

A man in a tuxedo is shown from the chest up, facing right. A bright blue light effect, resembling a film strip or a stylized 'X', is superimposed over his face and torso. The background is dark and out of focus.

**GABRINA
GARZA**

LEADING MAN

A red carpet is laid out on a white floor, leading towards a brightly lit entrance. The entrance is framed by two rows of stanchions with black ropes. The scene is illuminated with warm, golden light, suggesting a high-profile event or premiere.

Leading Man
by Gabrina Garza

Amber Quill Press

www.amberquill.com

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Leading Man
by Gabriela Garza

LEADING MAN

By

GABRINA GARZA

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CHAPTER 1

Xander looked over the script one last time and handed the dog-eared copy to Lillian.

"Well?" she asked, staring at him over the bound papers.

"See for yourself."

She pulled off her sunglasses and gave him an arched look. The first thing he'd noticed about her lately was her unusually dilated pupils and razor thin eyebrows, the color tinted to match her hair. This time she'd chosen cherry red, a delicious, artificial shade that suited her better than she ever could have imagined.

"What does that mean?" she mumbled, snatching the loose papers from his grasp. She sat back and gave him another look before she thumbed through the sheets he'd crumpled and examined scene by scene over a two-hour plane ride back to L.A.

She parted her lips as she read the first page, and flicked out her tongue, running it along her shiny, plump upper lip.

"Did you read it?" She glanced over the table.

"Yes." While she'd shifted her weight and called the flight attendant for drinks, pillows, a blanket, and a magazine that hadn't been used yet, he'd marked parts of the script he wanted his agent to see.

"All of it?"

"Every page."

"And?"

Xander shrugged. His opinion didn't matter and they both knew it. Their choice of movies was meant to build and sustain her career, not his. He was where he was supposed to be, not too far down and not all the way to the top, comfortably in the middle waiting for her to join him in stardom.

"And?" she prompted again.

"What do you think?" he countered.

If she didn't take this damn script out of his hands and look at it he was going to get up and leave her, just as he'd been rehearsing for weeks. He hadn't grown out his dark hair and gone scruffy for weeks to look the part and not take it. Longer hair and stubble wasn't him, at least not for long periods of time. The lower his maintenance level the better, especially when Lil needed to spread out her collection of serums, gels, and pills in the bathroom.

She frowned and pretended to read through the first few pages as though it interested her. If he said it was complete shit and they should pass, she'd be on the phone with the director gushing over how they couldn't wait to start filming.

"It's been a while since we've done something like this," he answered. It had been a while since they'd done anything at all. Attending parties didn't count as being part of Hollywood, at least not to him. He itched deep inside for becoming someone else, someone who didn't exist—but who would be immortal.

She reached for her martini and paused just as she clinked her grapefruit-pink fingernails against the glass. The wind threatened to blow her head scarf away, though she made no

attempt to fasten it around her long, thin neck. It would be more dramatic to watch the opaque black fabric blow away like a raven on a mission rather than to steal it back.

"Something worthy of our talent?"

He waited only a heartbeat before he nodded. "Of course. I think you've found your lead role."

Lillian smiled. "Darling," she said, reaching for his hand instead of her martini. From the corner of her eye she looked to see if anyone noticed her before she continued. "How I adore you."

* * * *

Lillian rolled across the bed, giggling to herself as she kicked through the sheets in her bra and panties. She looked as though she were drowning, her hair in her eyes, her arms fighting against black satin.

"You know what we need? We need someone to play with us again."

Xander swallowed. They needed something alright, but adding another person was just another body to cover up what was underneath their relationship.

"Maybe you're right."

"Another woman this time. Would that make you hot, Xander? Me and another woman all over you, letting you fuck us over and over again."

"You're too good to me," he murmured.

"I want a baby," she said under her breath.

He stood in the doorway with his arms crossed and watched her slide her bra straps down her shoulders. She

played with her nipples and spread her legs wider as she arched her back and giggled, attempting seduction and youthful sexuality. Neither worked for her.

"Did you hear me, Xander?"

He leaned against the doorframe and looked past her at the sheer curtains barely hiding a perfect ocean view. The sun had all but disappeared, leaving her to bask in the reddish glow of twilight.

"I want a baby with your beautiful smile and dimples," she said. "Did you know that? God, I thought for sure I was pregnant this month. I can't believe between you and Raul I'm not having twins. Maybe the test was wrong."

His breath hitched, the unfamiliar name finally latching on to the image of a waiter Lil had brought home several times. He'd catered a party for Gwyneth and Chris and another event for Jen and Ben, which was how Lil had gotten his number. She'd brought him home in hopes of creating sensation in the tabloids, but the pop princesses always had top billing when they managed to run over camera men on a weekly basis.

The threesome, however, should have made headlines. The raw, uninhibited nights spent in their darkened beachside house had given him weeks of jerking off in the shower, imagining it was Raul sucking him off while Lil watched, then Lil blowing Raul while he fucked the shorter, muscular waiter. Every moment of their time together had been sinful and erotic, a memory painted out in perfect detail he wanted to relive again and again.

"I need a baby, Xander. Everyone has been in the news for their recent pregnancies. We need this," she said, sounding like a little girl whining for a Barbie doll.

Raul's caress still haunted him and he shook off the fantasies. The bite marks down his torso had disappeared, but he could still hear Raul's voice, the words murmured in Spanish that could have either been nonsense or true love.

"We're not ready for a baby," he said under his breath.

"I am. I've been ready for you to fuck me good and hard." She slid her panties down her slim hips and spread her legs, her toes pointing at the ceiling. She sucked on her index finger, then rubbed between her legs, her head thrown back in pleasure.

A childhood spent like a carousel of talent shows and dance auditions had given her grace and absolutely no shame or inhibitions. Every word from her wide mouth had always been scripted, a lie woven from the moment she was old enough to talk.

Xander clenched his hands at his sides. Any man would want her day and night, if only for a personal plaything. She belonged on a fifty-something bachelor's private yacht, floating around the Mexican coastline with lines of coke at her disposal and rich old men admiring her young, tight body.

"We've got a film to shoot," he said.

"So?"

"So you can't be knocked up during filming, Lil. You said you wanted to do all of your own stunts. Pregnant and stunts aren't a good combination if you want the baby to survive."

She rolled onto her stomach and ground her hips against the mattress, groaning as she wiggled her ass in the air. "I'll shoot all the nude scenes first, before I get a bump. And I won't get hurt. I know I won't."

His nostrils flared. Whoever had come up with the phrase "baby bump" deserved to be flogged. A bump sounded harmless, almost fun and carefree when the reality was lifelong commitment. Eighteen years of raising a child, not a few weeks of covering a bump with loose clothes. Bumps could be mended with bandages and ice packs. They went away easily. The sort of bump Lillian wanted would lose its novelty well before birth—but long after she could legally have an abortion. Even if he wasn't a practicing Catholic he still didn't like the idea of getting her pregnant just so she'd have her way.

"We're not ready."

"I'm ready."

"Then..."

Anger flashed into her narrowed eyes. "Then what?"

The gate to their relationship creaked open, allowing him a moment to peek outside of the life he'd known with her. If they broke up, an easy film shoot would become a war zone or Antarctica with her blowing him off each time he passed by. She'd throw tantrums, the kind that would make even the food service employees clear out of her way. For someone so petite she could be destructive if she wanted to really stir something up. He still had a burn mark on his arm from where she'd thrown a cup of coffee at her makeup artist and hit him instead.

But Lil and Xander calling it quits before a major movie? Paparazzi would undoubtedly fill the tabloids with their feud, though by the time the movie came out the sensation would die and it would be just another summer blockbuster.

He looked away, afraid to tell her they should find other people. *Career before sanity, image before heart and soul, sell out to make the damn ends meet.* Nothing new there.

"Then we have a lot of talking to do."

"We talk now." She sat up and pulled on her panties, her tousled hair in her eyes. "Right now, Xander."

"We have sixteen Yorkies with a dog sitter because you can't take care of them. How are you going to take care of a baby? Leave it with poor Mary? With your mother? With the neighbors?"

"I won't have sixteen babies."

"Lil, listen to me..."

"How about a nanny? Can you imagine having a nanny in the house? Or how about one of those exotic nannies? What do they call them? *Au pairs*? I can just see her in pictures with us and the baby right here in this room. Now that would be adorable. I can't even begin to imagine how much *People* will pay us for the first pictures."

"There are no babies."

Her face crumpled. "You come over here and tell me why you never want to touch me anymore."

"Lillian." He groaned. "If I didn't want to touch you, we wouldn't have been late for our meeting with the director."

"What's wrong with me?"

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Xander put his hand out to her, his palm up in supplication. "It's not you. There's nothing wrong with us, either. We're just under a lot of stress right now."

"I want a baby. Why don't you understand that? I'm a woman, it's what I'm meant to do."

"We have a movie to shoot together, something perfect for you. Remember? We need this for you. When we're done, we'll talk."

Tears welled up in her eyes, though her sudden bout of drama ended with the doorbell ringing. She cleared her throat and combed her fingers through her hair before she climbed out of bed and ran down the hall toward the front door, leaving him to watch her.

She allowed the door to fling open as she stood in her bra and panties, feigning surprise. Xander hesitated, afraid of who might be at the door. Knowing her, she'd ordered dinner just to have the delivery boy ring the doorbell while they were going at it. He'd learned nothing made her hornier than an unsuspecting college kid walking up to the sound of her moaning and yelling for him to fuck her harder and deeper.

"You're late," she said.

"You're, umm," came a male voice with the slightest hint of an accent. It sounded like faded Scottish or a terrible attempt at faking British. Whoever stood at the door gave a nervous cough. "You're not expecting company."

"Of course I am." She paused and let out a high, flirty giggle. "Oh, you mean I'm not exactly dressed for company."

"I guess that depends on the company." Another nervous laugh. "Well, I'm sure you'd like to get back to that company. I'll try you another day."

"Am I making you uncomfortable? Oh, please say nudity doesn't bother you."

The guest stammered for an answer. "Bother me? No, of course not."

"I'll throw something on, but please come inside. Xander and I are so glad you made it. We really wanted to discuss the part with you and just make sure Howard has the right vision for our movie. Believe me, sweetheart, there are some directors who can just ruin what could be your best role."

Xander stepped into the hall and tilted his head to the side, wondering who in the hell she had invited over to their house.

"Lil?" he called.

