia?"

"His wife?"

Janet shook her head. "He was married, that's why you couldn't tell him about the baby?"

"Julia was Drake's mother."

Janet covered her mouth again. She started to sob. She reached out for the handle on the door and held on to it to give her support.

Sophia wiped her eyes and got up off the bed. She put her suitcase on the floor. Then she came over and took her former daughter-in-law by the shoulders. "I have entrusted you with this. You must take it to your grave, do you understand? Drake was an orphan. His mother died giving him life, and his father took his own life because he couldn't live without his wife. I loved Drake's father, and he made me promise to care for his son. I did. I have. I love him like my own. His brothers



love him. I can't destroy this family, Janet. I won't."

"But..." Janet shook her head. Her stomach was heaving. She felt like she was going to be sick. "Don't you see what pain...don't you understand the guilt you put Drake through? He has suffered enormously because he believes Johnny is his brother. All these years he thought he was sick...cursed...he's not in love with his brother at all, he's simply in love with another man."

"His father was a great lover of women. Drake can become like that too," Sophia pleaded.

"Drake is in love with Johnny, Sophia, and he has fought those feelings, but he can't win. You have to tell them, Sophia. The lie has to stop here. There's been too much pain...too much pain for everyone involved."

"But if they knew before, there would have been no grandchildren...no little Drake, or little Tony."

"Maybe not, but it wasn't your choice to make. You denied Drake the choice. He should know, Sophia, and if you don't tell him, I will."

"No," she cried, clutching Janet's dress, "you're a mother. You know these things. You must understand. You can't tell him...I won't allow..."

The door opened suddenly. Drake stood there. "What's going on?" he asked, looking from Janet to his mother and then back again.

Janet's face drained of colour. She looked at Sophia and then stepped away from her. "Drake, I think your mother has something she must tell you."

She gave Sophia a meaningful look, paused, kissed Drake on the cheek and then walked out into the



hallway, then directly outside to take in some air.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tony saw her leave and came outside to join her. He gave her a concerned look. "You okay, Aunt Janet?"

She glanced at him. "You're still my nephew," she murmured.

"Of course I'm your nephew. What are you talking about?"

"Why would she tell me?" she said as if to herself, looking up at the sky, then took a cigarette out of a pack in her purse and lit it. If ever there was a time for a cigarette, this was it.

"Tell you what?" Tony asked. "Who told you what, Aunt Janet?"

"Maybe it's too late now. Maybe Sophia is right and its best to...God, I don't know. What have I done?" She took a drag off her cigarette.

The door opened and Drake stepped out. He met Janet's eyes. "What is this all about, Janet? What is wrong with Mama? She won't stop crying. Did you have a fight with her? She's not young anymore, and she has a heart condition. I--" His voice was angry.

"I said nothing to upset her, Drake!" Janet replied defensively. "She told me something that she needs to tell you and she doesn't want to."

"Well, what in hell is it?" Drake demanded.

"It's her place to tell you, not mine. Oh, Drake," Janet sighed, walked up to him and pulled him into her arms.

Drake looked over his shoulder at Tony with a questioning expression.



Tony gave him a look back, indicating that he hadn't a clue what was going on.

Drake disengaged himself from Janet and marched back inside.

\* \* \* \* \*

Pepi came to meet Drake in the hallway. "What's wrong with Mama? I went in to say goodnight and she told me that she didn't feel well and she didn't want anyone else coming into her room tonight. Is she all right?"

"I don't know what's going on. I think she had a fight with Janet."

"A fight about what?" Pepi asked.

"I don't know, but they were into something heavy when I walked in that room. Janet looked like someone had socked her with a wrecking ball, and they had both been crying."

"Weird."

"Well, leave it for tonight. I'll talk to Mama in the morning." Drake looked over at Johnny, still in the chair. Tony stood beside him. Drake shook his head. "Johnny looks great, but he's tired now. I think I'll try and get him to bed. It is after two."

"Good idea." Pepi nodded, looking around at the guests laughing and dancing. Some had jumped into the indoor pool in the other room. "It's a great party," Pepi added. "I think some of your empty bedrooms are being occupied." He winked.

Drake grinned. "Happens every year. No one here



take your eye, little brother?" Drake slapped him on the back. "I don't get it. You're a celebrity, you're great-looking, you have a super personality, don't tell me there's not someone out there for you."

"I don't want to get tied down. It hasn't worked for you or Johnny, or Mac, even. It's scary."

"Maybe, but Mac is finally going to marry the woman he has always loved. He and Janet will be happy together. I know it. It will last."

"And you? When will you be happy, Drake?"

The question loomed in the air.

"The only thing that's ever made Johnny happy is cocaine," Pepi added.

"Don't say things like that," Drake growled.

"But it's true."

Drake sighed. "Look, go on back to the party, okay. I'll get Johnny to bed."

"I miss Angelo. Too bad he's not here." Pepi looked at his brother.

"I get the message. I miss him too. Does that make you happy?" Drake lifted an eyebrow.

"It does," Pepi replied and walked away.

Drake laughed and walked over to Johnny.

Johnny looked up at him. "Hi, gorgeous. Where have you been all my life?"

Tony watched the exchange between them.

"Don't ask. Are you tired?"

"A little."

"Want me to help you to bed?" Drake asked.

Johnny smiled. "Will you tuck me in and sing me to sleep?"



"If you like," he returned with a slow smile.

Tony volunteered to help, but his father quickly told him, "No. Drake can handle it."

Tony got the message. Was his father planning some sort of seduction? His eyes had followed Drake all night. Actually both his *and* his father's eyes had. Drake was the best-looking thing in the room.

Tony left the living room and made his way upstairs. He knew he shouldn't spy on them, but he felt compelled. He made his way down the upstairs hallway. There were murmurs and sounds coming from several rooms.

Tony stopped at the end of the hall. He could see Drake and his father's reflection through the mirror of a dresser. The door stood half open.

Drake was helping Johnny to undress. He slowly undid the buttons on his shirt. Tony watched the expression on his father's face as Drake busied himself with the buttons. His head was back a little, his eyes half closed. He moved several times to kiss Drake's hair as he bent a little to undo his pants, but clenched his fists at his side in order to hold himself back. There was such desire in Johnny's face that for a second Tony couldn't remember ever seeing anything quite so erotically beautiful.

"Lift your leg." Drake stooped down to remove his pants. His father placed both hands on Drake's head, forcing him to his knees. Drake looked up at him as Johnny pushed his underwear down over his hips. He was totally erect.

Drake tried to get up off his knees, but Johnny



pushed him down again.

"Johnny, stop!" Drake told him. "Let me up."

Johnny pushed his hips against Drake's face, his erection brushing across his lips.

Tony felt his knees weaken.

"Please," his father breathed. "Baby, it's been so long. It's Christmas. Give me just a little."

Again he was moving his erection against Drake's mouth. Drake was trying his best to avoid it. Johnny's hands were in Drake's hair. "Baby," he said, "Oh, baby."

They were struggling, and Drake tried to stand. Finally, he broke free from Johnny's hold and cried out with an agonized moan, "No!" He was on his feet, his chest heaving, his eyes blazing.

Johnny moved toward him. "Look at me, look what you do to me. How do I go on like this? Should I go downstairs and find someone to relieve the tension? Anyone right about now would do."

"No," Drake replied softly. "Don't do that."

"So I can't have you, and I can't have anyone else either. Is that the way it works, Drake?" Johnny demanded. "Oh, well, it doesn't matter anyway. No one can ease the pain except you, and maybe cocaine temporarily."

"We can't..." Drake threw his hands out weakly.

"We can, but you won't," Johnny sighed. "Fine. Then get to hell out and let me do what I usually do when you come this close to me..."

After a few seconds, Drake laughed. "I didn't do this."



Johnny laughed with him. "Of course you did, but you can't help it, because you're so goddamned beautiful." There was a pause, and then Johnny pleaded, "Make it stop, Drake, make me stop wanting you."

"I can't," Drake replied helplessly. "Help me. Stop me from wanting you."

"I can't do that either," he laughed sadly.

"Good night, Johnny," Drake whispered. He turned to leave, but Johnny reached out for Drake and slammed the door shut with his foot.

"Not tonight, Drake," Tony heard his father say, "Tonight you're mine. I don't care about tomorrow."

Tony moved closer to the door. He heard Drake say, "No, don't do this, Johnny, don't...please," but the words were muffled and soon replaced by the softer sounds of moans and whimpers.

When a hand took him by the collar and pulled him backward, Tony was completely taken by surprise.

It was Pepi.

"What are you doing?" he asked. "Spying on people?"

"No...not at all. I was...okay, I was. Sorry." Tony blushed in embarrassment. "What time is it?"

"Almost three in the morning," Pepi replied, walking with his nephew down the hallway. "The guests that haven't passed out have dug in for the night. I guess you're staying here."

"Are you staying?"

"Ya. We have a big family dinner at four tomorrow. It's tradition. We'll get up and open the gifts when all



the strays go home.”

“Looks like the bedrooms are all occupied,” Tony muttered.

“Where is Drake?”

“In that room at the end of the hall...with...eh...my dad,” Tony said.

“They always shared a room growing up. Drake probably fell asleep in there.”

I don’t think so, Tony thought but didn’t say anything.

“Anyway, take Drake’s room and I’ll sleep in the living room on one of the sofas. I’m so bushed, I could sleep anywhere.”

Tony felt a little strange about sleeping in Drake’s room, but he was too damned tired to worry about it. He walked in to the huge room, threw off his clothes and climbed into the bed. God, if anyone had told him that one day he would be sleeping in this man’s bed, he would have told them they were nuts.

He fell asleep almost immediately and didn’t wake up until well after eleven in the morning.

He discovered he wasn’t alone.

Drake’s bed was one of those super king-size beds that could have slept about five people comfortably. Tony wouldn’t have even been aware that someone else was in the bed if he hadn’t heard him.

There was someone moaning and more than this, it sounded like crying. Tony moved over in the bed and was a little startled to find Drake there with him. He must have come to bed later and not even noticed that Tony had been sleeping there.



Drake was restless, talking low in his sleep and moaning. Then there were definitely the sounds of sobs.

