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CONTENTS

My Secret Valentine

Dedication

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

About the Author

* * * *

A Total-E-Bound Publication

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Secret Admirer
ISBN # 978-1-906811-91-4

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Edited by Michele Paulin
Total-E-Bound Publishing

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Published in 2008 by Total-E-Bound Publishing 1 The Corner, Faldingworth Road, Spridlington, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, LN8 2DE, UK.

Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

My Secret Valentine

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SECRET ADMIRER

Ashley Ladd

[Back to Table of Contents]

Dedication

To my very own Valentine, my husband Dave of 29 years.

Thanks for all the wonderful Valentine's days.

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Body For Life: Natural Supplement Association,

Incorporated DBA Experimental and Applied Sciences, Inc.

Frankenstein: E.L.V.H., Inc. Gidget: Columbia Pictures

Haagen Daz: HAAGEN-DAZS BRANDS, INC.

Jesus Christ Superstar:

Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat: (I can't find it, either)

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Rambo: STUDIOCANAL, S.A. CORPORATION Rocky: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc.

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[Back to Table of Contents]

Chapter One

Wes Donovan was never lucky, but today it seemed his luck had changed.

Blake Kirchner, the object of his fantasies, stepped onto the treadmill two rows in front of Wes, just enough to the right to award a perfect view of Blake's toned, beautiful body and let Wes do the secret admiration thing.

The way Blake's tight-sculpted gluts flexed and strained against his skin-tight shorts made Wes' mouth water. Blake's broad, well-muscled shoulders made Wes long to be swept into Blake's arms.

Wes vowed anew to work out until he was so buff Blake's mouth would water for him, too.

Light refracted off Blake's shiny blue-black fall of hair, and Wes made out blurry images of the exerciser behind Blake in its silky fall. His breath hitched in his throat and his palms became clammier.

Again he wiped his hands on his towel then mopped away perspiration dotting his brow. The heart-rate monitor on his machine jumped from ninety-six to one-forty-five although he needed no external acknowledgment that he couldn't breathe.

He'd give anything if Blake returned his affections, but the man had never been more than cordial if he saw Wes at all, so he was still very much a secret admirer.

Exhausted, he knew he'd pushed himself to his limits, but he was loath to leave as long as Blake remained. Maybe, just

maybe, Blake would turn, catch his gaze and think him the hottest guy in the world.

He caught himself staring hard at Blake and wondered what he could do to win his affections when Blake suddenly stopped, turned and pinned him with a steady look.

Wes' heart stopped, and he gulped. Guilty heat flooded his cheeks and dust coated his throat. The earth quaked beneath him as his feet were dragged out from under him, and he stumbled off the equipment.

The woman beside him caught him, but he cringed to the soundtrack of loud snickers, snorts, and even a few scathingly muttered, "Geeks."

Raging with humiliation, he mumbled a raspy, "Thanks," as he grabbed his towel, ducked his head and bolted.

Damn! So he wasn't such a 'secret' admirer after all.

"Some piece of work you are, dude." He was so mortified he didn't think he could ever show his face in the gym again. Worse, he wondered how big a dork Blake must think him.

When he reached his car, he flung his soaked towel on the passenger seat and lifted his eyes to the heavens. "Why?"

The sun floated peacefully on the horizon as if everything was cool with the world.

"Why of all men I could have a thing for, why him?"

Wes would have a better chance of winning the next United States presidential election than getting Blake to look twice at him.

Still, he yearned only for Blake. Worse, he dreaded going to his baseball team's Valentine Party stag—again.

There had to be something, somehow, he could do to trick fate and get his man.

* * * *

Later that night, his mind kept flickering between the gym disaster and the disastrous ballgame earlier in the week. Remembering how he'd made the final out, serving victory to the opposing team, he cringed. As nice as he'd been, Blake obviously had itched to escape the minute Wes had mentioned going for pizza—just as every other guy had since Freddie. Even though he was on a gay baseball league and had, in fact, joined in the hopes of making sympathetic friends and perhaps find his perfect someone, he'd found more heartache and was about to call it quits. He didn't need more rejection heaped upon what he got at the day job and just about everywhere else he went.

Mad at himself, Wes hit the junk food and popped in one of his favourite musicals. Afterwards, tired of the same old thing, he put on *Gidget*.

He so understood the skinny chick. Although she was smart and cute and had a lot of spunk, the guys thought she was a puny little midget who reminded them of their annoying little sisters and never thought of her as a full grown, desirable woman.

A geek all his life, it sure seemed men saw him as a pesky little kid instead of a full-grown man.