With a bright, cheery smile reminiscent of child pageants, Lillian ushered in a black-haired stranger. "Darling, did I forget to mention Angus McNamee was joining us tonight?"

"Who?"

The kid—and with his dimples and Superman curl he was definitely a kid—offered his hand and a shy smile. "Mr. Michaels. Wow. I've enjoyed several of your performances. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Lillian clung to Angus. "This is your sidekick—or at least he's auditioning for sidekick."

"Mr. Howard offered me the role. We're going over the script ... right?" He towered over Lillian, a mass of young,

muscular flesh with a natural olive complexion and dark green eyes to push him over the edge from handsome to hot.

Xander realized he was staring but made no attempt to look away. Despite good looks, the majority of actors he met were so full of themselves it detracted from their appearance.

But this kid begged for an audience and Xander was more than willing to allow their guest to captivate him. Blood rushed through his veins, curiosity willing him to step forward for a better look.

"We will," Lillian said with a casual air. "As soon as we're all comfortable."

"I've, uh, got a little time."

"Angus, you can't rush things when you're with me, do you understand?" She took his hand in both of hers and stared at him. Xander had seen her do this before during fan meet and greets when she wanted to seem honest and sincere. "I'm a woman who demands all the time I deserve. When you're with me, you focus on me."

"Yes, ma'am."

Xander looked him over, wondering if he was sincerely this trusting or if he was a damn good, natural actor. He played a very convincing role of an up and coming Hollywood heartthrob, his voice soft, his demeanor puppy dog friendly, and his expression relaxed and inviting.

Lillian would rip him to shreds in a heartbeat.

"Why don't you come out back with us? We can have a few drinks and look over what the screenwriters think we should do. Then we'll decide what's best for the three of us."

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The kid shifted his weight and met Xander's eye. "I'll do whatever the two of you want."

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CHAPTER 2

Lillian brought a pitcher of margaritas outside and shimmed her way poolside in a white lace dress thin enough to display every curve and leave nothing to the imagination. She bent over the table and gazed into Angus's eyes, giving him a dreamy, longing look he didn't seem to notice.

"You've got a nice place," he said, turning toward Xander with an uneasy expression.

"Thanks," Lil replied, scooting her chair close to Angus. Her nipples stood straight out, two large, erect peaks straining to be noticed. "I'll give you the tour if you'd like."

"Whatever you want, Miss Dell."

She closed her hand over his and giggled to herself. "You must call me Lil."

"I'm not really sure if I can. I'm a big fan of your work."

"Don't be silly, Angus. It's what all of my closest friends call me and I just know while we're filming you and I are going to be very close." She batted her eyelashes and looked around as though searching for the words to her invisible script. William Shatner would have been proud of her overacting abilities. "You know, Angus, there's just something about being someone else that really speaks to me. Ever since I started out I've just felt really connected to all of these unborn souls."

"Excuse me?"

"I've blogged about it for my fans when they begged to know my secret. Oh, I just have to educate you on what it's

really like to be an actor, especially when you've found Ho-ho-um. It's completely transformed my life. Finally, I feel comfortable in my own skin."

Angus shot Xander a look, to which he mouthed, "Hollywood religion."

The kid nodded and turned his attention back to Lil. "I'd love to hear about it some time."

"I'll tell you everything, but you need to do something for me. You promise me something." She linked her smallest finger with his and leaned into him, her breasts smashed against his chest. "No secrets between the three of us. I want you with me down to the very essence of your soul."

"I'm an actor. I don't have a soul."

Xander chuckled and licked salt from his finger. At least the kid had a good sense of humor, which might save him from movie hell with Lillian. "You got that right." He looked up into Lillian's fiery gaze and twisted expression, the one she reserved for him when he overstepped his invisible boundaries.

"The Ho-ho-um has allowed me peace in a time of ignorance. I must cleanse myself." She gave him one last dirty look, stood, and pulled her dress up over her head. Angus sat back, speechless, and Xander gritted his teeth as she sauntered toward the pool and dropped her dress on the deck.

Her body flowed like liquid, her hips swaying, her hair falling in waves over her shoulders. Xander took a gulp of his margarita and wondered when the hell he'd stopped reacting to her. It had been at least six months since he'd felt like

sleeping with her—and he only felt like climbing into bed with her after a night of drinking. Half a year of his life had disappeared because he didn't love her, but he didn't quite know what he should do. Six months of closing his eyes while she sucked on his dick. Six months of doing her from behind because he didn't want to see her face. He didn't hate her—at least not yet—but he didn't love her as he should have. He didn't know if she was the problem or if he had issues bigger than they could handle.

She stood on the diving board with her hands over her head, her breasts lifted, her nipples stabbing at the cool night air. He looked at her and had no desire to touch her the way she demanded he love her—and he had no idea why. Physically she was amazing, her trainer had seen to that despite her love of fried chicken and buttered biscuits.

He could still remember the first time she'd been featured in a magazine, how he flipped through glossy pages and couldn't believe they shared a bed. Tall, lean, and animated, she would have been famous if not for the hundreds of bigger sharks in the Hollywood pool. She didn't have enough to make her stand out, though she had enough to make a normal guy grateful for every second of her.

Except Xander, and he wasn't normal. He was an actor, which he considered just a fancy word to describe someone who'd eluded the nut house.

"I am free," she murmured, bouncing ever so slightly. "Free to be myself, to love myself, to be seen as worth loving."

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She bent her knees and dove into the water, graceful as though she were liquid meeting liquid. Beneath the surface, where she was in a different, safe world, Xander turned and looked at Angus.

"If you're not followed by cameras yet, you will be after this."

* * * *

"I'm going down to the Kaba-ho-ho-um." Lil wrapped a towel around her lithe frame and stared inches above Xander's head. He'd managed to down two margaritas in silence while he and Angus looked on, watching as Lillian did desperate laps across the length of the pool. All the while he'd been afraid she'd grab him by the hand, lead him away, and demand he prove his love to her up against their bedroom wall. The only way he could screw her now was if he had enough tequila in him and he'd guaranteed himself a good performance.

Xander looked from her to Angus, who sat clutching an empty glass. "What about the script?"

"I'm toxic," she said, pinching the bridge of her nose. "I cannot go over a script feeling like you've poisoned me."

Xander took a breath. Whatever he said would undoubtedly be the wrong thing. "I'm sorry."

"I'm grateful the Eternal Light has guided me away from your negativity. In time you'll see just what sort of black, gaping, putrid hole you really have."

Angus bowed his head. If he stayed on for the movie, he'd have some wild tales to tell the rest of the crew. Another L-Dell Drama, as the tabloids had dubbed it.

"May the pure, loving light be with you," she said, bowing to kiss Angus on the forehead. She took his hand, unfolded his fingers, and kissed his palm. "You have a very generous soul. I can feel it. Hopefully you'll open yourself to me and we can be pure, white love for one another."

With that, she squared her shoulders and walked away, leaving her towel pooled on the ground.

"That was intense," Angus said once they heard a car engine start. "I had no idea."

"Yeah."

"She's very ... unique."

"She is."

"And apparently receptive to ... religion."

"That's Lil."

Angus tilted his glass back despite already emptying the contents. He struggled to occupy himself for a moment before Xander felt sorry for the guy and scooted his chair back.

"Are you also leaving?" The kid prepared to stand, but Xander motioned for him to stay seated.

"I'll be right back."

A strained expression settled on Angus's face but he didn't budge, and Xander stepped into the house, grabbed the half-empty bottle of tequila sitting on the kitchen island, and returned outside.

"Here." He tilted the bottle toward Angus. "You're going to need this."

"What about you?"

"I'll take whatever you don't finish."

A warm, wide smile spread across his face, creating dimples so deep and inviting that Xander immediately looked away. Someone needed to harden this kid, and Lillian was the perfect person to sink her claws into tender flesh and bleed him a little.

The kid tipped the bottle back and took a gulp, then handed the bottle to Xander, who gripped it in his right hand, hesitating to drink straight from the bottle. Lately photographers had snapped hundreds of photos of him drinking out of bottles in what looked like secluded locations. Movie Mania and StarGazer.Net had both speculated he was a raging alcoholic and coupled pictures of him boozing it up with innocent shots of Lil shopping for flowers at the local farmer's market. Even if the property was monitored by security, he didn't want to risk being caught.

"I've never done an action movie before," Angus said suddenly.

Xander nodded and squinted at his companion. He had no idea what in the hell this kid had done before. For all he knew he was a pro at commercials or he'd gone from a rock band to movies. Musicians turned actors always pissed him off since he'd worked his ass off for his career and didn't think singing a hit song in front of a crowd made someone an actor.

Angus reached for the bottle and took another drink. "Most of my work has been dramas, lots of period pieces, tons of costumes, swords, horses, and all kinds of other authentic

crap. I'm looking forward to jeans, a dusty shirt, and some fake blood."

"Good."

"Oh, and I hope to God they give me one kick ass gun. You know, the kind that looks so ridiculous it could blow up a Hummer."

"I think that's a given in a movie like this."

Angus hesitated. "Look, I don't expect you to know who I am, Mr. Michaels, and I'm not trying to show off. I just want you and Lillian to know I'm serious when it comes to acting."

Xander cringed. Just because Angus was in his mid-twenties it was no reason for him to throw around a word like "mister." Forty was the new thirty anyway, and at the age of thirty-seven he was practically still twenty—or at least that's what he liked to think.

"Xander is fine. I only throw around Mister when it comes to the folks who write the checks."

The kid took another drink and placed the bottle on the table. "Sorry, it's just a little overwhelming to be here. But now that I'm here, I want you to know I've got a reputation for being very professional on set. And off set," he added quickly.

With the bottle just out of reach, Xander sat back and examined the kid. Corruption could be fun or it could be devastating. He mentally put Angus into Raul's place in their threesome and imagined all of the ways he could corrupt the young actor. They could start off at the patio table and move into the pool where they'd be hidden behind a ten foot stone

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wall, safe from prying eyes. There he could get to know that strong, hard body.

Xander cleared his throat. "Well, if you stick around long enough maybe you could teach us a thing or two."

"Not if I keep drinking that tequila."

"Why's that?"

Angus reached for the bottle and took one last gulp. "Don't worry. It's nothing bad."

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CHAPTER 3

He'd been a fan for quite some time, but Angus already knew he couldn't blurt out how he'd memorized all of Alexander Michaels's lines from *Make It Rain Blood* or how he'd practice his facial expressions in *The Rising*.