Tony reached out and touched his shoulder. The blankets were draped over his waist, just barely. It was quite evident that Drake slept in the nude.

His skin was warm. He didn't stir when Tony touched him. Tony moved closer to him and placed his arm around him. He could feel his naked flesh against his own.

He slid down the blanket and ran his gaze over him. Yes. Drake was exactly how he'd pictured him, only better. His body was lean and muscular, hills and valleys in all the right places, and his sex was absolutely beautiful. He ran his hand over his hip and then reached around and began to caress his sex. He was already erect, and as he moved his fingers up and down the shaft, Drake grew harder.

Tony placed his lips on his throat, moving back the long hair, and then began to kiss his mouth. "I've waited so long for this," he whispered against Drake's lips.

Drake began to kiss him back. He wasn't fully awake but he reached for him, bringing Tony's body down on top of his. He ran his hands over him, clutching his buttocks, and then began to hotly kiss him.

Tony moaned as he felt Drake's sex brush against his own. Drake lifted him again, laying him on his back. He moved his lips over him, tonguing his nipples, licking down to his navel. Then he took Tony's cock into his mouth.

Tony was lost. His flesh was alive. Drake Russo was



making love to him. "You're all I've ever wanted," he told him.

Drake closed his eyes. "Johnny...Johnny..." for a minute, he was sure he was dreaming and then something didn't seem right. This wasn't Johnny, because if it was, he wouldn't be making love to him like this.

Tony came in his mouth, causing him to choke and then sit up and rub his eyes. He blinked in the morning sun. When he saw Tony lying there naked, he let out a cry. "What in hell are you doing in my bed?"

Tony didn't want it to end. Not now. God, it was too good. The mood was slipping away. "Drake..." he reached for him. "Please...I want you. I have since..."

Drake scrambled off the bed. "Are you crazy?"

"I'm of age. I'm not jailbait. I..."

"I know how old you are, Tony, but you're an eighteen-year-old boy and I'm a thirty-six-year-old man, for Christ's sakes. Goddamn it! What kind of a man do you think I am? And shit...you're Johnny's son. What in hell is wrong with you? Can't you find someone other than your relatives to sleep with?"

"Maybe I'm just like my father!" Tony snapped, feeling angry and hurt. "Have a good time with your brother last night, Uncle Drake?" he sneered.

For a minute, Drake looked as if he was going to hit him. He made a move toward him and raised his fist, then stopped.

Tony cowered in the corner of the bed. "I'm...I'm sorry...I shouldn't have said that."



Drake took a deep breath and reached for his robe. He put on the tattered old terry robe and tied it securely with the sash at the waist. For a minute, he said nothing and then walked over to the window.

He looked back at his nephew. "Get out of my bed," he said gruffly, "before someone sees you there. That's all I need."

Tony crawled off the bed and began to dress.

"So, you were spying on me last night," Drake sighed.

Tony coloured. "I...I suppose I was. I saw you. You didn't leave his room last night, did you?"

He didn't reply.

"So what now?" Tony asked.

"I don't know 'what now'!" Drake yelled. "If I knew what to do, I'd...forget it. I don't want to talk about it."

Tony was taken aback by the anger. He fell quiet.

"And if you must know, nothing really happened last night anyway," Drake said. "Your father is not strong enough yet to...well...to go the distance even if he thinks he is."

"And when he is strong enough?" Tony raised an eyebrow, buttoning his shirt.

"I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

"And meanwhile, allowing me to make love to you is out?" Tony asked, walking over to where he stood.

Drake turned from the window and met Tony's eyes. "What do you want me to say, Tony? If I say it will never happen, you'll try all the harder to prove me wrong. If you want to seduce me, go ahead, you probably could. You certainly have enough of your



father in you to turn me on. I can fight, but I'll probably lose one of these nights when the timing is right. But it will change things and it could destroy what you've built with your father. Have you thought about that?"

Tony shook his head.

"How do you think he'll feel knowing I've slept with his son? He'd never forgive either one of us. Ask yourself if a night in bed with me is worth it. I would wager no. I'm good," he grinned, "but I'm not that good."

Tony had to smile at that.

"I am flattered, you know," Drake looked at him.

God, he was gorgeous. Tony sucked in some air. "Okay, I'm all right. Still friends?"

"Ya, friends," Drake said.

Tony came closer. He stood up on tiptoe, kissed his mouth and then backed away. "You're a good kisser," Tony told him.

"Watch it," Drake teased. "Go on now so I can kick myself for sending you away."

Tony nodded and left the room. He felt dizzy, dizzy from his kisses and dizzy with wanting him. He didn't expect to run into Drake's son walking down the hallway.

Angelo stopped. He deliberately turned around and walked in the other direction.

Tony ran to catch up to him. "Angelo...hey...where you going?"

Angelo turned now and looked at him. He gave him a hateful glare. "What's it to you?"

"Hey, what's up? You angry at me for something?"



"Did you get my Christmas present?" Angelo asked him.

"Ya...I did. I think we should talk about it. I..." Tony began.

Angelo reached up to his neck and ripped at something. The other half of the heart fell on the floor at his feet along with a broken gold chain. "Here's the other half. Now you have a matched set!"

Tony reached out and grabbed his arm. "Wait, I don't understand. What did the heart mean? I thought you were trying to tell me that I broke your heart. I mean...I..."

Angelo gave him a harsh laugh. "Is that what you think? It was my way of telling you that you meant something to me...that maybe...just maybe we might have something together but you know what...fuck you. Take that and give it to someone else. Maybe my dad can appreciate it more than I can."

Tony felt like crying, although he didn't know why. "Nothing major happened between me and your dad, I swear."

"But you wanted it to. It's what you were in training for, right?" He sneered. "I was the teacher and Dad was to benefit from the learned pupil. I hope he had a good fucking time...did you tell him it was my pleasure?"

Tony was speechless. How could he argue? Everything he said was true.

He watched Angelo walk away, down the hall. Was he leaving? No. He was staying, moving into an empty room and putting down his bag.

Tony followed him into the room. "I'm sorry."



Angelo looked at him. "Get out. Get away from me, or I swear I'll kick your ass."

"Oh...violence, now there's a solution!" Tony snorted.

"Tony, I'm warning you," Angelo told him, taking a step toward him. "Get out of my sight. I'm not in the mood to discuss anything with you. Later, when I calm down I'll be okay, but for now, leave me alone."

Tony laughed. "You wouldn't hit me. I'm..."

It took all of a fraction of a second for Angelo to hit him. Tony didn't even see the punch coming.

He was on the floor, holding his mouth. It hurt like hell. He looked up at him. "You really hit me, you motherfucker!"

"Now get out before I hit you again," Angelo seethed at him. "This time I'll do some serious damage, I swear."

\* \* \* \* \*

Mac was worried about Janet. She hadn't slept all night and she wouldn't eat any breakfast. When he got up, she was sitting on his front porch, smoking a cigarette.

"You really should give that up, you know. Cigarettes will kill ya," Mac told her as he stepped outside and handed her a cup of coffee.

She took it with gratitude, warming her hands on the steaming mug.

Mac sat down on the stoop beside her. A soft breeze blew through the trees. Birds sang overhead.

"Merry Christmas," Mac said, smiling at her.

She smiled back. "Merry Christmas."



"You didn't come to bed at all last night," Mac mentioned, gazing at her over his coffee mug.

"There wasn't much left of the night by the time we got back here. Maybe we should have stayed at Drake's like he suggested. A lot of people did."

Mac nodded, taking a sip of his coffee. "Are you going to tell me what's bothering you, or do you want me to guess?"

Janet sighed. "Last night Sophia told me something and then begged me not to tell anyone what she had said."

"And?"

"What do you mean by 'and'? Isn't that enough?" Janet shot him an irritated look. "She passed the burden of this secret to me."

"Is it something bad?"

"It's not that it's 'bad', it's just that it's something that could change people's lives forever."

"In a positive or negative way?" Mac enquired, worried now.

"I don't know. Both ways, maybe. What I don't understand is why she told me about it. I didn't ask to know this. In fact," she stood up, "I wish I didn't know. But it sure as hell explains a lot of things. I've been thinking about it all night. I can't get it out of my head."

Mac stood up too. "It must be really heavy stuff for it to bother you so much."

"It will affect all of us. It changes everything," Janet told him. "And in an odd sort of way, it gives me peace."

"What is it, Janet?" Mac asked, taking her by the



shoulders. "Tell me what it is that Sophia said to you."

She shook her head. "I can't. First, I have to talk to her again and try to convince her to tell the truth..."

"And if she won't?" Mac asked.

"I don't know," Janet let out a sigh. "It's not my place to reveal this, but too many people have suffered and they suffer still. It's got to stop. Sophia will have to put aside her prejudices and let the chips fall where they will or I may have to..." She closed her eyes a minute. She dreaded that possibility.

*Damn you, Sophia.*

Mac shook his head. "I haven't a clue what you're talking about. To change the subject, are we still planning on going to Christmas dinner at Drake's?"

"Yes. I hope Angelo is there. He promised me he would be," she muttered.

"He'll be there, but I don't know if we will. We had better get ready if we're going. The dinner is at four and it's five after three already."

"Shit," Janet said and then walked inside.

"Just tell me one thing," Mac asked, placing a hand on Janet's shoulder as she moved to take a shower.

"If I can."

"This thing that Sophia told you, will Drake be devastated by it?"

She waited for a minute, noting the concern on Mac's face, then she slowly nodded.

\* \* \* \* \*

Drake heard the commotion coming from the other side of the house. He left his mother sitting in the dining



room drinking a cup of tea and ran down the hallway.

He stopped dead as he saw Tony sprawled out on the floor of one of the bedrooms, holding his mouth. There was blood on his shirt.

His son stood on the other side of the room, his back turned to him.

"What in hell is going on in here?" Drake demanded, reaching down to pull Tony to his feet.

"Ask your macho son over there. Mr. Butch socked me in the mouth!" Tony raged.

"Oh, go whine somewhere else, will ya?" Angelo shot back, turning around to glare at him.

"What did you hit him for?" Drake asked, examining his nephew's mouth. "You've split his lip."

"Why don't you go and kiss it better, Daddy?" he cooed, glaring at his father.

"What in hell's wrong with you?" Drake took a step toward his son.