A growl arose in his throat, and he cracked his knuckles. So what was he supposed to do? Grab a surf board? Catch a wave? Although he only lived about five miles from the beach,

there was barely a surfing community. What else he could do to win Blake? Wes' gym workouts merely kept off the weight. He still looked like a hundred-pound weakling.

When Gidget decided to make Moon Doggie jealous by hiring another dude to be her date at the big clambake, his muscles contracted. He let out a howl when Moon Doggie showed up to take the guy's place and be Gidget's 'date'.

He hooted at the Gidget's scared to death expression.

Then he sobered as an absolutely brilliant thought rooted in his brain.

Why couldn't he be Gidget?

Well, not sprout tits like a girl, but become an irresistible, mouth-watering hero Blake would fall for?

If such a snip of a girl could get her man, so could he!

The *Rocky* theme song blared through his skull, and he jumped up, flung back his head and howled. Then he thumped his chest. He was going to get his man or die trying!

* * * *

Later that night, lying in his bed with his laptop propped on his knees, he put Blake's name into an Internet search engine and thought it cool when he found him on a social network and better yet, when he found Blake's personal blog. Rather than immediately check out the guy's blog, he logged off his screen name and created another one under a different handle. He didn't want Blake to know he was 'following' him on Twitter's social network or reading his blog. 'Following' had a sinister, stalking sound to it even if he knew tons of people on the Twitter network who liked to call themselves 'twits'.

He uploaded an ambiguous avatar and gave himself a name that could go either AC/DC, then he also signed up to follow the rest of the guys on the ball team whom he found on the site.

He skimmed through Blake's posts. It seemed the man's mind was on working out, keeping fit and baseball. He strangled a growl when he read that Blake had recently gone on a date to Parker Playhouse with some joker named Duane.

He made a mental note that Blake liked plays. He did, too, so he'd see what was coming up he could invite Blake to tag along. He loved off-Broadway musicals.

He caught himself humming *Aquarius* from *Hair* under his breath and wondered when the Rocky theme song had morphed into the sixty's musical.

He should have been the one on that date! He could imagine how it would be on their date. First, he'd dazzle Blake by taking him to a romantic beach restaurant, one with flickering candlelight and soft music. The lap of waves against the Ft. Lauderdale shore would lull them into even more of a romantic mood. Moonlight bathing them would complete the scene.

He'd fork a mouthful of his favourite scallops into Blake's mouth and softly stroke the buttery seafood across his lover's lips as he gazed deeply, longingly into his smouldering eyes.

Then, to loosen him up and make him forget his inhibitions, he'd ply Blake with his favourite spirit.

He'd nudge Blake's knee beneath the table to keep electric current zinging.

Then they'd mosey over to the playhouse and sit shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh, and he'd capture Blake's hand during the production. When Blake whispered to him, his warm lips would graze his ear, his soft hair would tickle his cheek, and lightning bolts would shoot straight to his cock which by now demanded release.

He'd have to hide his flexing cock with his tented program, but Blake's magic fingers would sneak beneath the book to caress his dick, making it swell even more.

At intermission, they'd slip off to a quiet corner where they'd steal a kiss, and he'd savour Blake's lips. By now, Blake's trousers would also show a telltale bulge, and he'd whisper, "Let's blow this joint. We've got better things to do."

Passion glazed over Blake's black eyes as his nostrils dangerously flared. His pheromones made Wes squirm, and he could hardly stand another second in his too tight slacks. Forget the play. His aching cock deserved top billing.

Unable to stop touching, fondling, and nibbling each other, they rushed home. At one stoplight, Blake unzipped Wes' pants, unleashed his cock, leaned over and muttered, "God, I love to suck dick," and then licked it.

Wes loved to get and give blow jobs, but in traffic wasn't his favourite place. Still, he got into his fantasy, and his breathing grew raspier. He grunted and set his computer on his nightstand. Then he unsnapped his trousers and pushed down the damned things and wiggled the rest of the way out. When they didn't want to unhook from his feet, he was ready to rip them off. He curled his fingers around his cock that stood at attention, closed his eyes and imagined it was Blake

manhandling him in the car, and as he pumped harder as if it was Blake milking him. He slouched further into the bed, pushed his shoulders into the mattress, and thrust up his hips. He pumped harder, and the bed rammed into the wall.

Wildfire blazed through his cock and in rapture, he forgot where he was and he imagined his foot going slack and his truck rolling into the intersection until honking horns jerked him from his haze and he gave a sheepish wave to say sorry.

"You're giving me head here? We're going to get pulled over by the cops."

Blake winked but didn't loose Wes' cock. "Don't worry so much. Just hurry and get us home so I can give you the hardest fuck of your life."

If Wes could think coherently enough to drive...