Tequila burned through his veins and sent fire along the back of his throat, liquid courage in a time when he needed to sit down and shut the hell up. If Xander gave him some advice or talked about his experience filming, that was cool. If he got up and walked back inside leaving him alone, that was cool, too.

"So you're playing..." Xander ventured.

"Buck."

Xander squinted. "Ah, that's right. You had all the lines I wanted."

"And you have all the actions scenes I wanted."

Xander gave a laugh, which seemed to finally put him at ease. "Trust me, you'll have all the action you want."

Bottle in hand, Angus searched Xander's expression, wanting to find hidden meaning in the actor's words. This wasn't the time or place but he wanted action. Lots of action. Inappropriate, unadulterated, no holds barred action that included Xander Michaels telling him what to do and how to do it. No matter how he tried, he couldn't imagine issuing orders to *the* hottest man he'd ever met. Even with his longer hair and scruffy appearance he was gorgeous.

"I hear they're still tweaking the script, so who knows? In the end I might end up with the best lines and you'll have all the action scenes."

He nodded and shifted his weight. The tequila had definitely made its way into his blood stream and had started a conga line directly toward his crotch. Alarms went off in his mind, but he still had reasonable control. God, how he wanted Xander to tweak him.

"That's cool with me." He took another sip. "As long as they don't write me out, I don't care what I have to do."

Xander eyed him. "Really?"

He forced himself to take another sip and buy some time before he could answer. If he didn't watch it, he was going to say something he'd regret. "Within reason, of course."

"Of course."

"What's the craziest thing you've ever done to get a role?"

Xander reached across the table and snatched the bottle out of Angus's hands. He made no apologies and poured tequila down his throat. "Goddamn, I should have brought out a lime," he said, shaking his head as though that might dull the burn. "What did you ask me?"

He already knew his cheeks had flushed from embarrassment and he couldn't possibly turn the evening into an interview session. "Forget it. I'm just making conversation."

"Craziest thing I've ever done to get a role? Was that what you asked?"

Angus nodded. All he wanted to do was hear him talk.

"Probably show up at an audition two days before they started seeing people and waiting on the street."

"Really?"

"Really." Xander moved in closer and took another sip. "I brought my guitar with me and made about fifty bucks playing on a street corner. It rained all fucking day and the wind blew all night long. It was hell."

"But it was worth it."

Xander grunted. "If I'd gotten the part it would have been a fantastic story. Instead they decided to go with Mark Wahlberg."

"So you and Lil were just starting out?"

Xander frowned and took another long swig from the bottle. "We weren't Xander and Lil. It was just me. She had her own gig."

"I keep forgetting you've done a lot more films than she has."

"We've done two together. But she spent a long time in television, so she's got a longer resume."

He nodded. One was a blockbuster comedy, a goofy role for Xander and the perfect role for Lillian, who looked angelic in her part as the bride left at the altar. Critics thought it was crap, but audiences came to the theater in droves of screaming middle-aged women who couldn't get enough of Xander. His underground fan base made sure they banded together and attended his movies three or four times in the same day for opening weekend to get his movies noticed, giving him a somewhat frightening but dedicated bunch of

single women, neglected wives, and bored stay-at-home moms.

"I guess I just think of the two of you as the perfect pair."

The bottle slipped from Xander's grasp and hit the table hard. Despite all he'd had to drink, Angus snapped his hand out and reached for the bottle, grabbing hold of Xander's hand instead.

Tequila splashed out virtually unnoticed as the two men stared at one another. His mind went into overdrive, his muscles no longer responding now that he had Xander in his grasp. The only part of his anatomy ready to act was his growing, painfully hard cock.

"We're not together," Xander rasped.

It was impossible to gauge his tone and Angus stammered. "Oh. I didn't know. I just thought ... when I got here ... the two of you are always..."

"I know. It's ... it's ... it's really none of your—"

His hand had locked into place over Xander's, keeping them connected even though Angus was certain he should let go.

"Look, that's cool. None of my business."

Xander gave an easy nod and pulled his hand and the bottle away. He took one last sip and emptied the contents.

"Can you stand?"

Angus started to get up but paused, his balls aching. If he stood now he'd salute Xander, showing him just how excited he was to meet him—and how happy he was to know Xander and Lil weren't really together.

"Give me a moment."

"You probably shouldn't drive home." Xander took a breath and swayed as he stood. "We get a lot of paparazzi around here and they'll nail you if you swerve on the road. That's not how you want to make a mark, kid."

Shit. Now he was drunk and marooned on an island he shouldn't have visited in the first place.

"I'll be fine. I'm buzzed."

Xander pushed against his shoulder, rough and commanding. He bent forward, breathing onto Angus's cheek, holding him in a way that seemed far from threatening. "The hell you are."

If only he could meld into Xander's embrace and tell him he was right, he was more than buzzed, he was flat out drunk off his ass and willing to pay the price. The higher the better in this instance, just as long as it got him that much closer to Xander.

Angus let out a chuckle. He should have just nodded and allowed Xander to lead him off to the guest room, but he wanted to push this a little farther and see what would happen.

"So you got me drunk. Now what?"

Xander grunted. "You got yourself drunk."

"Is this what you and Lil do? She invites them over and you make sure they keep coming back?"

Xander paused. "God, you're a talkative one. Get inside the house. You need to sleep it off before you do something stupid."

Frustrated, he stood and leaned against Xander, purposely grinding his cock against the older actor's side. He wanted

Xander to feel him, to know him just as Lil had said. No secrets between them. "I don't know if I can sleep this off."

"Come on." Xander patted him on the back and led him toward the sliding glass doors. A blast of cool air made him shiver and cling to the man helping him inside. "Before you pass out."

"It's not going to be from tequila," Angus mumbled, reaching down to adjust his throbbing cock. He knew he shouldn't have done it, but he was far from caring. His face rested in the crook of Xander's neck, his nostrils flared to the musk of a man he needed to touch.

But Xander didn't give him the opportunity to play out his fantasies. With a fistful of Angus's shirt, he dragged him inside and slammed him into the wall.

He was certain his brain rattled in his skull. His vision blurred, his knees threatening to give out on him.

"Do you want to be caught?" Xander growled, pinning him in place.

As far as Angus was concerned, he was already caught, trapped in the place he wanted to be most. Despite his swimming head, he took hold of Xander's shoulders and pressed his fingers into the long, hard muscles, clinging to him like an anchor.

Xander shook him hard, his teeth gritted, expression twisted. "Do you?"

Angus lowered his gaze and shook his head. Sick and twisted as it was, he had a fetish for being controlled and Xander's harsh tone fed an inner need. Verbal punishment made him almost as horny as the tequila.

"You're not going to come in here and fuck shit up for me," he growled.

Angus angled his head and caught Xander's lips, kissing him briefly before the more experienced and sober actor rammed him against the opposite wall. The look in Xander's eyes turned dark and he held Angus by the throat, pressing hard until Angus began to struggle.

He managed to pull himself free from Xander's hold and collapsed on the bamboo floor, gasping for air. The cloud of drunken stupor wasn't nearly as dense now that he'd been brought to his knees—and not in a good way. Through glassy eyes he followed Xander's muscular calves up to his toned thighs and the defined bulge in his shorts. He stared a moment, figuring it couldn't hurt him at this point if he daydreamed about unzipping him and sucking him to life.

Xander bent at the waist and frowned at him. "Look, I'm not trying to be a bastard." His tone softened, his expression filled with remorse. "But you don't know who's watching you out there. One wrong photo..."

His breath caught in his throat and he nodded, knowing Xander was right. He wasn't a big enough name to draw much attention, but Xander had built a loyal fan base. If photos hit the Internet of them kissing or fondling one another he could ruin Xander's career. Gay men didn't make lead heartthrob roles. They didn't draw box office crowds to action/adventure films like Xander Michaels.

"I'm sorry."

"Most people are when it comes to *Reserva*."

"To what?"

"It came in a basket at the Academy Awards last year. You just finished the best tequila on the planet, my friend."

Xander rearranged him like a doll and sighed. "Eight years in an oak cask wasted on, well, being wasted."

"I'm not wasted."

"Drunk, bombed, trashed, snockered, whatever you want to call it, you're there."

Angus allowed his gaze to dip below Xander's belt. "You forgot horny."

"Jesus Christ," Xander mumbled. "You're a piece of work, kid."

"I'm not trying to ruin you. But I think you're family ... aren't you? Or at least you want to experiment. I don't really care if you are or aren't as long as you want to."

He didn't answer, but he didn't protest, either. That seemed like a good sign. At least Angus knew Xander wasn't completely against the idea of the two of them messing around.

Xander hauled him to his feet and pushed him down the hall. "Stop talking. Walk, and just stop talking."

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CHAPTER 4

The kid didn't protest being escorted down the hall and into the guest room, which was really more of a half-assed meditation room filled with soft lighting, various religious deities like Anubis and the Hindu god Ganesh. Incense had made a permanent, stale mark on the specially imported worm-friendly silk Lillian had to have in order to find balance in her life.

"Here we are," Xander said, dropping Angus on the bed. He wrestled off his shoes, but that was as far as he was willing to go. Undress him any further and he wouldn't want to stop, and there was no way in hell he was taking advantage of someone like this. It was way too easy and God knows he didn't do anything easy.

One glance at the clock and he exhaled hard. Two in the morning and Lil hadn't come home yet, which was a bad sign considering how his libido had skyrocketed. She was probably cleansing herself in the Ho-ho-um bath house, having two bald-headed men in red loincloths scrape cool oil off her naked body and then float her around a pool while they reinforced positive energy back into her.

It had always sounded like some sort of hush-hush orgy to him, but he didn't want to think about Lil or her new religion. He had enough to think about, starting with a young actor nearly passed out cold on the bed. The only part of him still responsive was, naturally, his incredibly noticeable stiff dick.

"If you need anything else, you're going to have to do it yourself."

"Thank you." Angus reached for him and clasped his wrist. He pulled Xander down until he knelt over him, their bodies barely touching, connected only by the unmistakable pulse in the air. "Thank you for not killing me."

Xander grunted. He bent down, feeling Angus press up against him when they should have been separated by several feet, if not walls and a door. They were dangerously close and getting closer, both of them inching toward a morning filled with regrets.

"I'll take personal responsibility for helping you get this way," Xander mumbled.

"I'll be out before morning."

Angus snaked his arm around Xander's neck and pulled him close, kissing him on the cheek. Perfectly innocent yet sinful all the same, like a juxtaposition Xander should have seen for miles.