"What's wrong with me?" Angelo asked, astonished. "What is wrong with this whole fucking family? My father sleeps with his brother, my cousin asks me to make love to him so that he can get enough experience to sleep with his uncle, and you ask what is wrong with me?"

Drake went pale.

"You think I don't know? You think I haven't known all along? Christ, Dad, everyone knows! They're just too afraid to say it out loud. When I was on the road with you guys, don't you think I saw it? The long line of lovers that never stayed around too long, the jealousy between you, the way Uncle Johnny always tried to



make you jealous by flaunting his men in front of you? I'd walk in on you in the dressing room and he'd be rubbing your back in a way I've never seen any brother rub another guy's back before. I know you slept with him last summer. I knew it as soon as you came back, because nothing was ever the same again! And now Johnny is not enough, you have to have your nephew too...a nephew who is young enough to be your son!"

Angelo was so angry that there were tears in his eyes.

Drake was speechless.

Angelo looked at Tony. "And you were moaning about the years you had lost with this family? Ha! You should thank your mother, she did you a favour by keeping you away. What benefit have I had as the great Drake Russo's son? None whatsoever."

Drake crossed the floor quickly and slapped his son hard in the face.

Tony winced at the sound of it.

Angelo never moved a muscle, even though his face was turning red where he'd hit him.

"I didn't sleep with Tony. I can't believe that your opinion of me is that low. I loved you the best way I could. I tried to keep you out of the spotlight, protect you. When you got older, I allowed you to make your own choices. I taught you to love music. I took you places, showed you the world and yet you stand there and say you..." his voice faltered.

Suddenly, Sophia came to stand at the door. She looked from Drake to his son and then back again. "Why are you tearing each other apart when you love



each other so much? Angelo," she walked over to her grandson, "I've seen your father rock you to sleep in his arms, sing you lullabies, rush to your side if Janet even so much as thought you had a runny nose. He loves you more than anything in this world, and you know this.

"And you?" Sophia looked at Drake. "How can you scream at your son for hitting Tony when you have just hit your son yourself? I have never seen you hit Angelo in your life. What's got into you?"

There was silence. "I'm sorry, Angelo," Drake said and left the room.

Sophia looked at Angelo. "What about Tony? Are you man enough to apologize to him?"

Angelo heaved a sigh and looked at his grandmother. "You don't understand, Grandma."

"I don't have to. You have no cause to hit anyone. Now make a man out of yourself and apologize."

"He doesn't have to, Grandmother," Tony said.

"Be quiet!" She snapped. "He does, and he will. It's Christmas Day, all my family is together and we are going to have peace. It could be my last Christmas on this earth. Angelo, do it for me."

"I'm sorry, Tony," he murmured and then walked out.

"Come on," Sophia said, taking Tony by the arm, "let's have a look at that."

"He said it, but he didn't mean it," Tony muttered as they walked to the bathroom.

"Down deep he did. He meant it. He lost his temper, that's all. He's a good boy."



Tony laughed. "Ya, and I got a fat lip to prove it."  
Sophia grinned.

\* \* \* \* \*

Drake stood out on the terrace, his hands gripping the rail. He thought he would like to cry, but he couldn't. When he heard a sound behind him, he was surprised to see his son standing there.

"Hi," Angelo said, raising a hand.

Drake nodded at him and turned away.

"Dad, I...I'm sorry for the things I said." He moved closer to him. "I do love you...I..."

"Why?" Drake turned around and looked at him. "Why are you sorry? Everything you said was true."

"I didn't mean to attack you like that. I was angry, upset. I came in today and I saw Tony coming out of your bedroom and I assumed...."

"I can understand why you would have thought that. I've had lovers that age before. Nothing happened, Angelo, but it almost did." He spoke as if to himself, turning away.

Angelo said nothing. Instead he looked down at the floor and uttered a soft sigh.

"All this time," Drake said, turning to face him again, "you knew about Johnny and I and yet you said nothing. I can only imagine what holding that inside must have done to you. I never wanted my sins visited on you. My misery was my own."

"Dad...I may not understand, but..." Angelo began.

Drake reached out for his son. He pulled him into his arms and held him. "I love you," he murmured, kissing



his hair, "Please, no matter what, don't hate me. I hate myself enough for both of us. I know this whole thing has hurt you. It's hurt everyone. I tried to protect you, Drake, I really did."

Angelo kissed his father on the cheek and released him. It had been a long time since his father had embraced him like that and called him Drake.

"I don't hate you, Dad. I don't understand this whole thing between you and Uncle Johnny, but I could never hate you." Angelo walked over to the railing and looked out at the water in the distance. "I...I made a mistake just recently myself, a big one. I should have never..." he paused, closing his eyes.

"Slept with Tony?" His father raised an eyebrow.

"Ya. He used me, and I ended up feeling more then I should have. My emotions got away from me. I thought everything was under control...I don't know. It was a mistake, that's all, a mistake I mean to put right."

"How?"

"I'm taking Company Angelo on the road. We've found someone to manage the band..." he paused. "Don't worry, Dad," he sneered, "I didn't ask Frank."

"Angelo," Drake sighed heavily and threw up his hands, "I know I told you I wanted you to experience what it was like to struggle. I didn't say you couldn't use some of my connections..."

"No, Dad. I either do this entirely on my own or I don't. This is what you wanted. No compromises. Anyway, we leave next week. I know Tony will be living here with you and Uncle Johnny. Johnny is staying with you until he recovers completely, isn't



he?"

Drake nodded.

"Anyway, I want to put some distance between Tony and I."

"How many times did it happen?" Drake asked him gently.

"Twice," Angelo replied, looking away.

"His idea or yours?"

"His, both times."

"Are you in love with him?" Drake asked, watching the expression on his son's face.

"I don't know. I could be with the right persuasion."

Drake sighed. "I'm sorry. Any chance he feels the same? You are only cousins."

Angelo shook his head. "I'll tell you what my take on Tony is, okay? When he found out he was a Russo, he immediately assumed that he had missed a lot in his life. He associates L.A. and the rock music scene with freedom, sex, and having a good time."

Drake nodded. "I can understand that."

"In that town where he's from, he never got the opportunity to express his sexuality and it appears there was no one to even talk about it with. Now suddenly he's in L.A. with people who don't bat an eye at being gay and he wants to throw off his old skin. He's too afraid to do the L.A. bar scene right away, so he figures I can break him in. Who he really wants is you, because you've been his sexual fantasy since he was a boy. He used me to get ready for you."

Drake said nothing for a minute. "He'll get over that. It's a crush. Are there been others besides you?"



"Ya. He had two guys with him one night when he came down to the club to hear me play."

Drake met his son's eyes. "Do you think a father can pass on an attraction to his son?"

"What?" Angelo was confused.

"Could you be attracted to Tony because of the way I feel about Johnny?"

"Dad, that makes no sense."

"Could Johnny have passed that on to Tony so that he would feel attracted to you?"

"Dad?"

"Johnny had a dream. He told me about it in the hospital. I got real angry at him but..."

Angelo came over and placed a hand on his father's arm. "Stop it, Dad. There is nothing between Tony and I except some misunderstandings, that's all."

"You were his first. I still remember my first," Drake smiled.

Angelo laughed. "You must have a good memory!"

"Oh, shut up." Drake poked him in the ribs. "Not nice. Anyway, I've been doing a lot of thinking about things this morning."

"Thinking about what?" Angelo asked.

"About the way my life has been. I've made a few decisions."

"What's that," Angelo laughed, "to become a monk?" He threw himself into one of the easy chairs. He sobered when he saw the serious look on his father's face. "What is it, Dad? I'm listening."

"I'm going to set some ground rules with Johnny. We're going to stop trying to hurt each other so much.



We're going to try it for six months and if after that, it doesn't work, I'm going to leave the band."

Angelo's eyes widened. His jaw dropped open. "You're going to what?"

"You heard me. If Johnny and I can give each other nothing but misery when we're together, then it's time we live apart."

"But you are the band!" Angelo protested, springing out of his chair. "You'll tear The Russo Brothers apart, Dad. It will never survive without you, and even if it could...Mac would refuse to...so would Pepi and Johnny...well...Dad..."

"Then maybe you could step into my place if..." he paused as he saw the pain on his son's face. "I didn't say I was leaving the band for certain...I..."

"Who's leaving the band?" It was Johnny. He was standing in the doorway, leaning on a crutch. He wore a Santa Claus hat to hide the bald patches around his ear. His hair was growing out pretty long already in the back. He was dressed in black flannel pants with a forest green sweater, the pants loose on him. He had lost a lot of weight.

He was looking at Drake now, who had turned his back.

"No one is leaving the band, Uncle Johnny," Angelo said with a smile.

Johnny's eyes stayed on his brother's back. "Then why did you say it?"

When there was no response, Johnny said, "We built this band together, you and I and Mac and now...you want to destroy it? Is that it, Drake? You want to run



away and leave me? Do you really believe Mac, Pepi or I could carry on without you? Why don't you just rip out our hearts while you're at it?"

"Stop it, Johnny!" Drake snapped, turning to face him. "Stop the goddamned drama. No one is leaving the band today, okay?"

After a few seconds, Drake forced himself to smile. He walked over to his younger brother. "Merry Christmas. You look wonderful. How do you feel?"

Johnny searched Drake's face, then relaxed. The tension was gone. "Not bad, actually. The turkey smells wonderful." He turned to his nephew. "Merry Christmas, Angelo," he smiled at him. "Is that what you're wearing today?"

Angelo looked down at his old blue sweatpants and white T-shirt and laughed. "No, Uncle Johnny, and I get the message." He gave Johnny a mocking grin.

"And you, big brother?" Johnny raised an eyebrow. "Are you going to stay in your housecoat all day?"

"I'm going...I'm going..." Drake protested, leaving the room.

Seconds later, Tony walked in. He gave Angelo a hesitant look and then smiled at his father, who with Angelo's help had hobbled over to a chair and sat down.

"Good God, what happened to your mouth?" Johnny demanded.

"Ask your nephew." Tony narrowed his eyes at Angelo.

Angelo rolled his eyes. "Poor baby. It's not that bad, just a scratch."



"You hit him?" Johnny swung his eyes in the direction of his nephew.