Before he imagined getting into his house, his cum squirted high in the air and showered him. The stream was thick, creamy and warm on his nakedness. The musky odour seeped into him like rich cologne.

When he could think straight again, he knew he had to make a move on this heartthrob soon. This baseball season only lasted three months, and who knew if he'd ever see Blake again?

* * * *

Remembering the last disastrous game of fifteen to three, Blake gritted his teeth. It was all he could do to hold up his head and walk back onto the field like a man in the face of their snickering opponents and his team's own perpetually swearing coach. Someone had to do something about Wesley. The guy couldn't throw, he couldn't catch, he couldn't bat, and he was a slow runner. The lousy coach had washed his hands of him and the rest of the team was about to do the same.

Blake wondered why he cared, why he felt sorry for the dude. The guy wanted to play so badly it reminded Blake of himself. Years ago, but what the hell?

An idea punched him between the eyes. Why didn't he practise with Wes to make him a stronger player? It couldn't hurt the team if their weakest link was strengthened, and they wouldn't have to hurt the guy's feelings by kicking him off the team.

Although it was five forty-five, the South Florida sun was still a killer. When gnats swarmed him, he batted them away and moved further down the dugout bench.

Wes looked around for a spot to sit so Blake pointed to the space beside him. "Over here."

Wes' eyes grew large as he moseyed over. He interrupted his humming of *Jesus Christ Superstar* to mumble, "Evening."

Blake's mission stayed uppermost in his mind, and he turned to the object of his thoughts assessing him. He concluded Wes wouldn't be so bad if he'd work out, dressed better, and especially, if he didn't act like such a big nerd. The first things he knew how to help with. The last he wasn't sure if even God could help with.

He reached over and plucked the pen and pocket protector out of Wes' shirt and put it on the bench beside his bat bag. "You can't wear that during the game. I don't want to lose an eye."

Wes went cross-eyed, and his gaze pinpointed his pen. "That wouldn't be cool." He shoved his unruly hair out of his eyes and pushed it back. Then he pushed his broken, taped glasses further onto his nose.

Blake did his best to ignore the geeky accessories and acted as if nothing was out of the ordinary. "I need someone to catch for me so I can practise my pitching. How about it?"

Wes froze as if he couldn't breathe, as if he couldn't move, and he just stared open-mouthed. After someone nudged him, he came to life and gulped. "You saw me, right? How I cost us the game the other night?" He cleared his throat and wrung his hands in his lap.

Blake let his gaze sweep over the rest of the team as they sauntered in and began to warm up, then he shrugged. "That? Forget it. It happens to all of us. Practise would help you, too."

He waited for Wes' answer. He wasn't lying about needing a catcher and why not Wes? The net would stop any balls Wes missed. Once they finished pitching practise, they could work on other drills. Hopefully, in the process, the other guy's confidence would build. By the end of the season, he wanted to crush Gil Ramses' team into the dirt. They couldn't do that if Wes flubbed his plays.

Wes blinked and shook his head. He held out his hand.
"Sure! I'd love to. I want to ask you something, too." His lashes swept down to veil his eyes and covertly he looked first right then left. "But not here. In private."

Oh oh. Blake hoped Wes wasn't hearing wedding bells. Uneasy and unsure how to respond, he nodded. "If it's okay with you, we'll grab that pizza tonight."

Joy danced in Wes' eyes for a flash, before he guarded his expression. "Okie dokie, alligator."

Blake was relieved when Clay wagged his finger at him and jerked his thumb at the pitching mound. He grabbed his mitt and, forcing his mind back to the game, swaggered off. Tonight, they played Gil's team, and his mission was to smear his ex so far into the dirt he'd run home crying to his mama.

[Back to Table of Contents]

Chapter Two

That night at the pizza parlour after another losing game, Wes mumbled to himself under his breath and dug his nails so hard into his palms he drew blood. His entire future rode on his plan, but he wasn't sure if he could go through with it. Suddenly, he felt asinine. He wasn't some stupid teenage girl back in the fifties. He was a twenty-seven year old man in the twenty-first century.

But he didn't have a plan B unless just letting things ride and being Blake's catcher was enough. He didn't think so, so he clenched and unclenched his fists and silently practised his plea.

He didn't spy Blake, so he scoped out a secluded booth in the back of the joint and perched on the edge of the bench so he could wave him down when he walked in. The minutes dragged, and he wondered if he'd been stood up. When Blake, so powerful and hot, pushed through the door, Wes inhaled sharply. The man never failed to steal his breath or utterly intoxicate him. His breathing hitched in his throat, and his jaw slacked. He tried to get a rein on himself as he stood and motioned to Blake. "Yo! Over here."