He swallowed and relaxed, his body draped over Angus. Fingers swept through his hair and along the back of his neck, trailing down his spine. He couldn't decide if he wanted to inhale the scent of his lover or exhale, groaning in appreciation. Instead he froze, his heart hammering, his mind reeling. He'd been with Raul and Lil, but he'd never had a man all to himself—a perfect, muscular male body to appreciate all night long.

His brain told him to stop, but he turned his head and brushed his lips against Angus's soft, warm mouth. One languid, damp kiss left him trembling with desire.

This was way too much, more than he could possibly handle. He shook his body loose and looked Angus over one last time. So much for professionalism on the kid's part. God, it would have been easy to crawl into bed and give Angus a reason to stay.

The kid struggled to sit up, but Xander pushed him back down. "Just get sober before you go anywhere," he mumbled. At least he could keep him out of the papers and out of jail. That was about all the satisfaction he could get out of the night.

Angus rolled onto his side and snuggled into his pillow, taking on a pose for a cologne advertisement in a magazine. Even while completely out of it he had the natural ability to use his long, lean body to his advantage. He could almost imagine the women in his fan club howling over the two of them when the movie hit theaters. Some of the younger ones might jump the Xander Michaels's ship if they could see Angus McNamee like this, sprawled out in bed for a nightlong romp.

"Tell me one thing," Angus said, his voice deep and soaked in a Scottish burr.

"What, Angus?"

"Tell me you want me."

"I want you to go to sleep."

The little bastard smiled, his kissable lips daring Xander to come back for more. "I want you, Xander. I want you to experiment with me."

He waited until he was pretty sure the kid wasn't a flight risk before he left the room. Yeah, he was way in over his

head and more than willing to drown with Angus. If he'd been certain the kid wouldn't remember a damn thing by morning, he would have told him he'd done a lot more than experiment with men. He'd wanted Raul all to himself, in private quarters far from Lil, but he didn't trust their third-party lover. As long as it stayed the three of them, it was kink, but if he ventured off on his own it was cheating with a man. It made him a completely different entity to go it alone, something most of his fan base wouldn't approve of or support.

To hell with what they wanted. He'd given them fan interviews, autographed items for charity auctions, and his privacy at dinner and out jogging. He'd bled himself for them to see, and each moment of his private life became theirs. Not once had he denied a fan a picture or a chat no matter if he was coming out of Starbucks or off a movie set. No matter how tired, angry, or depleted he felt mentally and physically, he'd shown his gratitude even when they overstepped their boundaries.

He'd seen the nasty retaliation from fans when the actor they adored blew them off. People were hardcore and passionate about their celebrities, and many of them were nut cases who traveled from movie set to movie set for the chance to talk with the cast. Ever since he'd started out as a no name extra, he'd presented himself as a grateful, caring actor who sought the approval of his fans.

But he couldn't keep it up forever, and it seemed the more he did or said the more they wanted from him. They could go screw themselves if they wanted more from him—and then

he'd be back to where he started, practically living out of his car waiting to get his big break.

It wasn't worth it. It would be good, but it wouldn't be worth it. There were too many expectations he needed to live up to in order to survive.

His breath hitched, the house around him warm and quiet, the perfect sanctuary for a religious experience all his own. Lillian wouldn't be back for hours, possibly days. She'd never know—which was part of the problem. Sneaking around behind her back wasn't his gig. He couldn't even take the last of the wheat grass without fear of being caught by Lil.

Xander leaned against the hallway wall and closed his eyes, still envisioning Angus spread out on the bed, waiting for company. This could be so much more satisfying than wheat grass, but total suicide in every aspect of his life. He could want, but he couldn't have.

He sucked in a breath and slowly let it out, attempting to release his frustration in a healthy and productive way, just like his therapist had told him. He had a feeling the know-it-all blonde had never, ever felt this consumed by one kiss. If she had, she would have told him to go for it and get it out of his system.

This sure as hell wasn't good.

* * * *

Angus had no idea how long he slept, but he woke in darkness, his mouth Sahara dry and his head still floating like a balloon losing helium. He sucked in a breath, smelling mint on the pillowcase, which brought back a rush of memories.

"God." He groaned, remembering vaguely how Xander had put him to bed. He had no recollection of getting up and driving himself home, which must mean he was still with Xander.

Against his better judgment, he turned onto his side and patted the soft, cool sheets. Disappointed with his discovery, he exhaled and stared at the ceiling a moment, wondering if anything had happened. Even drunk, he had a feeling he would remember being with a man like Xander Michaels. Their combined musk would have permeated the air and clung to his flesh, a welcomed reminder of how good they were together.

His dick sprang to life and he reached into his jeans, adjusting his throbbing cock. It did nothing to ease the aching, which had become more prominent now that his mind raced with images of the man who'd carefully ushered him off to bed.

He squeezed his eyes shut and exhaled, imagining his hand belonged to Xander and they were both resting comfortably in bed. Face to face on the bed, they'd be kissing and whispering as they memorized each other's body. Angus bit his lip, imagining Xander fondling him with gentle, loving strokes. His stomach tightened, his fingers slowly moving from the tip of his pulsing dick down to his testicles.

The air conditioning kicked on and the curtains rustled just enough for him to see the lights surrounding the in ground pool. He thought of Lillian swimming laps and Xander watching her poolside, his gaze fixed on her but his mind wandering. Angus noted the frustration as he nursed his

second margarita and studied Xander. He hadn't meant to stare, but the man was even better looking up close and all he could do was fantasize about having him all to himself in the pool.

With nothing but water between them, they could float and hold onto one another out in the open. Only a wall would separate them from camera lenses and prying eyes, a barrier of rock keeping out the rest of the world.

He wanted Xander to let him in, allow him an hour or two to do whatever he wanted. Greedy kisses could be exchanged for even greedier bites and strokes until making love became a dangerous and satisfying game. He wouldn't leave until he'd left a mark on that perfect body. Nothing satisfied Angus quite like showering the next morning and finding a bite mark on his stomach or scratches along his shoulders. Xander might have Lil Dell in his bed every night, but that wasn't what he wanted and Angus knew it. He'd sensed Xander's undeniable interest from the moment he'd walked into the house, the subtle look of wanting in his eyes. It reminded him of a dog separated from a bone, which seemed like the perfect self-diagnosing analogy. Freud would have been proud of him in his post-drunken state.

Screw psychology. Fantasizing about Xander in the pool had made him rock hard, his balls tight and ready to unload. He quickly unzipped his pants and struggled to shove them down his hips. With his legs slightly bent, he wrapped his fingers around his dick and began pumping, imagining it was Xander getting him off.

"Harder," he said through clenched teeth, spitting on his free hand to lube each long stroke. The tip of his sensitive dick slapped against his stomach and he groaned through his teeth, his breaths coming harder and faster. His hips pumped in time with his hand, his prick stiff and ready for squirting into his lover's open mouth. Sperm dripped down the tip, sensations growing into an undeniable frenzy of sexual need.

He imagined holding Xander's head steady and telling him how to suck him off. Ever since he'd first accepted himself as a gay man, he'd never been the one to initiate or issues orders. He was always the one seduced, a plaything for another man.

But he wanted control over Xander, one long, fulfilling night of pumping his dick into the back of his lover's throat, an evening of kissing his way down Xander's body and between his muscular legs.

He closed his eyes and imagined Xander enthusiastically sucking him off, taking him in deep strokes and ending with a flick of his tongue along the sensitive head. No matter how much he trembled and begged, Xander would play with him, tempt him closer to the edge, then pull back and draw it out a while longer. No matter what he said to Xander, he knew his lover had complete control of his pleasure.

The sprinklers outside came to life one by one, a spray of water hitting the windows just as pleasure overwhelmed him. He groaned, knowing no one would hear him, and settled back in bed, his muscles turning to liquid as he sank into the body warmed comfort of bed.

Leading Man
by Gabriela Garza

Yet he still couldn't get Xander out of his mind. The guy was right there, still naked in his fantasies, still wanting more. Or maybe that was just the tequila talking.

What a first impression he'd made at the start of the biggest movie in his otherwise uneventful career. So much for presenting himself as professional to one of the leading men in Hollywood, one who'd most likely blow him off during the rest of the shoot.

"Blow me." He smiled to himself, hearing the buzz of a television somewhere in the house. The speakers rattled the walls just enough to guarantee him no more sleep. "If only."

He ran his fingers through his hair and sat up, wondering what time it was and whether or not Xander had the house to himself.

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CHAPTER 5

Xander had spent four hours on the couch dozing as he waited for Lil to return, but he knew she wasn't coming back, not until nightfall. She'd make a statement by staying away all night long, telling him how much he'd hurt her. Maybe she'd come home with a new tattoo or a new religion. Maybe she'd shave her head or accidentally lose her top as she grabbed a cup of coffee.

Or maybe she'd leave him and get it over with.

He lounged on the couch, taking sips of silt water imported from New Zealand while he watched threesome scenes from a DVD Lil had picked up months ago. She'd been photographed leaving the boutique with a shiny black bag filled with lingerie and sex toys, a sort of forced version of Madonna shopping for Guy Ritchie.

With the volume turned down, he played his own musical soundtrack over the images of a woman on all fours, her ass up in the air as a man with an unnaturally large cock filled her. Another man stood in front of her with his hands on his hips as she sucked him. If only the camera panned up to get a look at the guy's face and show how much he enjoyed her pumping him.

Angus had left him with a life-threatening hard-on that was only complicated by watching porn. He could already imagine Lil standing in the way of them much like the blonde in the movie, pleasuring them both when they could have pleased each other.

He crossed his legs at the ankles and shifted, his dick begging for attention as though he needed convincing to masturbate to porn. With a grunt he reached for a bottle of massage oil and squirted a dime-sized amount onto the palm of his hand. In nothing but briefs, he lay on the couch and wrapped his hand around his cock, lubing himself from base to tip in one fast, hard stroke.

His toes instantly curled, his breath leaving his body in one long, shuddering sigh. Suddenly he could picture Angus on his hands and knees, sucking him with unabashed enthusiasm.

No man had ever gone down on him, not even Raul. The most his threesome partner had ever done was kiss the head of his dick before he guided him into Lil, but he'd wondered what it would be like to have a male lover swirl his tongue around the cap and down the sensitive ridge.

He closed his eyes, envisioning Angus with his waves of dark hair and the little Superman curl in front. He had a feeling his innocence was all a ploy, a skin he'd shed the moment the bedroom door closed.