"Ya, I did. Why don't you ask him why?" Angelo replied, folding his arms defensively across his chest.

Johnny met Tony's eyes.

"I have no idea," Tony answered his father's wordless question. "Jealous, maybe?" He raised an eyebrow and gave Angelo an exaggerated grin.

"Fuck you!" Angelo replied hotly.

"Hey...hey..." Johnny protested. "This is Christmas day and no matter what the problems are, I expect both of you to put them aside until this day is over. Is that understood?"

Angelo nodded. "No problem," he said and left the room.

Tony was about to follow when he heard his father say, "Halt!"

Tony groaned and turned to face his dad. "I don't want to talk about it, Dad, okay?"

"No, it's not okay. What happened? Tell me."

"I fell asleep in Drake's bed last night..."

"What?" Johnny interrupted. "You...what in hell were you doing in Drake's bed?"

"He wasn't in it...at least he wasn't until morning," Tony muttered.

"What...and...?"

"Angelo saw me coming out of his dad's room and he thought we had slept together."

Johnny felt as if his lungs were bursting. "And...did you?"

"No!" Tony cried.



"Thank God," Johnny sighed with relief. "Have you had sex with Angelo?"

"Dad! I don't think I..."

"You have, haven't you? I knew it. I had a dream about it. Tony, why...why did you...?"

"Because it was safe and I was scared to do it with a stranger. I only needed him to...well...break me in. I'm fine now." He smiled.

"Tony, you can't play games like that and expect that there won't be any hurt feelings. Are you in love with Angelo?"

"No," Tony protested. "Are you kidding? I wish he'd...I don't even want to see him...I wouldn't touch him with...I don't give a..."

Johnny looked at him. "A simple no would have been enough, son, and far more convincing. Anyway, I can't save you from a broken heart. I saw it in a dream and even if Drake makes fun of my dreams, they always come true."

Tony blinked. "Your dream said that Angelo is going to have a broken heart?"

"No, that you are."

"Me?" He laughed. "No way. Oh," Tony said, looking out the window, "Janet and Mac just drove up. I'm going to go say hi."

Johnny nodded. "I'll be there soon."

"Want some help?"

"No. You look nice, by the way."

Tony was wearing navy dress pants with a pale blue shirt. "Thanks," he sang and went to greet Janet and Mac.



Johnny looked out the window and sighed. The thought that Drake could actually consider leaving the band made his heart ache. He closed his eyes. Tony would come to know that ache soon enough although he refused to acknowledge it for the time being. It would hit him all of a sudden, at a time when he least expected to feel it. Then it would settle into his bones and would never leave him.

As for his nephew...well, he would hurt too, but somehow he would handle it better. He would lash out, hit something...like Tony! Angelo was like his father. Tony, on the other hand, was just like him. He had noticed it over these last few weeks as he had got to know him and began to understand his temperament. Tony felt things deeper and took things to heart.

Johnny got up out of his chair, leaning heavily on his crutch. Sophia met him at the door and took his arm. They went into the living room, where Janet and Mac sat together curled up on the sofa.

Tony was there, talking to them. Johnny sat down opposite them.

They made small talk and then Drake came in with Pepi. They both wore corduroys, Drake's were burgundy, Pepi's were tan. Drake had on a cream-coloured cableknit sweater and Pepi wore a chocolate-brown one. They sat side-by-side, Pepi looking exceptionally pleased to be seated beside Drake.

Tony couldn't help thinking how handsome Drake looked and the image of him naked in that bed this morning manifested itself clearly in his mind.

He tried to shake it loose and concentrate on what



Mac was saying, but it was difficult. His eyes riveted to the curve of Drake's mouth as he smiled, and then moved downward to where his hands rested on his knees. He tore his eyes away and looked over at his aunt.

Janet seemed unusually quiet today in her knee-length red dress and high heels. She didn't look very happy. Mac held her hand the whole time they were sitting there on the sofa, giving it a little squeeze once in a while.

Sophia also had said very little since Pepi insisted she take a seat near them.

There were some questions concerning the puffiness of Tony's mouth, which Drake quickly redirected to something else.

Angelo made an appearance now, fresh from the shower. He wore soft brown leather pants with a caramel-coloured peasant shirt, open at the neck. He leaned over to kiss his mother and grandmother, then perched himself on the arm of the sofa next to his father.

Tony looked him over, noticing that Angelo had grown a thin moustache on his upper lip. It suited him. His hand rested on the top of his upper thigh. It was magnificently shaped with long tapering fingers. Piano-playing hands, as they called them. They were strong, well-shaped hands and Tony suddenly got the vaguest recollection of what those hands felt like when they were caressing his skin. He looked away.

Father and son. It was funny how when they spoke, their voices sounded remarkably similar. Both deep,



Drake's a little less exuberant, more laid back, calm. Angelo's voice was younger, full of excitement as Pepi asked him to tell him about Company Angelo.

When Angelo announced that he was taking the band on the road, all eyes turned to Tony as he blurted out, "For how long?"

"I don't know," Angelo replied, lifting an eyebrow. He looked surprised at Tony's outburst. "Six months, a year maybe."

Tony flushed. He felt stupid for asking. He nodded. "That will be nice."

Drake was praising the move, telling Angelo that going on the road was just what was required.

Janet glanced over at her son. "My son is deserting me again. Just like your father, you've got the wanderlust."

"Oh, Mom, it will go fast. You'll be busy with Mac anyway," Angelo winked.

Mac rolled his eyes and made a face while Janet laughed and hit him.

Drake gave Janet a tender look and then grinned at Mac. "Watch it, Mac, she's a wild one but I don't think she ever got that excited with me!"

She shook her head. "Stop it, you guys. And Drake, no comparing notes, please."

Everyone laughed.

"Later, Mac," Drake winked as a waiter came around with drinks. He bent his head toward Drake and informed him that dinner would be served in a half hour.

There was a chorus of 'Thank Gods'.



Pepi asked Angelo if he wanted to play table tennis. They both got up and left the room.

Johnny leaned over to Drake and asked him what was wrong with Mama.

Drake shrugged.

Janet asked Sophia if they could talk in private.

She said "No," very loudly.

The conversation turned to Johnny's recovery, his next doctor's appointment, what painkillers he was taking. Mac and Drake discussed pros and cons of certain drugs they had taken for various aches and pains.

Janet was speaking to Sophia in whispers.

Tony noticed that both his aunt and his grandmother seemed agitated. He tried to focus on the conversation Mac, Drake and his dad was having, but his eyes went again to the two women.

Suddenly, Sophia jumped up from her chair. She was in tears. "You bitch! You want to tear my family to pieces, don't you? I won't let you destroy my boys!"

Janet laid her head back against the sofa in frustration.

Drake stood up. "What in hell is going on here?"

"Sit down, Mama," Johnny began, "and..."

"No!" She shook her head at her son and then looked at Janet. "If you tell anyone what I told you in confidence, I will never forgive you and you will have the breakup of this family on your conscience forever. Maybe you don't care anymore, because you're getting out of this family, aren't you? You're going to marry Mac now. I'd thought you'd understand, but I was



wrong. I thought you'd do it for young Drake's sake. I should have known better then to..."

"Then why in hell did you tell me at all?" Janet demanded, standing up. "I never asked to know this! Goddamn you!" She pushed away from the sofa and stalked out of the room.

Drake looked at his mother; she was shaking. "What in hell is this all about?"

Mac stood up and left the room to go after Janet.

Drake sat his mother down and looked at his brother.

"Mama?" Johnny said, moving over on the sofa so he could get closer to her chair. He took her hand. "What will destroy the family? What are you talking about?"

"Nothing! For the love of God, leave it alone." She was crying again. She reached out and took Drake's hand. "My love," she said softly. "I just couldn't handle it alone anymore. I had to tell someone, someone close to the family but not in the family."

"Tell them what?" Drake asked.

"Do you love this family, Drake?" Sophia demanded.

"Of course I love my family."

"Do you love your brothers?"

Drake swallowed. "Yes."

"Then leave it alone. Let's just have a nice Christmas, okay?"

Drake and Johnny locked eyes.

Sophia got up from her seat. "I need to lie down for a few minutes. Call me for dinner."

They watched her leave the room.



Johnny reached over and took Drake's hand. He squeezed it, saying nothing. They were both aware that something grave had happened, but they had no idea what it was.

Drake stood up and went to find Janet. She was outside, smoking. Mac was beside her.

"Can I talk to her alone for a second?" Drake asked him.

Mac nodded and went inside.

"Janet?" Drake looked into her blue eyes.

"Don't ask me, I can't." She tore her gaze away from his.

"What is this all about? What did Mama tell you?" Drake demanded.

"I can't. I...can't...Drake. Don't ask me."

"Is it something terrible?" Drake persisted.

"Yes and no. I don't know. It's something you should have known...we all should have...years ago."

"I see. Will it make any difference now?"

"It will change a lot of things, Drake. I don't think it's my place to...I don't want to...it's too much, Drake, just too much." She walked down the driveway.

Drake leaned against the outside wall of his house and watched her. Why would Mama tell Janet this upsetting news about the family? Shit, how bad could it be? Drake walked back inside and asked the kitchen staff to put off dinner for an hour. He found Pepi and Angelo in the games room and asked Angelo if he could borrow his brother for a while.

"Come for a walk, Pepi, okay?" Drake invited.

Angelo put down the table racket and told his uncle



he would keep track of the score.

"Dinner's going to be another hour," Drake told his son, who groaned in reply.

On the way out, Drake and Pepi met Tony in the hall. "Keep your cousin company, will ya? I need to talk with Pepi."

Tony agreed half-heartedly, then walked into the games room and asked Angelo what was going on.

"I don't know. I'm starved, and dinner keeps getting later and later. Where is everyone?"

"Well," Tony said, walking over to the window and looking out, "I see your mom is taking a walk. Grand-mama really lit into her about something."

"Really? Shit. They're always..." Angelo began.

"No. It was something big. Grandmother was really upset because your mom wanted her to say something...I don't know. Something funny is going on."

"This is the Russo family. Something funny is always going on," Angelo scoffed, coming to join Tony at the window.

"Look, I'm sorry about what happened earlier..." Tony began.