Blake nodded and without a break in his step, changed direction. Dusty from the field, he was still a vision as of rippling muscles. As he slid into the seat across from Wes, he gave a lopsided smile. "What a game. We almost won."

Wes' heart fell to his knees. "Yeah, if I hadn't messed it up again." Embarrassed, he stretched out, rested his head on the

cushioned back, and pulled the bill of his ball cap low over his face. "Are you sure you want me to help you? I'm the last person who can tell someone if they're doing something wrong or right in baseball."

The waitress sashayed up to them and, blushing, stammered as she gazed at Blake with awe, not even sparing a glance for Wes.

Wes was used to being invisible, but it still stung. He narrowed his eyes and noted how the woman's blush stole all the way to her hairline and how she jutted out her breasts. He wasn't surprised Blake had this effect on both sexes, and he didn't like it any better than reading about Duane.

Blake looked at him over the top of his menu and asked, "What do you want? My treat." After Wes ordered a plain cheese pizza with a diet soda, Blake doubled the order and added a beer. Then he winked at the waitress and thanked her.

After the woman was out of earshot, he leaned over the table and confided, "Friday is my only day to be bad, so since this is Friday, I might as well go all out."

Bad? Butterflies flitted through Wes' stomach. Just what did the other man mean by 'bad'?

Blake laughed a throaty chuckle that sent shivers of delight coursing down Wes' spine. "I'm doing that *Body For Life,* and I'm a boxer. I'm only allowed to pig out once a week."

Wes searched his mind for where he'd heard about that and what it was. His brow puckered. "Is that the program

where you take nutritional supplements all week instead of food? Is that safe?"

Blake curled his arm, made a fist and showed off his impressive muscle. "It's made me the man I am today. I went from a ninety-eight pound weakling to a champion boxer. I'm a fan."

"Wow!" Wes couldn't help but be in awe. Feeling more like a weak boy than ever with his too-thin shoulders and skinny legs, he wanted to shrink deeper into the shadows. "That's amazing. Were you really small to begin with?" A scrawny Blake did not compute.

Blake pursed his lips and nodded as he lowered his arm and linked his fingers before him on the table. "Really. No lying."

The waitress delivered their drinks, and Blake tipped his brown bottle, guzzled a hefty swig, then sighed in ecstasy. He banged it on the table then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Man, that tastes good."

Wes took a sip of his drink, but it didn't do a thing to reduce his fever. Blake was so hot, he was about to combust. "Do you think it would help me? I mean to fill out and get stronger?"

Blake narrowed his eyes. "Sure. It can help everybody, as long as you stick with the program. If you're really serious, you should try boxing, too. That's what really helped me to bulk up and get fit."

"Does it cost a lot? Do I have to sign my life away?"

"Why don't you try the one I go to? They'll give you a month's free trial to see if you like it. Tell them I sent you.

You could even come with me, and I'll get you started on the ropes."

Blake wanted him to work out with him? See him in those skimpy workout outfits?

Hell yes!

"Sure, why not? I'll give it a shot," he said in a much smaller voice than the booming one dying to leap out. "When do we start?"

"I go every Saturday morning, before the game, so how about tomorrow?"

Wes didn't want to sound too eager so brought himself down several RPMs. "Sounds okay," he tried to say nonchalantly.

The pizza arrived and not caring that it burnt his tongue or sizzled on the way down his throat, Wes delved into it. He'd eat flaming coals if it meant Blake was sitting across from him.

He downed a slice in silence as he mustered his courage. Finally, he blurted it out before he lost his nerve. "There's someone I want to make jealous, and I'd like to get your help."

"My help?" Blake blinked at him as if he'd grown another head. "Who is it?"

The blood drained from Wes' head as he panicked. "Think!" he shouted to himself. Clay, the manager was the only one who came to mind as being unattached, but he was a real tyrant and not at all Wes' type. But he couldn't stall much longer. "Clay."

"Clay?" Blake spluttered. "You shitting me?"

Miserable, mad at himself for lack of foresight, Wes nodded. "What can I say? I've got the hots for him."

"Maybe that's why you miss play." Blake scratched his head with a perplexed look screwing up his face. "I didn't see that coming."

Neither had he. Suddenly, he wasn't hungry, but he'd done it now. "You know what they say, opposites attract, love is blind, and all that shit."

"So you have it bad for old hound dog Clay? How do I fit in?"

Wes' tongue could barely move. His throat constricted, and he had a hot flash. "Uh, I, uh, thought, you could flirt with me, and at the next party, dance with me and stuff like that. You know, junk to make him jealous. Like pretend to be my date."

Blake swallowed his mouthful of food and washed it down with another swig of beer. "Well, I guess we'll be spending time together practicing and working out. It shouldn't be much harder to turn on some charm when old Clay's around."