Over and over he stroked until his lubed fist jerked hard on his swollen dick. Angus would encourage him to come in his mouth and he wouldn't disappoint. Hips grinding against his imaginary lover, he rode through hard waves of a sudden, overwhelming orgasm.

His body locked him in place, imprisoning him with the force of pleasure. He'd never experienced anything like it alone and definitely not with Lil.

He forced himself to breathe, to open his eyes and make sure the world around him still existed. The movie played on,

the scene cutting to something between two women and a man. Bassnectar still played on the speakers, the techno beat racing as fast as his heart.

And standing over him like a ghost was a shadow in the house moving closer, discovering him in a moment he wanted to be alone.

"Lil?" he said, his voice hoarse. He struggled to find the remote and turn down the music, which would give her a better forum once she decided to either start out screaming or crying.

"It's Angus."

His heart threatened to drop into his stomach. Now who was the one being unprofessional?

"What the hell are you doing up?"

"Uh, I heard the music," he said, sounding disoriented and a little embarrassed.

Xander finally managed to turn down the volume and adjust his penis through briefs, though he knew he'd been caught. It didn't quite take a detective to figure out what a man in his underwear was doing watching porn on television with a bottle of oil at his disposal.

"You need something?"

"No. I mean, I don't think so." He pointed down the hall. "I just used some of your mouthwash. I hope that's okay."

Xander nodded. Now that perfect mouth just begged to be tasted. "Fine."

Angus looked over the couch at him, his lips pursed, his eyes averted away from Xander's gaze. He stared directly at

Xander's dick, which had decided to be his very worst enemy and pulse back to life.

Xander tried to shift but there was no hiding the obvious. He wanted Angus in the most painful way possible and no matter what he did, he couldn't deny it. Still on his back, he studied Angus's expression, watching for a hint of false intentions. He'd learned to look for the signs when Lil wanted him and when she just wanted sex. Most of the time it didn't matter, but right now he wanted to see pure lust and desire in Angus's eyes, an urge that could only be sated by one person.

Angus clasped the backrest, still staring at Xander's briefs. His Adam's apple bobbed, his breathing deep and noticeable. Xander followed his gaze down to the wet spot on his underwear where the head of his dick strained against white cotton. Angus leaned forward and Xander's dick twitched, his stomach quivering in anticipation of looking turning to touching.

He offered himself up, his knees slightly bent, his back arched. Wordlessly Angus reached down, the tips of his fingers barely touching Xander's chest. With gentle, loving strokes, he trailed down to Xander's stomach and back up again, taking great care to trace his way around two erect nipples.

Everything moved far too slowly for Xander's taste and he reached up, grabbing Angus by the wrist. The younger man looked down at him, his mouth gaping open, his eyes wide.

"I'm sorry, I thought—"

Xander gave a hard tug and pulled Angus over the edge of the couch. He fell without an ounce of grace, grunting as their bodies collided. Arms linked around Angus's body, he spread his legs, cradling him between his thighs as he searched his face.

The initial surprise wore off and Angus returned an easy smile, his body relaxing in Xander's grasp. He lowered his head and kissed Xander's neck, breathing hard against sensitive flesh.

He felt way too damn good, way too forbidden—and Xander had no intention of stopping. With his fingers stroking through Angus's dark hair, he ground his hips hard against his lover's, wanting him to know he couldn't resist.

"Is the door locked?" Angus questioned.

"Hmm?"

"The door. No one's going to walk in on us, are they?"

Xander brought Angus's lips to his and kissed him hard, welcoming the sharp tang of mint on his breath. "No one has a key."

"What about Lillian?"

She was the furthest thing from his mind, but he shook his head. "She's not coming back."

"Ever?"

Why in the hell did he insist on talking at a time like this? The only thing in need of discussion was who was blowing who first or how fast he could get Angus out of his clothes.

"Not until later."

"You're sure?"

He reached between their bodies and unzipped Angus's jeans. If this didn't shut him up, nothing would.

"Positive."

Angus groaned in his ear and kissed his temple. Words turned into unsteady breaths and he lifted himself up, allowing Xander to shove his pants down his hips.

His stomach was hotter than Xander imagined, the heat of his body forcing him to register exactly what was happening. He was with a man now, all alone in the house he shared with Lil.

Shut up, stop thinking it over, and just enjoy it.

He ran his thumbs over Angus's flat, hard abdomen, feeling the ripples of muscle beneath soft skin and wiry hair leading between his legs. God, he felt good, a juicy treat Xander couldn't wait to bite into and savor. This had to be how Eve felt before she had her first taste of the apple, the anticipation threatening to consume her.

He wondered if she'd ever reconsidered, if she'd been a better person than he was for wanting another man this bad. Sucking in a breath, he dug his fingers into Angus's sides and held him in place for a long, slow kiss.

This was the makings of a very fine forbidden fruit, one he wanted to bite and suck all night long.

Angus supported his weight with his arms and kissed his way down Xander's neck and chest, taking a slow, languid route that threatened to drive Xander mad. He wanted to push on the back of his lover's head and guide him to his throbbing cock, but he didn't want to force him. The torture was a necessity, a part of the game he hated and loved.

Whatever Angus wanted to do to him, Xander would accept just as long as he didn't stop.

The stubble on Angus's cheeks made Xander inhale sharply and bite his bottom lip, anticipating the feel of a bristly chin scraping against his lower stomach. Sperm dripped from the slit of his painfully hard dick, his breaths coming faster, his heart pounding. Barely able to keep his eyes open, he stole a glance and watched as Angus pulled his briefs down and inhaled him.

Xander braced himself, watching as Angus took his time and played around his throbbing cock. He teased Xander's balls, nuzzling his face in trimmed pubic hair and kissing Xander's hips until he groaned with pleasure and frustration. His dick twitched with each kiss, his testicles tight and aching for relief.

Smoldering dark eyes met his and Angus kissed him at the base of his penis. He exhaled hard against Xander's stomach, the heat of his breath causing Xander to groan.

Angus smiled, his tongue flicking out to trace a hot, wet line from Xander's sac to the tip of his plum-colored dick. He flattened his hands against the couch cushions and watched, wanting to memorize every second of how it looked and felt when Angus slowly took him into his mouth.

"You taste like cherry cola," Angus murmured against his skin, each word written out in the scrape of stubble against Xander's leg.

Xander stole a glance at the bottle of oil, thankful he'd found something edible by complete accident.

"When I was in college, that's all I ever drank," Angus said. He drew a circle around Xander's belly button with his tongue, his gaze still fixed on Xander's face. "By the gallon."

Xander swallowed hard and pushed his hips up to Angus's parted lips.

"Don't worry," said Angus. He swirled his tongue around the head, then gently sucked on the ridge. "I'm willing to taste you all night long."

Xander's head rolled back, and he groaned as Angus took more of him into his mouth. Every muscle in his body tightened, and his lungs constricted until he couldn't breathe. Angus gripped his thighs as though he needed to pleasure Xander and wanted him to know it. He forced himself to lift his head and watch Angus suck his dick. Immediately Angus met his eye and lapped sperm from the glistening tip of Xander's cock, groaning as he took his first real taste.

They moved together slowly, with Angus taking him in inch by inch. He rubbed the tip of his tongue along Xander's stiff, sensitive prick, then closed his lips around him and sucked him from the head down to the base.

Xander groaned, voicing his pleasure in the otherwise empty house. At last he could react without fear of Lil telling him he hadn't paid enough attention to her. At last he could watch, mesmerized by the sight of another man kneeling over him for his pleasure. At last he could be himself in his own house, no expectations to act like someone else.

He cupped Angus's cheek, caressing the shell of his ear while his partner took him in and allowed him to slide out to

the very tip. All the while Angus watched him, groaning softly with each thrust as though he needed more.

Angus rubbed his thumb along Xander's sac, petting him gently until Xander couldn't stand it a moment longer. He needed this more than Angus would ever understand, more than anyone would ever know.

Xander reached down, grabbed Angus by the hair, and thrust deep into his mouth. He pumped in hard, short strokes, each thrust of his hips made in desperation. Shudders of pleasure replaced the build-up of frustration he'd felt since the moment he discovered Angus standing over him, watching him, admiring him.

He couldn't hold on a moment longer and gave in to his primal needs. With each hard plunge Angus milked him dry, drinking every drop of seed Xander offered.

They lay together for a long moment, with Xander attempting to catch his breath, and Angus kissing his way up his body, a hot, damp trail leading from Xander's stomach to his mouth.

"I've never—"

Angus silenced him with a long, hard kiss to the lips. He tasted like mint, salt, and pure sex, the perfect combination. "Don't say you've never done this. I don't want to be your first."

"You're not my first."

Angus smiled. "Good."

Xander ran his fingers through Angus's hair and searched his face, wondering what the hell they were both doing here. His heart began to race all over again, his hands trembling.

"We should go over the script," he said for the sake of saying something.

"We should."

Rather than push him away, Xander continued to hold him close. "I should probably shower."

"I don't mind watching."

He grunted. This kid was nothing but hours of fun and trouble, and each sounded equally inviting. He wanted Angus there with him in the newly renovated bathroom, either watching him through the frosted glass stall door or beneath the cascade of water with him, running a bar of soap over his chest and down his stomach.

"You're not getting shy, are you?" Angus murmured.

"How shy can I possibly be lying naked beneath a man?"

Angus chuckled and kissed him again, a longer, deeper kiss that made Xander want to bolt the door and spend the rest of the day alone with Angus, away from the script and obligations, away from the juxtaposition of reality and fantasy.

All he needed was a day to submerge himself in his deepest, dirtiest, most satisfying fantasies. Just one night and he would have it out of his system, like a kid doing pot through college and then giving it up and growing up.

All he could do was hope he could crawl back out at the end and be what Hollywood and his fans expected.

"Let's hit the shower."

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CHAPTER 6

Angus followed Xander down the hall, enjoying the view. A guy in briefs with an ass like that deserved all the attention Angus could give him—and with the house all to themselves he intended on appreciating every inch of that long, lean, hard body. He already knew their time together in the living room was only a taste of what he wanted to devour.

"You're staring at my ass, aren't you?" Xander asked over his shoulder.

"Yep."

"And you're not going to try to hide the fact?"

"Nope."

"And you're probably having unclean thoughts right about now?"

"That's the only kind I have."

Xander opened the bathroom door and turned on the light, revealing a spacious room with cerulean blue tile walls, probably imported, and white towels hanging from fancy racks. In the corner, a fountain built into the wall sent a constant sheet of water over textured glass.