"What are you sorry about? I hit you, remember?" Angelo raised an eyebrow. "There you go again, apologizing."

"Ya...well...I've been kind of...let's say, I haven't been very nice to you about....eh...."

"Forget it," Angelo cut him off. "And I shouldn't have hit you. I apologize."

"Accepted," Tony replied, not looking at him. "Are



you really going on the road with the band?"

"Ya. It's a good opportunity. Richard Killerman, the guy who offered to manage us, well, he has gigs set up all over the U.S. We need exposure."

Tony nodded. He was just about to tell him that he would miss him when he heard someone cry out like a wounded dog.

"What in hell was that?" Angelo asked.

"Don't know," Tony replied.

Both young men left the games room to try and find the source of the cry.

\* \* \* \* \*

Drake sat on the floor outside the bedroom door. Johnny had been in there for hours. Drake would have broken down the door if Johnny hadn't told him that he was all right, saying, "Please, Drake, I just want to be alone."

As soon as he had gone outside, all hell had broken loose. The first thing that happened was that Mama had come staggering out of the house like a drunk, screaming, "Drake...go to Johnny...go to Johnny!"

He immediately assumed that Johnny had collapsed. He went racing into the house to find Tony and his son standing at the door to one of the bedrooms upstairs.

"What's happened?" Drake asked. "Where's Johnny?"

"Dad's in there," Tony replied, visibly upset. "He's locked the door. He won't come out."

"Is he all right?" Drake demanded, banging on the



door.

"He said he just wanted to be alone. We heard him cry out. We thought he was in pain," Angelo said, shaking his head.

It was a quarter after eight now and Johnny still refused to open the door. Drake had told the rest of the family to go ahead and eat. No one did.

Sophia had left the house, and had not yet returned. Pepi went looking for her in the car. Angelo and Tony went on foot. Mac and Janet stayed with Drake for emotional support until Drake told them to go on home.

Janet gave Drake a sympathetic look before she left. "You may need me," she had said before leaving.

He knew she could tell him what was happening, but she wouldn't. "Johnny will tell you when he's ready. Sophia must have told him."

"Told him what, for Christ's sakes, that the world is coming to a fucking end? I wish someone would tell me what in Jesus is going on!"

Janet had gathered him into her arms and held him. "Baby...it will be okay. Here, have a cigarette."

He had taken a cigarette from her and smoked it there in the hallway. She had left with Mac, telling Drake to call her when they had any news of Sophia. He said he would, and told them goodnight.

There was nothing but silence on the other side of the door. Only after he had threatened to break down the door or call the police did Johnny respond that he was all right and to leave him alone.

Drake rested his head on the locked door and closed



his eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Inside the room, Johnny lay on the bed, his head pounding. He had cried all the tears he could. They were all gone now. It was a terrible thing to hate your own mother, but he did. He hated her to the core. Funny, his son hated his mother, too.

After that scene in the living room, Johnny had followed his mother to her room. He knocked on the door. She told him to come in. She looked up at him as he did.

"Mama," he said, "I know there is something that you're not telling us. Something we deserve to know. All these years there has been something seriously wrong with this family. What is it? I can take it."

She closed her eyes. "I can't, Johnny...I...can't..."

"You can, and you will! All these years you have loved Drake more than either me or Pepi, and you have that same feeling for Drake's son. Although you love Pepi and I, it's not the same. Are Pepi and I adopted? Is that it?"

Sophia started to laugh, and then she cried. Johnny let her cry. After a few minutes, she calmed down. Slowly, she rose from the bed and took her suitcase from the closet. She opened it. She ran her hand inside the lining and took out a photograph.

She showed it to him. She was shaking.

"It's...it looks like Drake," he said. "Who is it?"

"His name was Drake too. He was Drake's father."



His eyes had widened. So he and Drake had different fathers. "Drake is only my half brother then?" he asked softly, studying the photograph.

Sophia sighed. "I loved him. He was the love of my life."

"I'm not judging you, Mama," Johnny shook his head. "Daddy never knew that Drake was not his?"

She shook her head. "Darling, Drake is not your brother at all. His mother's name was Julia. I looked after her, then Drake after he was born. I..."

It was at that moment that Johnny felt his legs buckle. He glared at his mother. "All these years and you never told us that Drake is not our brother. All this...you knew what it was doing to us. You knew that Drake and I were in love, and yet you let us believe we were brothers when we're not brothers at all? You heartless old woman!" He went to strike her and then took a step backwards as she cowered before him.

"Why?" he cried out to her, his hands open in a pleading way. "Why, Mama? Why didn't you tell us?" Tears streamed down his face.

"Because it wasn't right...it was unnatural...since you were little boys...I saw you come together. I knew I should have separated you. Being brothers kept you apart...kept you from..."

"No, Mama, it didn't. It didn't keep us from being lovers, if that's what you mean. It just made us ruin people's lives and hurt our lovers and sniff coke and drink too much and...it was killing us. What did you think the shooting was about? Drake tried to kill himself and if it hadn't been for me, he'd be dead!"



"No!" She let out a howl. Placing her hands over her ears, she went running out of the house.

He had screamed too, a cry that didn't sound quite human. He went down on his knees and sobbed as he had never sobbed before. Somehow he got up and locked the door, not wanting to see anyone. He had to try and figure out what all this meant. Drake was not his brother. They didn't have the same mother or father. God.

He could sense that Drake was still on the other side of the door, his Drake, who had never shared his blood. They weren't brothers, although God, it sure felt as if they were. Their love was not tainted or cursed. They were simply two men in love, two men who loved each other so much that being brothers never felt right and could never stand in the way of that love.

Johnny got off the bed and placed his hand on the door. It was almost ten o'clock. "Drake?" He knew that he would answer.

"Johnny, Johnny, are you all right?"

"Baby," he said softly, "do you know how much I love you...how much I want you?"

Drake sighed. "Johnny, we need to talk about that. We need to find a way to...."

"I have to talk to you. I have something to tell you, Drake, that you might not believe and you know...even though it's the answer to everything for us, this will hurt you."

The door opened.

Drake stood up and looked at Johnny. His eyes were red and swollen. "Thank God you're all right. Will you



tell me what this is all about? Do you know that Mama is gone and no one...?"

"Good. I hope she stays gone!" Johnny replied coldly.

"How can you say that? She's got a bad heart, Johnny. She could have collapsed out there, and..."

"Drake," Johnny pulled him into the room and then went to close the door, "sit down." He touched Drake's hair. It was the first time he could touch him like that without feeling any guilt. He felt liberated, free. He only hoped Drake would not take this too hard. He looked at him, thinking about what it had been like making love to him. The sweet memories of that night came to him, gripping him like a vise. They would make love like that again, and it would be even sweeter because there would be nothing to stop them now, no barrier between them.

Drake sat down. "Okay, what is it?"

Johnny paced and then sat down beside him. He was tired. He took Drake's hand in his. "I don't know how to say this...so I guess I'll just come out and say it. Drake, we're not really brothers."

Drake blinked at him. "Johnny--" he began.

"Drake, Mama just told me. She showed me a picture." He stood up and went to his mother's suitcase, still sitting open on the bed. The picture lay inside. Johnny gave Drake the picture.

Drake looked at it. "Who is this man?"

"Your father."

"My what?" Drake asked, standing up. "Joseph Russo was my father!"



"No. He was mine and Pepi's. The man in the picture was yours."

"God. He was Mama's lover?" Drake asked, glancing again at the picture. "Did Papa know he wasn't my father?"

"I don't know if Mama told him or not," Johnny replied.

"So, we have different fathers. I'm still your brother..."

"We're not brothers, Drake," Johnny heaved a sigh. "Your mother's name was Julia, this man's wife. She died after giving birth to you."

"Then..." he sat back down. "Sophia is not my mother either?"

Johnny shook his head, then he smiled, taking Drake by the shoulders. "Don't you see what this means for us? Our feelings for each other have been pure and untainted. It's natural...the way we feel, Drake. There is no need to feel..."

Drake shook himself away. "My whole existence is a lie. I'm not a Russo at all. My birth certificate is a lie. You're not my brother...Pepi's not my brother either. Christ...this is too much...too much! Why would Mama...Sophia take me in if I wasn't hers?"

"She said she loved this man. He was the love of her life. Oh, Drake," Johnny touched his face, "I understand her, because you're the love of mine."

Drake looked up at him and then shook his head. He stood up. "There are too many unanswered questions. You'd better tell Pepi and our sons. I just can't right now."



Johnny watched him leave the room. A few minutes later, he heard him get into his car and drive away.

It was better to leave him alone right now. He didn't know what he should say. Should he tell him that it was all right now to be his lover because they weren't brothers, or did he want to hear how he would always be his brother anyway?

His head ached.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angelo paced the floor, waiting for news about his grandmother, while Pepi sat down in a chair in the corner of the waiting room. Tony had gone to ask the nurse when they could expect to hear something from the doctor.

They had been all over the place, then Pepi had started calling the hospitals in the area on his car phone. He finally found someone meeting his mother's description at one of the hospitals. She had collapsed after ordering a cup of coffee in a small diner not far from his brother's house.

Pepi found Tony and Angelo on the corner of Drake's street. He swung up to the curb and told them to get in, and they sped off to the hospital.

After about an hour, the doctor came to tell them that Sophia Russo was in critical condition. "She's had a massive coronary," he said. "She's very weak. Are you her sons?"

"Son," Pepi replied. "And these are her two grandsons."

"Well, if she has any more immediate family around-



- husband, sons, daughters--I'd call them in. I'm sorry, but I don't expect her to hold on through the night. And eh...is there someone here called Drake?"

Pepi sighed. "Drake is my eldest brother."

"Well, she's asking for him," the doctor said. "Might be good if you could find him."

Pepi nodded, tears in his eyes. When the doctor left, Pepi turned to his nephews. "Can one of you try Drake and Johnny again?"

Tony placed his hand on Angelo's arm. "I'll do it." He walked over to the pay phone and put in a quarter.

The phone rang several times before someone picked up. It was his dad. He sounded as if he'd been sleeping.

"Dad?"

"Ya? Drake?"

"No, it's Tony. Dad, it's Grandmother. We found her at the L.A. General Hospital. She's had a major heart attack. The doctor doesn't think she's going to make it through the night."