"You will?" Wes was so giddy he turned into all grins and his toes curled. The more Blake was around him, the more Blake would help him become sexier, and the more chance he had of hitting a homerun in the love department.

"I said I would. How long is it 'til that party?"

Wes checked his mental calendar. "About three weeks. Is that enough time to get sexier?"

Blake laughed. "What's sexy enough? To really bulk up, it generally takes about six months of hard work."

Wes' heart dropped, and his shoulders slumped. "Oh."

Blake pursed his lips and shook his head. "But that gives us time to work on some stuff, if you want my advice."

Wes merely meant to nod, but when he realised his head was bobbing like mad, and he was pumping Blake's hand, he stopped. "I'm putty. Mould away. Make me a ten."

Blake extricated his hand from Wes' grip then folded his arms over his chest and gave Wes the once over. "Do you really need those glasses?"

Wes took them off and squinted as everything went blurry. "Only if I want to walk without falling over everything."

Blake nodded. "Then you'll get Lasik surgery or contacts." Wes gulped. Since when had love become so expensive?

He dragged out a notepad and pen from his pocket. "I'll never remember all this. Hang on a sec while I write it down."

Blake shot him a crooked smile. "Go for it."

Wes shook his pen. "Okay, shoot. Lasik. Boxing. Body For Life. What else?"

"I'll get you an appointment at my hair salon, then we'll go shopping for a new wardrobe."

Wes looked down at himself picturing his normal attire. He knew he needed help, but he'd hoped it hadn't been so noticeable. "Okay," was all he said, a little hurt yet still grateful for the makeover. He wanted Blake to make him into the man of his dreams so they could live happily ever after and Blake would forget all about that Duane guy.

When he went to eat a fourth slice of pizza, Blake frowned and stilled his hand. "You've had enough. You're on the program now. I'll bring the book for you tomorrow." He took a

card out of his pocket, scribbled on the back then slid it across the table.

"Check out this site on the internet tonight, and tell me what you think."

Electricity shocked Wes when their fingers touched, and he jerked back. "Sure. I can't wait. I'll look soon as I get home."

"Don't stay up too late. Part of the program is that you have to get a lot of rest. Tomorrow, eat fruits and veggies until we can go shopping for the supplement. Meet me at the boxing studio." Blake flipped the card and underlined the address with the tip of his finger. "Do you know how to get here?"

Wes studied it and could picture it in his mind. It was on a major thoroughfare near one of his favourite shops. "Sure. No problemo. What time?"

"Nine a.m. sharp."

Blake checked his watch and motioned to the waitress for the check. "We should get home and get to sleep."

Wes couldn't stop from speaking his mind. "Why do I feel like I just enlisted in boot camp?"

"This'll make boot camp look like nursery school."

Great! Wes swallowed a groan. What was he getting himself into?

* * * *

Blake arrived at the boxing studio early to get in his own workout before he helped Wes. He couldn't stop wondering what the guy saw in the object of his secret admiration? The coach was a regular bully and thought he was God's gift to

men. He couldn't stand the dude and had been tempted on several occasions to walk off the field and quit the team due to Clay shooting off his big mouth. But since Wes wanted Clay, Blake would do everything in his power to see that Wes got his man. Maybe if Clay found love, it'd soften his hard edges and he'd stop being such a moron. The team would award Blake a medal.

Thinking of Wes reminded him of how far he'd come since he'd started boxing. It had been his salvation in so many ways. It not only gave him a sense of self and wellbeing, but it had increased his confidence two-hundred percent and given him a reason to go on after his parents had died in an freak house fire. He should have been home, but he'd been out with Gil. If he'd been home, he might have been able to save them, maybe even put out the fire. Or maybe he'd have been too weak to save anyone, even himself.

When he'd realised that, he'd signed up at the studio and made himself into a new man his family could be proud of, a man who could take care of himself and help other people. It had consumed his thoughts and taken him away from the awful grief that threatened to kill his soul. How could he not want to help people like Wes who reminded him so much of his former self? He was sure there was a reason he'd been spared, and this was it.

By the time Wes pushed through the studio doors, looking around like he was lost, rivulets of perspiration ran down Blake's body. Pumped, he was sure he could do anything, even make Wes into a demi-God.

He bowed himself off the mat to be respectful then met Wes at the door. He shook his hand. "Welcome. Are you ready to start the rest of your life?"

Wes gulped but nodded. "You betcha. I'm so ready I can't stand it. There's only three weeks and counting."

"I hope you'll want to stick with this after. It's a lifestyle change, not just a diet."

"Are you trying to scare me away?"