"Whoa." He looked around at the tidy space. "This is bigger than my room as a kid."

"Mine, too."

"Where was home for you?"

"Outside Chicago. You?"

"Glasgow 'til I was five."

"Explains the accent."

He shrugged. "Don't remember much, though I guess I retained enough to talk like a local. Both of my parents liked to travel. My dad liked having a big family and made sure he had one just about everywhere he went."

Xander raised a brow.

"He was an unfaithful bastard who wrote these hippie chronicles of growing up in the sixties. My mom and I spent a lot of time moving around Europe and, trust me, the rooms were about a third of the size of this."

"Was she in the army or something?"

He laughed. "Far from it. She played in a folk band and my dad followed her around, fertilizing various women in various countries with his extremely hardy seed. I'm pretty sure he wrote about his conquests in some of his books."

"I take it you're not his biggest fan."

Angus shook his head. "Not really, but we get along okay. I moved to Providence, of all places, with my dad and stayed until I was eighteen."

"What happened to your mom? Band broke up?"

He shook his head. Fortunately, the media hadn't done much digging around for his past, though when they did, he knew the inevitable skeletons would surface. "She got this crazy idea that she could fly and jumped off a hotel balcony in London when I was thirteen. She was on the twenty-seventh floor."

Xander fully faced him, his lips parted. "Shit. I'm sorry."

"I wasn't there when she died. I actually didn't know about it until I was sixteen."

No one had asked him about his family for a while, at least not like this. The last time he'd talked about his parents was in a therapy session with his psychologist Nikki, who'd started seeing him shortly after he learned of his mother's death. Though she made her practice solely around teenagers, primarily gay teens, she'd continued to see him because she'd known his mom.

"Does anyone know?"

He bit his lip and shook his head. "I'm not important enough for TMZ to care yet, but I imagine it'll come out eventually." He paused and looked away, realizing how unprepared he was for discussing his private life. With so many aspects of his life to hide from others, he didn't know what he had left to share. "Nothing I can do about it."

When he finally looked at Xander he found sympathetic eyes staring back at him. "You just need to have the right statement at the right time. That way they won't play some dumbass clip of you over and over again on TV and YouTube. Trust me, if they catch you saying something asinine, they'll use it."

"Speaking from experience?"

"Of course. I once likened my career to Cary Grant."

Angus pursed his lips but couldn't hide his smile. "How modest of you."

Xander nodded. "Someone made an animation of me spouting off lines from Cary Grant movies. I have it saved on my Mac."

"Nice."

Music started to play, a slow but steady thump of bass, and Angus jumped. "What the hell is that?"

"I think it's trance. A soundtrack automatically starts when the sensors in the bathroom pick up movement for more than three minutes."

"You have a soundtrack in your bathroom?"

"If I'd picked out the music we'd be listening to classic rock."

Angus nodded and stared at the ceiling where the speakers were hidden. "With a mini fridge and a microwave, I could live in here."

"Uh-oh." Xander crossed his arms over his chest. "You're getting way too comfortable here."

Without hesitation, Angus turned and put his arms around Xander. "Soon you won't be able to get rid of me," he murmured.

Xander turned his head to the side and gave a shy, seductive smile. From where they stood, Angus could clearly see their joined bodies in the mirror, the way his arms fit over Xander's shoulders as though they belonged together.

But he felt a hint of resistance and wondered what it would take to convince a man like Xander Michaels to give in to him completely.

Suddenly he needed to know how to claim his lover. He kissed Xander's shoulder and ran his hands down from a broad chest to a flat, hard stomach. Xander quivered to his touch, breathing harder, more urgently.

Inch by inch Angus trailed his fingers down Xander's abdomen and into his briefs, watching as Xander twitched in

response. Lips pursed, he groaned as Angus rubbed his thumb over Xander's growing cock, drawing circles over the slit.

Angus explored him slowly, paying special attention to each inch of his lover's thick, hard dick. He worked his way down, smoothing his fingers over pulsing veins until he cupped Xander's large, heavy sac.

Xander drew in a breath and turned his head to the side, his lips parted, searching. Angus kissed him softly once, then focused his attention on their bodies in the mirror, the living, breathing artwork he created with one simple touch.

With a sigh Xander reached back and touched Angus's side, his grip firm and needy, just the way Angus wanted him.

Don't you dare hold back. Tell me you want this. Tell me you want me.

Angus angled his head and nipped at Xander's ear until his lover inhaled sharply, his spine straightening. Taking the initiative, Angus grabbed Xander by the wrists and pulled his hands behind his back, forcing him into submission.

Xander wrenched to the side, flailing momentarily while he watched Angus hold him in place. Heavy-lidded eyes drank in the view and told Angus everything he wanted to know. He wanted this, God how he wanted this, but he wasn't ready to admit it. Yet. It was going to take some convincing on Angus's part—and he was more than willing to persuade his new plaything.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Xander demanded.

"I know what I'm doing." He hauled Xander toward the mirror and leaned him over the sink. With one hand securing Xander's wrists, he rummaged through the bamboo cabinet until he found an open box of condoms and lube.

His dick twitched to life now that he'd found everything he needed from the hot guy, the protection, and the lubrication to bring it all together. He looked from his handful of treasures to the man he held captive and gave a smile. Normally he was the prey pinned against the sink, told to bend over and wait until he was given orders. Not this time.

This time around he had Xander anticipating his next move, waiting to see what would happen next. Angus smoothed his thumb over Xander's wrist and kissed the back of his neck, smelling sex in the air.

"You're getting into the shower, turning on the water, and washing me from head to toe."

"With what?" Xander asked.

Lips and tongue would do nicely, though he'd settled for warm, broad hands sliding down his wet, soap-covered body. Angus shrugged, appreciating Xander's question. "Be creative."

"And what makes you think I'm doing what you say?"

"Because you want this."

Xander tilted his chin down as though that might hide his growing smile. "We shouldn't—"

"But we will."

Xander visibly swallowed and Angus gave him a moment to protest, to end it all with one shake of his head and the words *man, we really can't do this*.

"Do you know who I am?" Xander rasped, his tone playful.

He gave Xander a tug and pulled him toward the shower, a condom and lube in hand. He set the items down on the glass shelf in the shape of a hand and undressed Xander quickly, tossing his briefs aside. With one sweeping glance, he looked over his forbidden prize.

"Right now, you're mine."

Xander looked over his shoulder, his nostrils flared. "Oh yeah?"

Eyes narrowed, Angus nodded. "Turn on the water."

"If I don't?"

Angus nudged the back of Xander's knee and forced him down until he knelt on the tile. He released Xander's wrists and bent over him, gripping his shoulder.

"You can guess where this is going."

He stood to Xander's side, his aching cock straining against his underwear. Xander studied him with unabashed interest, his gaze drawn to the wet spot on Angus's white briefs.

"Undress me," he commanded.

Xander's nostrils flared, his gaze flickering up to search Angus's eyes. Without a word he moved to face Angus and placed his hands on Angus's hips. He hesitated, drinking Angus in with his lusty gaze as he slid his fingers under the waistband and gently pulled down Angus's briefs.

His cock bobbed once Xander freed him, the swollen, plum-shaped head beaded with pre-cum. Angus ran his fingers through Xander's dark hair and drew him forward, guiding him toward his throbbing dick.

Xander inhaled and nuzzled Angus at the apex of his thighs, his breath hot and inviting, his lips soft and searching. He touched the tip of his tongue to the head of Angus's dick and circled him. For one long, agonizing moment he closed his lips over the tip and rubbed Angus with his tongue, shooting lightning bolts of pleasure through him until he was certain he'd fall to the tile floor beside Xander.

Angus groaned, his body trembling to Xander's slow, easy touch. He wondered who needed this more, who could barely stand waiting for the next move. His eyes had nearly closed, his head tilted back as Xander kissed his way up Angus's stomach and chest.

Once Xander stood, he turned on the water and sent a steady cascade from several built-in showerheads onto their joined bodies. They clung to one another, sheets of water drenching them. With damp hair in his eyes and droplets beading on his lashes, Angus drew Xander into his embrace and kissed him slowly, exploring the taste of his mouth.

Finally Angus felt his lover give in a little more to his desires and he smiled against Xander's lips. Reaching for a bar of soap, he massaged Xander's tense shoulders, kneading bunched muscles.

Xander groaned softly and massaged his thumbs along the notches of Angus's spine. He ran his fingers between Angus's cheeks, grabbing his ass roughly, urgently until they stood lodged up against one another, no space between them.

Xander rocked forward, his legs spread wide, his hands searching down Angus's body. He wished he could see the

way Xander explored him, wish he knew what went through his partner's mind.

Xander's hard, thick cock pressed against Angus's stomach and he reached between their bodies, his hand slick with soap and hot water. Lips pressed to Xander's mouth, he pumped him from base to tip, feeling him quiver with each stroke.

He had Xander now, inching past the point of no return. With every intention to have him completely, Angus penetrated Xander with his index finger, pumping slowly into him, each thrust bringing Xander's breaths faster and harder.

"Tell me you want me to fuck you," Angus murmured.

Steam rose around them, enveloping them in their private haven. The music continued to swell, the sound muffled by the rush of water and their combined groans. The musk of sex and soap scented the air, heavy as the feelings churning inside of Angus.

"I want you to fuck me," Xander replied. He reached back and pressed the lube and string of condoms into Angus's hand.

"Right here?"

"Right here."

"Right now?"

Xander nibbled on Angus's bottom lip and gently pushed against his chest. "Tell me what you want me to do."

Angus wiped the back of his hand over his eyes, then bit off a foil packet from the line of condoms Xander had handed him. Xander kissed and nuzzled his way along Angus's neck and stroked Angus's testicles, fondling him as though Angus

needed more encouragement. He'd wanted Xander from the first moment he'd seen him on the screen.

"Turn around," Angus instructed, enjoying his control over his partner. "And open the shower door."

Xander snapped his gaze to Angus, his mouth swollen, a bead of water clinging to his lower lip. He'd never appeared so masculine and sexual, so open and willing. This had been the expression the director had called for in one of his earliest films, the look of curiosity and obedience in his role as a slave. Now he'd nailed playing the real part of a slave—Angus's slave for the moment, a willing partner to do whatever he was told.

"I want to watch us in the mirror," Angus replied, his voice low and hoarse. Xander hesitated a moment longer than Angus wanted, which earned him a rough push to the shoulder. "I want to see the expression on your face when I'm inside of you."