There was a silence, then, "I'll be right there."

"Tell Uncle Drake, okay? She's asking for him."

"Okay, I'll try and find him."

"Find him? Where in the hell is he? Dad, what's happened? Something terrible has happened, I can feel it."

"We'll talk about it later. Drake needed to think, to be alone. I don't know if I'll be able to find him, Tony."

"What happened today, Dad?" Tony insisted. "It feels like all hell broke loose?"

"Just about."

"Look, get over here, okay? I'll get Angelo to drive



Uncle Pepi's car and we'll go looking for Uncle Drake. Maybe Angelo has an idea where his father is. Do you?"

There was a pause, then, "Check the gay bars."

"Christmas night in a gay bar," Angelo scowled a few minutes later as he placed the key in the ignition of Pepi's Ferrari and started the engine. "How goddamned jolly."

Tony smiled. "Christmas is about goodies, isn't it?"

"What a comedian," Angelo yawned, driving toward the gay village.

"So what do you think happened today?" Tony asked him.

"In this family? Like I said, could be just about anything. They'll tell us when they want us to know."

There was nothing more to say. They checked out almost every gay bar in the vicinity, most of which were half empty.

Angelo was in a foul mood. They got hit on in almost every bar they walked into by the most desperate of characters.

Angelo was swearing on the way back to the hospital. "Well, he's not in the bars. Even Dad is not that fucking desperate. Where in hell are you, Dad?" Angelo growled.

An hour and a half later, they were back at the hospital. Johnny and Pepi were sitting in the waiting room. Johnny had an arm around him and was stroking his hair.

Johnny hadn't told Pepi what had happened yet. The timing was bad. He was really upset about Mama.



Tony kissed his dad on the cheek. "Hi, Dad, you okay?"

Johnny nodded. "You didn't find Drake?"

"No," Tony mumbled.

"How is she?" Angelo asked.

"The same. I called home and left a message for Drake in case he comes back."

"Is she still...?" Tony asked.

"Asking to see Drake? Yes," Johnny sighed.

Johnny looked at his son, and then at Drake's. How would Angelo feel when he learned that he and Pepi were not his uncles? It was funny. Knowing Drake wasn't his brother didn't make him feel as if Angelo was any less his nephew. He still loved him, and Drake would always be his big brother no matter what. Nothing could change that, not even his mother's words today.

He closed his eyes.

Angelo leaned over and touched his arm. "Uncle Johnny, you should rest. You look really tired. You haven't been out of the hospital that long."

Johnny just shook his head.

They were all at her bedside at four in the morning. The doctor said they could stay with her if they liked. She was dying.

Sophia looked at her two sons and then at her grandsons. She reached out her hand to Drake's son, who hovered behind his two uncles.

He came forward at her request and squeezed her hand, smiling at her.

"Drake," she said softly, running her hand down the



side of his cheek. "You are so handsome. Just like your grandfather."

She had said that so often, and Johnny knew she was right. Angelo did look like his grandfather, his real grandfather. Before, people always thought Sophia had to be a little blind to think that either Drake or his son looked like Joseph Russo, but they never had the heart to contradict her. But Mama had never meant that they bore a resemblance to Joseph Russo.

"I love your father," she blinked at Angelo. "He has been the living reminder of my own heart. And you...you are so like your dad. Drake, Drake..." she sobbed, holding his hand.

Angelo looked around helplessly at his uncles.

"Where is your father...why doesn't he come? Does he hate me? Johnny....Johnny..." She let go of her grandson's hand. "Does he hate me now?"

"No...no, Mama...he doesn't hate you," Johnny moved in giving Angelo the opportunity to take a break. "He needs time to..."

"I can't hold on much longer, and yet I can't go...I won't go until he comes. Drake...Drake..." she whispered. "He has to forgive me, Johnny. Do you? Do you forgive me?"

Johnny turned around and to Pepi, he said, "Damn Drake! Why doesn't he come?"

"Forgive her for what, Johnny?" Pepi asked. "What is she talking about?"

"We'll talk about it later, Pep, okay?" Johnny said wearily, rubbing his face.

"No," Pepi muttered, pulling his brother aside,



"we'll talk about it now. I'm tired of being kept in the dark here. Obviously, you and Drake both know something that you need to forgive her about. What is it? It's about what happened today...why none of us got to eat Christmas dinner or open gifts, and why Mama ended up here, dying."

Johnny pulled his arm away and through clenched teeth, he growled. "I said not now, Pepi."

They looked over at their mother. She was sleeping, dozing, then waking again to call out Drake's name.

Angelo couldn't stand it anymore. He walked out of the room and into the hallway.

Tony followed him out, watching as he punched the wall. "Angelo, are you okay?"

"No, I'm not okay," Angelo replied angrily. "Where in the hell is he? His mother is dying and he's nowhere. I'm going to call the house again. Shit. If he doesn't get here in time, Tony, he's never going to be able to forgive himself."

"Wait," Tony put a hand on Angelo's shoulder and pointed. Drake was walking toward them, down the corridor. He looked like hell. His clothes were rumpled. They could smell liquor on his breath a mile away.

"How dare you come here like this?" Angelo declared. "Grandmother is dying. Don't you have any respect?"

Tony went back in the room to get Johnny. "Uncle Johnny, Drake's here."

"Thank God," Johnny said and went out into the hallway. Tony followed hesitantly while Pepi remained with Sophia.



"Get off my back, Angelo, I'm warning you," Drake was telling his son just as Johnny and Tony came out of the room.

"Drake," Johnny said, "thank God. She's been asking for you. She says she won't..." Tears appeared in Johnny's eyes for the first time. Perhaps it was seeing Drake standing there, looking so defeated. Maybe it was because his mother was dying and in spite of everything, he still loved her.

"I know how you feel, Drake," Johnny managed to say, "but can you tell her that...that you...forgive her even if you don't mean it. She's dying, Drake. I feel responsible. I said some horrible things to..." He started to cry.

Drake stood perfectly still for a minute while Johnny sobbed. Then he reached out, took him roughly into his arms and held him. He took his face between his hands and then kissed him directly on the mouth.

Angelo and Tony were awestruck. There was such love, such raw passion and emotion between them. It brought a lump to their throats.

Drake let Johnny go. "Don't worry. I'll tell her I forgive her."

"We'll stay here," Johnny said.

"No," Drake said. "Come in. All of you."

When he walked into the room, Pepi flung himself into his arms. Drake hugged him and gave him a kiss on the forehead. "My baby brother," he said softly, tears in his eyes.

He let Pepi go and went over to the bed. "Mama? It's me, it's Drake. Hi."



She opened her eyes and tears spilled down her face. "My love, are you waiting on the other side for me? Can we be together now? Julia would have understood, my love. She would have..."

"Shush, Mama. What are you talking about? Don't you know me? It's Drake, it's your son."

"Drake's son...my son..." she said softly. "I love you more than my life. My baby. I couldn't let you go. He asked me to take care of you. I promised. I loved you, Drake. I..." She gasped for air.

"Mama, it's okay," he said softly. "Just rest."

"Tell me...tell me you forgive me...please..."

"I do, Mama. I do. I forgive you."

"That night we shared together...it was the most beautiful night of my life. You were so...beautiful, Drake..."

Drake gave Johnny a questioning look. Johnny threw it back at him.

Neither Pepi nor his two nephews had a clue as to what was happening. Only Johnny and Drake seemed to have some idea of what she was talking about.

Johnny came to stand on the other side of the bed now, and Sophia turned to look at him. "Love your brother," she breathed. "Love him...and...eh..." Her voice failed her.

Tony ran to get the doctor. She was gone before he got back. They stood in stunned silence as the doctor examined her and pronounced her dead. He wrote the time on his chart, offered his condolences and then left the room.

Johnny stood sobbing softly in the corner. Tony held



him, listening in horror as he said, "I killed her, Tony, I killed my own mother."

Angelo stood beside Pepi, who looked as if he had been recently frozen. Both were dry-eyed, as if they hadn't any tears left.

Drake remained beside the bed of the woman who had played the part of his mother all these years. She, who had taken care of him when he had the flu, fed him, walked him to school in grade one, applauded so loudly at his first music recital, scraped together the money to buy him his first guitar. Mama. She was gone and in spite of everything, he never got the chance to thank her for being his mother.

He lowered his head onto her chest and cried.

\* \* \* \* \*

The funeral took place three days later, exactly four days before the New Year, back in Brooklyn, New York where the three Russo boys had been raised.

On the day of the funeral, Tony filed out of the church with Angelo, his father, two uncles, Mac and Frank as they carried the coffin to the hearse. The press was everywhere.

Police and private security surrounded the mourners as they processed down the street toward the Catholic Italian cemetery. As they stood at the gravesite, the sound of helicopters loomed overhead and reporters got as close as they could with their wide zoom lenses snapping pictures of the three sons at their mother's funeral.

"Can't they just let up for awhile?" Tony told his



cousin angrily. "It's a funeral, for Christ's sakes."

Angelo took his mother's arm as they headed back to the car, looking extremely elegant in his black suit and white shirt. "It's all in a day's work," he told him. "Welcome to the Russo family, kid."

Tony sighed. "I see what you mean."

The up side of the funeral was that Tony got to meet his grandmother's sister and two second cousins. He also got to stay in the house where his father grew up and see pictures of his grandfather Russo.

They had the reception in that house, a small gathering of family and friends, Mac's parents and former classmates of Drake's, Johnny's and Pepi's. A few celebrities also flew in to pay their respects, mostly people in the rock and roll industry. Others sent cards and flowers, realizing that there would be too many people at the funeral as it was.

The day after the funeral, his dad took Tony around the neighbourhood, showing him where he went to school and the playground where he used to play basketball as a kid. They even shot a few baskets, then called it quits as it started to snow.

That evening, Mac's parents had them all over for supper. The Hayes' were nice people, and it felt good to eat a home-cooked meal.

Later on, back at the house, Drake, Johnny and Pepi began to go through some of Sophia's things.

It was almost ten o'clock when they came down together and took a seat in the small, rather shabby living room.

Tony was half asleep in a chair. Janet was staying at



her future in-laws for the night with Mac, and Angelo had been absent for a few hours.