Blake hoped Wes was joking. When he looked into his eyes, he saw a spark of mischief and sighed in relief. He rather enjoyed the other man's sense of humour and wondered how he'd missed it.

"Let's get you suited out." He took Wes to the uniform and equipment room and helped him pick out appropriate attire and then pointed him in the right direction to pay. Once that was done, he slapped Wes on the back and pointed to the changing room. "Meet me back here when you're done."

When Wes returned, Blake was beating the hell out of his punching bag, pretending it was his demons.

Wes stood on the sidelines and stared. "You think I'll be able to do that some day? Beat up a defenceless punching bag?"

Blake looked from the man to the bag and grinned. "Defenceless? This thing?" He pointed at the bag. "You try it and see how 'defenceless' you think it is."

Wes crawled over the small wall separating the mat from the viewing area then waited while Blake helped him lace his gloves. Tentatively, he touched the bag and stood back.

Blake tried not to laugh. "You've got to go at it with gusto. Give it all you've got."

Wes held his arms high and wide. "This is all I've got. It's not much."

Blake looked and looked again. Wes wasn't bad. In fact, he wasn't built half-bad. He was neat and trim without an ounce of flab. He had a smattering of chest hair and hairy, powerful legs that would make for quite an opponent in a grappling match. Although he didn't have huge pecs or deltoids, he wasn't as far away from building them as Blake had at first thought. He gave himself a mental shake in shock at his thoughts.

Ignoring his reaction, he put his fists on his hips, stood over his student, and said, "Hit it hard. Like you want to kill it. Like it's your worst enemy."

Wes screwed up his face and let roar with a big punch.

The bag swung away then swung back, knocking him on his ass.

"Whoa! I see what you mean." Wes said shaking his head, his eyes dazed. He struggled to his feet and glared at the evil bag. "This isn't for sissies."

"Not at all. It's hard work. Think you can do it?" Blake hoped to hear yes. He loved it when someone stepped up to the challenge, and he wanted Wes to step up more than he'd ever wanted anyone else to.

"Yeah, if it won't beat the snot out of me every time."

"That's why I'll teach you the techniques. It'll take perseverance and dedication."

Wes closed the gap between them and lightly punched Blake's upheld glove with his own. "I accept. I'm in this one hundred thousand percent. I know what I want, and I'll go all out."

The corners of Blake's lips quirked. "Good. Let's get started."

* * * *

Wes had never worked so hard in his life. He'd never wanted anything with all his heart like he wanted this. The more he was around Blake, the more the man rode him, the deeper he fell in love. If this didn't work, he didn't know if he could live without Blake and wondered if he could stand just being his friend, student, and secret admirer from so close.

He decided not to worry so much and to enjoy the time with Blake.

Happy to be with Blake at the ball field and helping him with his pitching practise, he tossed his glove high in the air and caught it. Already his muscles sang, and he could feel them continue to work even when he rested. He could get used to this.

Blake pointed to the bucket and catcher's gear. "You can sit there while you put that on." He came over and knelt by Wes' side to adjust the leg protectors.

Bent down on one knee, Blake looked like he was about to propose, and it sent Wes' heart into convulsions. It skipped several beats then took off at mach speed.

Trying to breathe normally, and not make a fool of himself, Wes fastened the straps and tightened them before slipping on the mask. Again, Blake had to adjust it and even then it kept slipping over his eyes even as it felt like it was breaking every tooth in his head. But he wasn't about to wuss out and complain, so he ignored the pain and focused on the rest of his mission.

Once everything was tightened, Blake said, "If you want to learn how to catch and not just help me, then lose the bucket. Crouch."

Wanting to impress Blake and learn to play better, he got into a catcher's stance. He'd never played the position before so he wasn't surprised when Blake came over and showed him how to position himself and the main moves. He didn't mind Blake's hand on his body, and he debated whether to pretend to be slow so Blake would have to show him again.

Unfortunately, his cock responded to Blake's touch, and his pants grew unbearably tight. He prayed Blake didn't notice the bulge, and he shielded his groin with his glove.

He was grateful for the protective gear as the balls whizzed in at over seventy mph, knocking him on his ass. He was embarrassed to go sprawling, a couple times literally head over heels and getting tangled in the net.

Blake let out a hoot as he untangled him. "I bet you didn't know you were an acrobat."

Feeling like a failure, Wes tried to laugh it off. "I wasn't lying when I said you should go pro. How fast do you pitch? Seventy? Eighty? That was awesome."

Blake shrugged and ambled back to the mound. "Last time I was clocked, it was eighty-two. When you don't use it you lose it."

Lose it? Wes whistled under his breath. "You mean you were throwing faster?"