Xander's lips parted and slowly curved into a grin. He nodded and turned away, his feet shoulders' width apart. He pushed open the shower door, then grasped the edges and stood before the mirror, his long, lean body covered only in water.

Angus took his time and admired the view of the sculpted body before him. He kept his gaze fixed on the mirror while he explored Xander's powerful shoulders and strong arms.

Xander turned his head to the side and watched from the corner of his eye as Angus gripped his hips and pressed against him, teasing Xander with a kiss to the neck. He trailed his hands around Xander's hips, his fingers spread, searching.

He heard Xander inhale, his stomach quivering beneath Angus's touch.

Angus pushed his hips forward, the length of his cock rubbing between Xander's tight cheeks. He flattened his hand against Xander's stomach and steadied him, hearing him groan in anticipation.

Still focused on the mirror, he brushed the tips of his fingers along the head of Xander's rigid cock, teasing him a moment longer. He felt Xander immediately strain and rise onto the balls of his feet, silently begging for more.

Damn was he needy, just the way Angus wanted him. He squirted lube onto his fingers and rubbed between Xander's tight, round cheeks, causing Xander to lean forward. Slowly, Angus filled him, stretching him wide open with two fingers until he felt the hardened bulge of his prostate.

Xander groaned and exhaled, his chin tilted down, water dripping from his hair. Angus glanced over Xander's shoulder and watched his lips part and quiver in pleasure.

Holding back another moment became impossible and Angus tore open the foil packet. With a trembling hand he rolled the condom down his throbbing dick and locked his hand on Xander's hips. He breathed hard, feeling Xander tense in anticipation.

"You better hold on," he told Xander.

"You better give me everything," Xander murmured.

Angus bit his lip and pressed the head of his dick to Xander's puckered flesh. Still holding Xander by the hips, he thrust forward and pushed into him, gliding easily inside. Xander grunted in response, his fingers tightening against the

sides of the open shower door, then relaxing as he grew accustomed to their fit. Angus knew the sensation well, the initial discomfort followed by pleasure. He moved slowly, allowing Xander a moment to adjust to his size.

Once he felt him relax, Angus established his rhythm, filling Xander deeper with each thrust until he disappeared completely inside his lover. His gaze flickered from the mirror image to the length of his cock driving harder and harder into Xander.

Angus leaned over him and reached between Xander's legs, fondling his balls. He gripped the base of Xander's dick and rolled upward, sweeping his palm over the head of his rock hard penis.

"Christ," Xander breathed, leaning farther forward.

Teeth gritted, Angus closed his eyes and moved in time with each pump of his fist. The music swelled, the bass throbbing as though the soundtrack had been specially designed for them alone. He didn't want to think about it, but he wondered if Lil had purposely picked songs to seduce Xander, dragging him into the shower and giving him no choice but to fuck her.

He wondered if every time after this, when Xander and Lillian were alone, if he'd picture himself just as they were right now, enjoying what no one would have suspected from either of them.

"Tell me you want me," Angus said between his teeth.

"I want you."

"Say it," he demanded.

"I want you, Angus."

At the rate they were going they had no choice but to tumble over the edge together, lost in mutual, forbidden pleasure.

Xander tensed again, his body locking in place. With one hard thrust, Angus made no attempt to hold back a moment longer. He wanted to feel Xander come in his hand as he reached climax deep inside his lover.

With a long, loud moan, Xander gave Angus exactly what he wanted. His hot, sticky seed spilled into Angus's hand, spasms wrenching his body with the onset of orgasm.

Angus smiled to himself, enjoying what he could do to Xander, the way he made it impossible for him to hold off. He gave a shuddering breath and paused, the build-up of frustration disappearing in hard, body-numbing waves. All he could do was hold on to Xander, afraid to let go when he'd found exactly what he wanted—what belonged to someone else. In the midst of all his pleasure, he hated Lillian Dell for having him every night.

If only making love to Xander could be written into the script—now there was a scene Angus could do over and over, each take better than the last. He'd purposely stumble over a line as long as it meant he could find his way into Xander's arms all over again.

He pulled out and reached for Xander, wanting to turn him around and kiss him full on the lips, then start all over again. This time they could exchange roles, with Xander in the role of the aggressor bearing down on his all-too-willing lover. They could rehearse all day long for a movie only the two of them could script.

"That was amazing," Xander said against Angus's lips.
"Better than ... anything ... anyone."

Angus smiled and wrapped his arms around Xander, completely satisfied by his answer. Of course it was better than anyone or anything because this was what they both wanted, what came natural to them. This was the way it could be during the film shoot—and after if Xander wanted.

"Tell me what you want," he said suddenly.

"I think you know what I want."

"Tell me."

"I want you in the shower, on the couch, in the bedroom, and wherever the hell I can have you," Xander murmured.

"However many ways, however many times."

Angus cupped his face and looked into his eyes. "How long do we have?"

Xander's expression faltered. "As long as we can manage."

"Behind your girl's back?"

"She's not my girl."

"Then what is she?"

"It doesn't matter what she is. On the outside, we're what we need to be. That's all that matters."

"Matters to who? Your fans?"

Xander got in his face, his mouth twisted. "We can't do this, not the way you or I want. Away from everyone ... that's all I can give you. If you want more, then you're in the wrong fucking business."

It seemed a little too safe an answer, but Angus nodded and ran his thumb over Xander's lower lip. Almost immediately he settled down, his expression softening. Angus

knew exactly what Xander meant and consoled himself by exploring his partner's hard body, wanting him all over again. He would settle for having him whenever possible, whenever they could sneak away. Eventually he could peel Xander out from beneath Lil and take him away completely, at least in the way it mattered most.

"Look." Xander sighed and tried to pull away, but Angus held him tight. "You don't know what you're getting into."

"Yes, I do. I'm getting into you."

Xander chuckled. "That sounds like a line for one of your romantic period pieces."

With a nod, Angus looked away. "Yeah, I think I've uttered that line several times."

Xander grabbed him by the chin and held him firmly. "Tell me you're serious. About this."

Angus looked him in the eye. "I'm serious. I know it's early, but I'm serious. If nothing else, I want to at least try."

Rather than kiss him again, Angus watched Xander reach back and turn off the water. As the last drops cascaded down his hard, naked body, Xander frowned.

"The alarm's going off," he muttered, stepping out of the shower while Angus looked on. He grabbed a towel and tossed it to Angus before securing another fluffy wrap around his hips.

Angus squinted, unable to hear anything over his racing heart and hard breaths. "What? I don't hear anything over the music."

"I do." He hit the keypad on the bathroom wall and turned down the overhead radio volume. "We have an alarm set. If

Leading Man
by Gabriela Garza

you don't punch in the code after five minutes, it goes off to let us know someone's standing out there." He gave a heavy sigh of annoyance and raked his fingers through his damp hair. "Get dressed. I'll go see who it is."

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CHAPTER 7

Xander pulled on a pair of jeans and a clean T-shirt and stalked toward the front door. In the back of his mind he had a feeling it was Lil pulling some stupid act of forgetting the code even though it had been the same since the moment they moved in. Any four-digit code for entryways, computers, or other pertinent information was always her birthday, despite it being way too easy for the general public to guess. It didn't get much easier than that, but she could fake it when necessary. Maybe they both were experts at that.

He peered through the door viewer at the crowd of photographers milling around. One guy with his hat on backward and an oversized button-down shirt smashed his cigarette into one of the planters and shifted his weight while another snapped photos of the windows.

The invasion of privacy made Xander's skin crawl. He hated having to close the curtains and watch his every move just in case someone had decided to follow him. One time he'd dropped his fountain drink when leaving the gas station and had immediately heard about twenty-five clicks from digital cameras. It had pissed him off more than he expected, mostly because it embarrassed him. He'd screwed up on something small, a moment that shouldn't have mattered, but instead it would hit the Internet within hours and people who didn't know him would leave their comments about how stupid he was and how Lil deserved better. It didn't matter if they dumped coffee on themselves or dropped their food

while driving. They weren't constantly scrutinized for living their lives. They didn't know what it was like to have people constantly watching for mistakes.

Stars, he'd thought as he slammed the car door shut, they're just like us.

What the hell did that mean? Of course he was just like them, only less interesting. There was no facet of his life that called for constant monitoring, no daily activity that warranted people standing outside the door. If they only knew he could spend hour upon hour playing solitaire or vintage Atari video games.

For a split second he wondered if anyone had caught him with Angus, though he already knew no one could see them inside the house. At least he could keep that private.

"Mr. Michaels!"

He jumped, startled by someone calling his name followed by at least three individuals pounding on the door. "Come talk to us! It's about Lillian."

Xander closed his eyes and took a breath. Alone with Angus, he'd almost forgotten about her. He'd wanted to forget about her, at least for a while, but here she was again, forcing her way into his mind.

He stared at the closed door and shut his eyes. She made him miserable, absolutely miserable. If he could have just erased her, he would have taken her out of his life completely and drawn a line she couldn't cross.

Taking a breath, he opened the door to hundreds of flashbulbs and cameras shoved in his face.

"You guys have five minutes before the police show up," he announced, knowing they'd consider his words total crap and continue photographing him until he shut the door.

"What do you have to say about Lil? Is this the will of the Eternal Light?"

He calmly leaned against the doorframe and scanned the group of photographers, recognizing several of them from car chases with Lil behind the wheel, pretending she was Britney. Maybe she'd raced away with another man, deciding to stir up controversy on the set and leave him.

"What do you want me to say?" he asked. "I'll make it easy so you don't have to twist my words around."

Amidst the mumbles and chuckles, the sea of photographers shifted, pushing one another for the best shot possible. Through the crowd they managed to push a crinkled photograph of Lillian up to the front, which fell onto the porch at his feet. It was Lil topless on the bar with her hand over her stomach and a beer between her thighs. He glanced down at it, then back at the crowd. What the hell was she doing? Getting herself arrested?

"I'm going inside."

"Tell me about what you plan to do first," someone shouted. "Take her to rehab or to shop for the baby."

Xander looked just above their heads and gave a wave of his hand. "Go find Angelina and Brad. I think they're adopting again."

He turned, his heart hammering, his body numb. His hands trembled, his mouth gone dry with the sudden realization that he could shut the door but he couldn't escape.

They'd captured him on film, the image of him standing at the front door to accompany the picture of his topless counterpart showing off what they'd pass off as her baby bump.