"Where is Angelo?" Drake asked as Tony struggled to sit up in the easy chair.

"I don't know."

"Gone," Pepi announced, turning on the television.

"Gone?" Both Tony and Drake spoke at the same time. Johnny looked perplexed.

"Ya, he said he had to go back to L.A. He's taking his band on the road. They are leaving tomorrow morning."

Tony stood up and walked out of the room.

Drake and Johnny looked at each other.

"Should I or you?" Johnny asked.

"Why don't you let me?" Drake suggested.

They had decided upstairs that tonight they would tell Pepi and their two sons the truth about Drake's parentage. They had worked out exactly what they would say, now Angelo had left.

Drake walked out onto the porch. It was cold. Tony stood outside in his shirtsleeves.

"You're going to freeze out here. This isn't L.A., you know."

Tony turned around and looked at Drake. "He left without even saying goodbye."

"I know. Maybe he thought it would be better that way. Maybe he didn't know how to say goodbye." Drake suggested.

Tony breathed in the cold night air. "Maybe he just didn't want to."

Drake stamped his feet and slapped his arms a few



times. "Cold," he laughed, then sobered. "How do you feel about that?"

"About him leaving without even telling me?" Tony asked. "How do you think I feel? I feel like maybe he'll never come back...maybe I've lost him forever."

"But you didn't want him in the first place," Drake replied.

"I...you're right," Tony muttered. "I didn't...there's others...there's..." he stopped, swallowing hard. "It doesn't matter. It is damn cold out here." He brushed past him and went inside.

"Do you want to tell them separately?" Drake asked Johnny a few minutes later in the kitchen.

"I'll tell Tony, you talk to Pepi," Johnny suggested. Then added, "Go easy."

It had to be done. Drake took a breath and headed back into the living room. He sat down and began to tell him. When he was finished explaining as much as he actually knew about it, Pepi could only stare at him. Then after a few minutes, he got up, put on his coat and left the house.

Tony thought his father was joking with him until he took him into Sophia's room and showed Tony the picture. "That's Drake," Tony said. "Good God, Dad, Drake Russo is not my uncle, and he's not your brother either."

"Well, not by blood, but Drake and I will always be brothers."

Tony nodded. "But now...you're free to be...together, aren't you?"

"Yes," Johnny nodded, "but Drake...I don't know."



He's not so anxious. I think he needs time to digest all this."

"He'll come around. He loves you, Dad, I know that."

Johnny pulled his son into his arms. "Thanks, Tony, that means a lot." He let him go. "What about you and Angelo?"

Tony shook his head. "It's just...well...it was just a thing, Dad, okay? It's not like that with Angelo and I. It's over...well...there's probably nothing to be over...you know?"

Johnny looked at him. "As long as you're okay with it. I thought you looked kind of upset when you found out he had left."

"I was upset because the bastard didn't say goodbye, that's all!" Tony's voice was shaking.

Johnny placed an arm around his son. "Are you okay with all this?"

"I guess I'll have to be. I hope Uncle Pepi doesn't take it too hard."

"Me too," his father said.

\* \* \* \* \*

Drake caught up to Pepi, sitting on the curb in front of the school.

He sat down beside him. "You're going to get haemorrhoids if you sit on this cold pavement too long."

It didn't bring a smile, so Drake let out a sigh instead. "Pepi, I love you. I always have, and even when you think I wasn't paying enough attention to you...I..." he



stopped.

"Drake?" Pepi said.

Drake looked at him. "Ya?"

There were tears in his eyes. "I feel so guilty."

"Why? What for?" Drake turned his face toward him.

"Because I always loved you more than Johnny. When I was little, I was jealous of you and Johnny. He was about your age, and...sometimes, I wished him dead."

"Oh, Pep, that's what kids do, but you didn't mean it. You have nothing to feel guilty about. I love you, kid, I always have. I just don't want this to change anything between us."

"Drake, you're my big brother. You'll always be, and signed declarations in blood will never change that. Do you understand?" His voice was filled with emotion.

Pepi went into his brother's arms. They held each other. Drake kissed his head. "You know what...I think we should go. Someone is going to go by here, see us kissing and crying and accuse us of being two flaming queens."

Pepi laughed, wiping his tears. "I don't care. I know that I'm not one!"

"You little..." Drake eyed him with a grin. "Anyway, I have a reputation as a heterosexual to protect," Drake teased.

Pepi stood up with him and grinned. "Wearing thin, Drake!"

Drake made a face at him, and they laughed. "Well," Drake threw an arm around Pepi's shoulder when they



began to walk toward the house, "I'm glad you still consider me to be your brother, because if you didn't, we'd have to change the name of the band."

"To what?"

"To Drake and the Russo Brothers...hey," he mused, "that's not half bad. I like that."

"Forget it, Drake," Pepi threatened as they continued down the street toward the little house on the corner where they grew up.

"Drake and the Russo Brothers Band...Ya...!" Drake cried, beginning to run.

Pepi chased him, picking up handfuls of snow and flinging it at him. "No way, jerkoff...no bloody way!"

The scene had a familiar quality to it. It might as well have been twenty years ago.

When Johnny heard them outside, he smiled. He and Tony went to the door and watched them out the window, throwing snow at each other.

"Look at them," Johnny grinned at his son, putting an arm around him. "Drake thinks he's twelve again. Oh, shit, there goes Pepi," he laughed as Pepi took a fall on the front lawn.

Drake got him good then, washing his face with snow as Pepi hollered, "Johnny...Johnny, help me. Don't just stand there! He's killing me!"

"Come inside, you two," Johnny poked his head out the door. "You're going to wake up everybody in the neighbourhood," he complained with a grin.

He shooed them in the front door and then went into the kitchen to make hot chocolate just like Mama would have. The three brothers sat around the table, jabbing at



each other like when they were kids and for those moments, all was as it should be.

Only Tony stood alone, staring out the window. The snow was coming down hard now. He wondered where Angelo was. It wouldn't be snowing in L.A. He probably wasn't even in L.A. anymore. Oh, to hell with him, Tony thought. If he wanted to leave without so much as a goodbye, then...screw him.

He pushed away from the window and went to join the others, determined to put him out of his mind.

The next morning, they were packing to go back to L.A. Frank had committed them to a Los Angeles New Year's Rocking Eve thing, and they had to get back.

The sound of Drake and Johnny fighting had awakened Tony. They had been bickering since early that morning. They argued about whether to sell the family house or not for the first hour. The second hour was devoted to Johnny's desire to perform on New Year's Eve, and Drake's objection.

A rented limo had sat outside the house since eight that morning, ready to take them to their private jet, which was waiting at LaGuardia Airport. The driver, dressed in his limo driver's outfit, sat reading the New York Times, unconcerned. He was being paid by the hour.

Pepi ducked into the room Tony had been using and made a face. "Are they going to argue all the damn day?" he whispered.

Tony shrugged. "Brotherly love."



"We should get going. We promised Frank to go over some stuff with him this afternoon." Pepi sighed and checked his watch. "We're not going to make it."

"Well, I'm ready," Tony announced, picking up his bag. "I got everything...now if we can light a fire under them. Where's Mac, Uncle Pep?"

"Mac and Janet are going to meet us at the airport. They've probably been there an hour already. Mac's parents wanted to drive them."

Tony was about to say something when his dad's voice came bellowing down the hallway. Pepi shook his head and ran down the stairs.

"You won't come back here to live, Drake..." Johnny was saying now as he carted his suitcase down the hall.

"Dad," Tony gasped, coming out into the hall, "you shouldn't be lifting that."

"Oh, stop! Not you, too. You and Drake. I'm not an invalid, and I'm perfectly capable of performing tomorrow night."

"We'll see what Doctor Nick says," Drake replied, as he came rushing past Johnny, with two of his own bags.

"Doctor Nick doesn't know shit!" Johnny called after him as Drake bounded down the stairs without looking back. He gave his son an exasperated look. "All that quack knows is burnout and drug overdoses. He's a rock and roll doctor, for Christ's sakes. I never listen to him!"

"A rock and roll doctor?" Tony laughed. "I can picture that."

Johnny scowled as the front door slammed shut. "Damn him! He never listens to me. I'm not going to sit



on my ass and do nothing because of what that old fart says."

"Dad, you're getting all worked up for nothing," Tony wrestled his father's bag away from him and urged him down the stairs. "Uncle Pepi says we're late."

"Frank will wait. And another thing, Drake has to listen to reason about this house. I think we should sell it. What's the point of leaving it here empty to rot? None of us want to come back here to retire...it's just sentimental hogwash!"

"How does Uncle Pepi feel?" Tony asked, opening the front door.

"Pepi will do whatever we say. He's the baby!" Johnny snapped.

"Thanks," Pepi muttered, standing on the front porch. "I should be in the Guinness Book of World Records, because I'm the oldest baby in history."

"Don't get smart!" Johnny retorted.

Drake came up the walk. He looked expectantly at his brothers and nephew, his long black hair blowing across his handsome face. "Are you ready?"

"Ya...Ya..." Johnny replied.

"Well, I'll lock up and for Christ's sakes," Drake barked, "get in the limo, will ya?"

Tony grinned as his father said something nasty under his breath. The three of them climbed into the limousine.

Drake checked around the house, and locked up. He got into the limo himself, sitting beside Tony, across from his two brothers. He told the driver to go.



The limo headed toward the airport. They sat in silence for a few minutes. Suddenly, Drake slapped his hands on his thighs, leaned forward and gave Johnny a satisfied smile. "I got an idea. It just came to me."

Johnny rolled his eyes heavenward.

"Why don't we do something charitable with the house?"

"The charitable thing to do with that house is to burn the damn thing down," Johnny replied caustically.

"I don't know how you can say such things!" Drake snapped. He fell silent, and slumped back against the seat.

Feeling guilty, Johnny moaned and then asked him what his idea was.

Drake grinned, sitting forward again. "What about turning the house into a halfway house or a drug rehab?"

"Great. I'm sure the neighbours will be overjoyed," Johnny retorted.

"A shelter for battered women?" Pepi piped in. "There's no danger there, is there?"

"Hey, that's a possibility," Drake added.