"Once upon a time. Back when I had no other life except baseball. But I discovered there's more to life. Before I became this involved in boxing. I don't mean when I was a just a little punk." Such a morose expression crossed his face that Wes didn't dare ask 'what' though he longed to. He'd never before seen Blake melancholy, and he couldn't begin to imagine what could be wrong in his perfect life.

Shaking the cobwebs from his head and stretching his screaming muscles, he forced his mind back to the task before the ball creamed him again. The protective gear minimised the impact but didn't completely stop it. He was more than a little dizzy from the constant collisions.

"Let her rip," he mumbled, holding out his glove and trying not to flinch. The longer they practised, the more he doubted he was catcher material. But he wasn't about to admit to Blake that he couldn't take it and give up. He craved this time with the man when no one else was around and they could bond. He hoped their friendship would grow into something deeper and more meaningful. No way would he give up now, not when he had a shot at his dream.

He wasn't too happy when he grew breathless or when he toppled over in a heap and missed the ball. After fifty minutes, he pulled up his mask and panted. "I need water." He crawled to the bucket as if he was a dying man in the desert.

Blake laughed as he plopped down on his butt on top of the mound and hugged his legs. "You're doing good. You've done this a lot, right?"

Wes guzzled down the liquid then held it over his mouth and shook out every last drop over his lolling tongue. He tossed it aside and rolled onto his back and spread-eagled. He gazed up at the stars twinkling above them then spied the moon peeking out from behind dark clouds. "I think I know how you stay so in shape. If all this doesn't kill me, I'll be a muscle man."

Blake chuckled again. "I didn't know you were such a comedian."

"What's life without a few laughs? I say it's better to laugh with them then have 'em laugh at me."

Blake rose and joined him. He towered over Wes and their shadows mingled like lovers.

Wes wished their real selves would get so close. He wished he had the courage to hold up his hand and pull Blake down to him for a night of love under the moonlight. But he was worried the magic was all one-sided, and he was afraid of scaring off Blake. It was too soon.

So he rolled to his side and pushed himself up. Then he faced the other man. "I don't know about you, but I'm tuckered out."

"After an hour pitching? I wanted to work on a few other moves."

Wes wished they were moves unrelated to baseball or boxing. He was willing to wait, but he hoped not too long. The most important thing was that he was with Blake and no one else was around. He took pointers from the more seasoned player and practised sliding into a base feet first and diving without doing somersaults. He learned some other finer moves and rules for the bases.

"I wish I'd played as a kid. I'm way behind the other guys."

"Better now than never," Blake said. He looked around and scowled. "Looks like the park's getting ready to shut down. We'd better get a move on."

Wes mourned the end of their evening, but he tucked away the memories hoping for a lot of sequels.

Blake walked him to his car and leaned against door as he tossed his glove in the trunk. "I'm getting a haircut tomorrow evening. If you're free, why don't you come with me, and I'll have Cecilie do yours, too."

Wes had nothing more exciting planned than grocery shopping, so he nodded. "Sure. Name the time and place, and I'll meet you there."

"It'd be easier if I pick you up." Blake named six p.m. and added, "It's next to the health food store so we'll stop there after so you can get your supplements."

"Cool." His stomach grumbled however, having only been fed a banana and a couple apples all day. He didn't know how Blake stood this day after day unless the supplement helped abate the hunger.

"I have some homework for you," Blake said as Wes climbed into his car.

"Homework?" Wes wiggled his brows and stuck his head out to peer up at his mentor. "Am I back in school? Should I have brought you a shiny apple?"

Blake's smile widened. "I take bribes. Seriously, find out what you can about Clay, his likes and dislikes, his past boyfriends, and make a list. Let's see what he likes and make you so irresistible to him that you'll be his dream man."

Wes cringed inside, but he kept his expression neutral. "How do I go about that? Hire a detective? Stalk him?" Neither sounded palatable.

"Talk to his friends. Try to talk to him before or after the game. Listen to his conversations. Talk to him on Twitter or MySpace if he's on one of those social network thingamajigs. Google him and see if anything pops up."

Wes made a mental note to Google Blake again. When he got home, he'd make two lists: the fake one about Clay to show Blake and a real one about Blake.

So far he added to Blake's list that he liked to play baseball, pitch, box, and do the Body By Life thing. Despite the time they'd spent together, he knew little else.

Trying to get Blake to open up, he asked, "Give me some examples. You mean like what kind of movies and books he likes? How do you suggest I ask?"

Blake made a moue of his lips. "Well you could say something like, 'I saw *Mama Mia* at the theatre this weekend and Pierce Brosnan was so cute.' Then you'd turn to him and ask, 'Did you see it? What did you think?' And get the conversation going. Jesus, It's not that hard."