Fragments of thoughts passed through his mind, all leaning toward running as far and as fast as possible. She'd be on every magazine cover, on every trashy celeb website and television gossip show. For the next nine months she'd be everywhere, talking about her pregnancy, about her new movie, and about how she wanted to thank her religion—whichever one suited her for the moment.

"Goddamn it," he said under his breath.

Hands grasped his shoulders just as he felt as though he would fall. He leaned into Angus's familiar body and sank into his embrace, welcoming the feel of his arms and the heat of his breath.

"What happened? What's wrong?"

His mind refused to sort his thoughts into words, and he sank to his knees. He worried about her, just like he swore he never would. She could do whatever the hell he wanted as long as it didn't involve him.

But now it did involve him in the smallest, most unimaginable way. Just when he was ready to walk away from her, she reeled him in and refused to let go.

"Xander," Angus said firmly. "What's wrong?"

"Lil," he rasped. He forced his gaze to Angus's face. "She's pregnant."

"Shit," Angus said under his breath. "Are you sure?"

"No." He swallowed hard and took a breath. A tribe of photographers and reporters had come to his door, which was hardly the most reliable source. "If she's not, she will be."

Angus turned his face away. "If she is, do you think it's yours?"

He turned away, his hands balled into fists. Raul had never come inside of Lil, not as far as Xander knew. There was always a chance she'd sneaked away ... just as he'd done. "It doesn't matter."

"Of course it matters."

He waved his fist at the door. "It doesn't matter to them. If I split now, guess who's going to look like the selfish bastard?"

Angus licked his lips. "So prove them wrong. Get a DNA test and show them you're not involved."

"She won't do it."

"Which will prove your point."

"She'll sell the story if I ask her for proof."

Angus exhaled hard. "She'd do that?"

For a long moment he didn't speak. "She needs this," he mumbled.

"What do you need?"

Xander briefly closed his eyes. The kid didn't know what it took to build and maintain a career. Relationships could work like business contacts, a way to leapfrog from mid-list to A-list by being seen with the right person. For years he'd been Lil's anchor, but now she would jump ahead the moment she started blabbing about her unexpected miracle, the baby she knew they'd always have together.

"I need you to get out," Xander said under his breath. Angus stared down at him in disbelief. "Just like that?"

"It's nothing personal."

"Yeah." He stood and looked away. "I can see that."

Xander raked his fingers through his hair. What felt like the start of a killer migraine began to pulse in his temples. "I need to do this," he said quietly, still uncertain of what he had to do.

"For your career or just out of the goodness of your heart?"

"Because it needs to be done."

"You don't love her," Angus said suddenly. "I could tell the moment I saw the two of you together. Even you said you're not with her."

"It doesn't matter what I say. I need to take care of this."

"What about you?"

"What about me?"

He climbed to his feet, his mind still buzzing with thoughts. The first thing he needed to do was call her and find out where she'd gone, then play her game and encourage her to return. She wouldn't come back without a small amount of coaxing, especially if there was a crowd. Naturally she'd blame her erratic behavior on hormones and use every opportunity she had to play up her condition and her career. What better story than appearing on late night television talking about how she'd manage to do chase scenes on a runaway train while six months pregnant? She'd straighten out her life and go from train wreck actress to a working mother who doted on her new baby.

"I should have known she'd do this," Xander said to himself.

"What are you going to do?" Angus asked.

"Be what she needs."

"For how long?"

And just like that he knew it was over before he'd grasped hold of it, the beginning of the bittersweet end. For now he would have to wait, to put himself on hold all over again. For now it would have to be enough to look at Angus and think of what the next scene could have been. For now he'd have to let Lillian take the lead.

He turned and grabbed Angus by the shoulders, fully intending to kiss him on the lips one last time. "We're actors. We can do this for as long as it takes."

"I'm not acting," Angus said under his breath, his lips inches from Xander's. "Turn it off. Tell her it's over and turn it off."

Xander lowered his gaze and pushed away, knowing if he took one last chance he wouldn't be able to deny himself. Lil counted on him. The baby—if there was a baby yet—would count on him. Angus would survive without him. Hell, he'd be doing the kid a favor by walking away before they created a whole new mess.

The tabloids would never let him live it down if he left Lillian for a man. He'd never have a starring role again—he might not have another acting job for years if he walked away now, leaving Lil to fend for herself. In a year or two, when the kid could crawl, he could suffer the big public blow up, but not now. Right now everyone would side with her. Right now he'd

be a selfish bastard getting cold feet once he knocked up his long-time girlfriend.

"Xander? Are you listening to me? For Christ's sake, leave her. You don't even love her and I know you sure as hell don't trust her. Turn it off. Leave her."

He stumbled away, afraid someone would see them together, afraid truth would come bearing down on the life he'd assumed. Angus was right, he didn't love Lil, but this wasn't about love. This was necessity. This was basic survival in a twisted, artificial jungle of scripts, second takes, and junkets.

"I can't turn it off." He stared at the door, wondering if the paparazzi still lingered or if they'd moved like a hungry pack toward bigger and better celebrities. "And you need to leave."

"Don't do this."

"You have a career to think about."

"My career is fine."

"How easy do you think it'll be to get the role of the tough action hero or the romantic lead if everyone knows *this*?" Xander asked, gesturing toward the bathroom down the hall.

"Just because you leave her doesn't mean anyone has to know."

But they would. Somehow, some way they'd slip up and be seen a little too close together. In some exchange of words they'd lead the press on to the inevitable conclusion and rumors would go flying. His fans would start to leave open letters to him on the Internet and his agent would have stacks of angry letters from women he'd never met expressing how hurt and betrayed they felt by him living his

life. He wondered what gave them the right to tell him how he'd fucked up their fantasies, why they lingered on his words and made him more important than their husbands, boyfriends, and children.

And then he thought about rumors being confirmed, of footage caught and sold, streaming across the worldwide web for everyone to see, including his parents. Xander wondered if Raul would step forward once the right amount of money was offered. He could just see that bastard telling the paparazzi how he always knew Xander Michaels loved men, how he'd been drugged, bribed, or threatened into a relationship. The headline played in his head: *Xander Michaels on Dangerous Downward Spiral*.

Even if he kept this a secret, he was already on a tornado's path to destruction, guilt and angst sucking him dry—and all because he'd chosen to be an actor. He hadn't made the choice to live out his life before a camera. Once he left the set, that was supposed to be it. No one was supposed to watch him every single day, criticizing his choice for breakfast or his partner in bed.

"Angus—"

He'd almost walked away when Angus grabbed him by the arm and reeled him in. For a split second he started to struggle, but Angus held him, refusing to let go. Soft, warm, welcomed lips pressed to Xander's and silenced him.

Angus deepened the kiss and dug his fingers into Xander's spine. He almost lost himself in one hot, damp kiss, imagining what it would be like to wake up to a kiss like that every morning.

"Xander, don't do this," Angus begged, his Scottish burr noticeable. He planted another soft kiss on Xander's lips before he released him. "Don't do this to yourself. Tell her it's over."

"Just like that?"

Angus nodded. "Just like that."

Xander's cell phone began to ring from the bedroom, the ringtone "Crazy Bitch" by Buckcherry. Wherever Lil had ended up for the night, she'd taken her phone and decided to call him. From a bar stool or her religious sanctuary no longer mattered. She could have gone to anyone but she'd gone to him and that had to count for something. At least he knew she wanted to try—even if it was for the sake of the looming press. He could follow a script with the best of them, only this wasn't a nine-month shoot. This could be a full eighteen years of his life, but if that's what happened, he'd suck it up and live it, this script he didn't fully believe in.

"This isn't about me."

"When will it be about you?"

Xander shrugged. "I'm not asking you to make promises."

"I want to know. When is this yours? When do you get what you want, Xander?"

"Not soon enough."

He took one last look at Angus and swung away to retrieve his phone, wondering if this would be the beginning or the end.

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Lee Avalone

Paranormal author Lee Avalone is new to gay erotica, but not to writing best-selling stories. Lee's otherworldly stories promise sizzle with a twist of the unusual and heroes ranging from demon hunters to vampires to ghosts. This is an exciting to new journey and Lee hopes to make many new friends along the way.

Feel free to contact Lee at Leeavalon@gmail.com.

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Don't miss Dirty Love, by Lacey Savage,

available at AmberHeat.com!

Isabel Warren wouldn't dream of defying the morality statutes that forbid women over forty from ever making love again. As a medical practitioner, she understands the need for laws preventing "dirty love." The S.O.S. virus of 2030 left most of the male population infertile and turned human DNA into something resembling a microscopic jigsaw puzzle. The virus itself is undoubtedly dangerous, but older women are perhaps the most significant threat humanity has ever faced.

Yet knowing what's forbidden and keeping her feminine urges under lock and key are two different things. Especially when Isy's most recent assignment requires her to run intimate tests on Connor Flynn, a man sixteen years her junior, who seems determined to prove she's not the monster

Leading Man
by Gabriela Garza

everyone else thinks she is. And if such delicious temptation wasn't bad enough, she's also got Trevor Jones to worry about. It seems he, too, is willing to risk everything to be with her.

Two sexy men, and one woman who could destroy them both ... if they don't destroy her first...

* * * *

Don't miss the next Calendar Boys—

September: A Simple Truth

Available at AmberAllure.com!

Charlie Labrecque has lived a lie for most of his adult life, choosing to marry a woman and father a child rather than come out of the closet. But now that he is divorced and sees his young son only half the year, he decides it is time to start being honest with himself. And his friends. Starting with his best friend, openly gay Bryce Hanson.

Bryce responds with his encouragement, and promises to be Charlie's training wheels through the difficult transition. But now that both men feel like they can be honest with each other, new desires are found, new truths spoken.

* * * *

Don't miss *Dressed For Dying* by Janet Quinn,

available at AmberQuill.com!

Leading Man
by Gabriela Garza

In 1892, reporter Sean Madigan is pitted against the New York police when he's assigned his first high-profile murder story, the slaying of the wealthy Marshal Haversham, clothing industry mogul and sweatshop owner. While Sean hunts for the killer in order to prove his worth to his newspaper editor, the madman goes on a violent spree, burning down Haversham's warehouses and sweatshops and killing young women who work within them. Each victim is found dressed in a fancy ball gown that was secretly made within the sweatshops themselves.

When Madigan's sweetheart, Bridget, becomes the killer's next target, Sean determines he will find the man and his connection to the ball gowns. But the murderer has other designs, and it soon becomes a race against time and the police to discover the fiend's identity before he silences Sean or Bridget ... permanently...

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