Tony looked at his father. "It's a good idea, Dad. The house would be preserved, and it would be put to good use. Grandmother might have liked that."

Johnny thought for a minute and then smiled at his older brother. "I'm beginning to like it. I'm beginning to like it a lot, but," he paused, "it does depend on zoning laws, and..."

Drake waved his hand. "There's always a way around things like that if you grease the right palms."



Anyway," Drake added, "we'll discuss it more later on with Frank."

The discussion ended there and thankfully the discussion of Johnny performing on New Year's Eve did not resurface on the way to the airport.

Pepi had been right about Mac and Janet waiting for them at the airport; they were already on the plane when they arrived. They didn't seem to mind, however.

Once the private jet took off for L.A., everyone seemed to be into their own thing. Drake was listening to music on the headphones, Johnny had lain down, Mac and Janet watched a holiday movie on the overhead television and Tony played cards with Pepi.

Tony looked over at Drake, who was mouthing the words to the song he was listening to. God, he was handsome, and knowing that Drake wasn't his uncle after all somehow made it more difficult. He was just Drake Russo, and he was sitting a couple of feet away from him. Tony sighed. He also needed to remember that his father was in love with him, and there was no longer any reason for them to be apart.

It surprised him that Drake and his father didn't share a room at the family home in New York. In fact, Tony was quite baffled to find Drake sleeping on the sofa in the morning after the funeral. Maybe discovering that they weren't really brothers in blood wasn't enough to bring them together. Maybe they just needed time to come to terms with it all.

It was obvious to Tony that his father adored Drake, in spite of their quarrelling this morning. Even in the limo today, Tony saw his father gaze at Drake when he



was looking out the window, his eyes full of passion and love.

It was a sad story, now that he thought about it. He wondered why his grandmother hadn't told them the truth a long time ago. Maybe she didn't want them together, except as brothers.

And Grandmother, what about her life? She had spent it being in love with a dead man who had never even loved her. All she had of him was his son and his grandson to remind her of his memory. He hoped that she had had one night of passion with this man, one night of joy.

Tears stung his eyes. He played off suit, letting Pepi win the hand.

Pepi slapped his hands together, declaring himself the winner.

He never wanted to end up that way. Please, he prayed silently, looking over at Drake, who had gone to sleep, don't let me spend my life in love with someone I can never have. It is the cruellest of punishments.

"Dad and Drake have to find a way to be together," he whispered. He hadn't realized he had said it out loud until Pepi reached over and touched his arm.

"Are you okay?" Pepi asked him, noticing the single tear that had escaped from his eye.

Tony sniffed. "I'm feeling sad suddenly. Maybe it's Grandmother's funeral. I knew her for such a short time. Do you think Dad will forgive her one day?"

Pepi sighed. "I don't know. I'm not sure that any of us have."

"She had her own sadness. Being in love with



Drake's father, but never having him. Did she say much to Dad about Drake's father?"

"Just that he was the love of her life, and that he asked her to take care of Drake and then killed himself."

"Why did he kill himself?" Tony asked, looking around.

Mac and Janet were sitting a few feet away from them with their headphones on, laughing at something in the movie.

Pepi began shuffling the cards. "Because, he couldn't live without his wife, who died giving birth to Drake."

"That's sad," Tony announced. "So tragic. Everything seems tragic to me today. All these people in love but not together."

"Ya, I know," Pepi murmured sincerely.

Tony blinked back tears. "I guess it's everything all at once, you know."

Pepi nodded, then after a few minutes, he said, "Life is like that. There is a lot of sadness, but we have to fight for happiness in life, kid. We can't just sit by and let it go. What makes you happy right now?"

"I don't know. My dad. Being here with all of you makes me happy, being a part of this, even if...." Tony laughed.

"What?"

"Well, Angelo always tells me that I didn't miss anything by not being a part of this before. He..."

"Angelo loves this family, even if he gets impatient with people at times. Now that things are out in the open...after the shock has passed and people have put



things into perspective, it will be better. You'll see." Pepi dealt the cards, smiling at Tony rather sadly. "Most of what has been wrong with this family has come from Mama's lie. Mama is gone now, and so are the lies."

"But Angelo doesn't even know yet!" Tony replied as if the thought just occurred to him.

Pepi breathed a jagged breath and then closed his eyes. "He will. When he comes home, Drake will tell him."

Tony turned and looked out the window at the clouds. Then Pepi urged him to pick up his cards.

He picked them up as his uncle began to talk about the high school he would attending in L.A.

"It's all arranged, then?" Tony asked, excited.

"Everything is fine. It's a good school, a private high school, but not snooty."

"I told Dad that the public school would be fine," Tony protested.

"They're rough, Tony. You're used to Canadian high schools. People carry knives and guns in high schools here. There is no way you're going to attend a public high school, even in a good neighbourhood. Let your dad do this for you. If you don't like it, you can transfer."

Tony nodded and then smiled. "Okay."

They landed three and a half hours later then they were supposed to. Carter was standing by the limo near their landing strip. Drake was pushing the buttons on the car phone the minute he crawled into the limo as Janet asked Carter to drop her off at her house in



Malibu.

Drake was waiting to be put through to Frank, who was on the other line. Upon hearing Janet's request, he placed his hand over the phone and added, "Ya, and stop by my place, Carter, to let Tony and Johnny off." He was about to add something else and then changed his mind as Frank came on the line.

"So, where are we meeting? Ya, sorry, I know we're late," he was saying as Tony lay back against the seat and closed his eyes. He drifted then, trying not to hear what Drake was saying. Johnny was tired also, and he didn't complain about being excluded from the meeting with Frank.

Carter let Janet out in front of her house. She gave Mac a quick kiss, waved goodbye and disappeared inside.

A few minutes later, Carter drove up the curved driveway and stopped in front of Drake's house.

Johnny looked at Drake for a minute. "It might be time for me to go home soon...live in my own house. I'm feeling better everyday."

He didn't wait for Drake to answer. He got out. Tony said goodbye and followed him into the house.

\* \* \* \* \*

His father said little else when he got inside the door. He asked one of the servants to make him some sandwiches and tea and bring it to his room.

"I'm going to bed," he told Tony. "Goodnight, son."

Tony wished him goodnight and watched him as he



slowly climbed the stairs. The events of the last few days had clearly taken a toll on him. He needed to rest.

Tony wandered around the lavish house for a moment. Things had been cleaned up, but the huge Christmas tree still stood in the hallway, the candles now all snuffed out. And for the first time he noticed that there were gifts under the tree, gifts they never got to open. Tony walked out into the entranceway and bent down to read the tags. In the corner was a gift tag which said simply, Tony. Tony pulled the huge package out of the corner where it stood resting against the wall. He tore off the brightly wrapped paper and stood there astonished. It was an electric guitar of the finest quality, one just like Drake had. He ran his hand over it and then looked around for what he knew must have come with it. He spotted it, a square boxed gift in the other corner. Again the tag read, Tony. It was the amplifier. He let out a whoop which echoed throughout the empty house. After a few minutes, he lay the guitar aside. He bent down and looked at the other packages. One said Johnny, another Drake. There was one for Pepi and Mac and then one that read Mama, which was a simple envelope sitting in the tree. Another envelope had Mac and Janet written on it. Suddenly, Tony's eyes were drawn to another package, a rather small one. It was addressed to Angelo. Tony took it in his hands and then closed his eyes. He put it down on the floor.

Suddenly one of the servants walked into the hallway, a maid. She smiled at him. "Sir," she said. "There is a lot of food left from Christmas. Would you like some turkey and--"



Tony turned and smiled at her. "Thank you. I'll come and eat it in the kitchen."

"Yes, sir. It will be about twenty minutes."

"Take your time," Tony told her and left the hallway to go upstairs and put his guitar in his room.

He wasn't sure who had actually bought him the guitar, but he suspected that it cost a great deal of money and was a gift from all of them.

He came downstairs again and went into the living room, noticing that the answering machine was flashing. He pushed the button. There were close to two dozen messages waiting. He sat down to listen to them, wondering halfway through if he should be playing Drake's messages at all, especially when Francine Thomson's message came on. "Drake," she said, "I know you said it was over, but God...I don't know. I can't sleep at night, and I'm so horny." There was a pause. "I guess I shouldn't be saying this on an answering machine. Anyway, call me, okay," she pleaded. "I need to talk. I love you." She hung up.

Tony didn't know what listening to that message made him feel more, guilty or jealous. Maybe it was a combination of both. Other messages came over the speaker, mostly from people who were calling to offer their condolences. There was another message from Francine Thomson where she simply said, "Call me," and then others from people Tony didn't know. A few celebrities called, and magazine people who requested interviews concerning the aftermath of the shooting or wanting to do an expose on the Russo family itself.

Tony sighed and pressed rewind. There was nothing



from Angelo at all, but shit, he had just left. It was just that he missed him already.



**This concludes Episode Six of The Russos.**

**Stay tuned next month for the exciting  
Episode Seven:**

- Angelo takes his band on the road.**
- The relationship between Johnny and Drake is rocky.**
- Mac and Janet plan their wedding.**
- Sandy comes to L.A.**





## *Meet Janet Smith*

**D**rake's ex wife and Angelo's mother. She is very much a part of the Russo Tragedy. She takes Tony under her wing when he comes to L.A. and disapproves of what Sandy did...taking Tony away from his father. She loves her son and her ex fiercely, and wants Angelo to go to university instead of playing in rock clubs. She will eventually be entrusted with the family secret when Sofia Russo unloads it on her and begs her not to tell.



## *D.J. Manly*

**D**J. Manly is fast acquiring a reputation for pushing the boundaries of male/male erotic romance. A reviewer once said of Manly's work that it was enough to give the reader "...third-degree burns in an air conditioned room..." and that's putting it mildly. If you adore gorgeous men who can't get enough of each other's bodies...if you like rich plots laced with steamy sex, thick and rich with aching need and glorious adoration and love...Manly's books will satisfy the craving and leave you panting for more.

"If I wouldn't enjoy reading it, I wouldn't be writing it," says Manly. "I like to tease...but I always please..."

To check out books by D.J. Manly, you can visit the website at [djmanly.com](http://djmanly.com), and take a taste...if you dare.

"Fair warning, I've been told that it's highly addictive."

D.J. .