Wes loved that show. "I saw that on Broadway, and it was awesome. Did you see that? I love musicals." He began to hum the *ABBA* song and dance in his seat.

Blake said, "Nah. I don't go to the movies much. When I do, I like Samurai movies and action/adventure like *Rambo*."

"Too bad. It was awesome. Anyway, I'll try that with Clay. I might need some practise."

"Practise helps. Speaking of that, thanks for helping me with the pitching. Keep your schedule open. We have a lot of work to do before that party."

Wes nodded, wholly concurring. "We sure do. Later, dude."
[Back to Table of Contents]

Chapter Three

Blake directed Cecilie how to style Wes' hair. "I think it would look good with a fringe over his forehead." He held up a hairstyling book and pointed at a 'do he favoured.

Wes tried to look over their shoulders, but Blake blocked him. He gave him a look. "You've got to trust me. I know what I'm doing."

Wes screwed up his lips and plopped into the chair. He lifted his arms wide, and in his dramatic way, he said, "Dr. Frankenstein, have your way with me. I'm all yours."

Cecilie chuckled. "Your friend's cute." She draped the cape around Wes' neck and tied it. Then she ran her fingers through his wet hair. "See this widow's peak? I don't know if that cut will look good on him. Maybe we should try this." She pointed to a different style.

Blake looked from the book to Wes and tapped his chin, considering. "Maybe..."

Then he went back to his original choice. "I think he'd look dynamite with this. Try it."

Cecilie shrugged. "It's your buck. Your wish is my command."

Wes looked up at them with puppy dog eyes. "Don't hurt me. Be gentle."

Blake was tempted to pull the guy's hair and spin him around but refrained from the uncharacteristic playfulness. He wondered why he was tempted to revert to his childhood. Was it Wes? And was this a good or bad thing?

Cecilie shooed him away. "I can't work with you breathing down my neck. A creative artist needs space."

Blake rolled his eyes. "You're such a diva."

"And you love it. I make you look gorgeous, don't I?"
"Yes, you do, Dr. Frankenstein."

Cecilie stopped cutting and shook her scissors at him.
"Stop calling me that, or I'll use these scissors for something besides cutting hair." She aimed them at his dick.

He backed up across the room and covered his cock. "Oh no, you don't. I'm sorry. I'll never call you that again."

Wes whistled as if bored. "Any time you two get done playing, I'm waiting."

Cecilie now shook her scissors at Wes. "Look you. As long as I'm holding the scissors, I'm in charge, so the two of you had better show more respect."

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "Anything you say, ma'am."

"I'm not your mama, so don't call me 'ma'am'. I swear, you two will be the death of me. I don't know why I put up with you."

Blake waved his wallet. "Because you love me and my big tips."

"Oh, yeah. Now I remember." Cecilie combed Wes's hair then began cutting. She said to Wes, "Um um um. Aren't you drop dead gorgeous. Blake won't be able to keep his hands off you."

Wes blushed, and his long lashes swept over his cheeks making crescents.

Blake couldn't believe his eyes at the transformation a simple hair cut made. Between that and the loss of the dorky

glasses, Wes was pretty darned sexy. If Clay didn't do a double take, he wasn't gay.

The thought of Clay made him growl. He didn't like the man nor did he respect him as a coach. He didn't like the thought of Clay with a sweet guy like Wes. Wes didn't deserve him. He deserved someone a lot better.

Blake didn't like the direction of his thoughts. He was no matchmaker. He was already going way beyond his comfort zone.

When Cecilie finished, she whirled Wes back to the mirror and held up a hand mirror so he could see front and back. "You like?"

Wes's eyes got big. "Wow! You're a genius." He turned to Blake and asked, "What do you think?"

Blake swallowed hard. He thought Wes was darned handsome. "I think your hard work is paying off. You keep this up, you'll be able to turn the head of any man you want."

Blake knew that should make him happy, but it didn't. He really didn't like the fact that it made him unhappy. Wes wasn't his kind. He was nothing like Gil, built and blond, a real Greek god and a super sportsman. Wes was a quirky nerd who loved musicals and tripped over his own feet. His heart beat for jerks like Clay. Blake still didn't get it. He didn't think he ever would.

But then he didn't get how he ever could have thought himself in love with a jerk like Gil, either.

He tipped Cecilie generously and scheduled his next appointment, then he guided Wes next door where they bought enough supplies for the next three months.

"I hope I can do this," Wes said, scratching his head. "I dumped everything out of my refrigerator so I wouldn't eat in my sleep."

Blake let his gaze appreciatively rake over his student. "It's already paying off. I bet you feel much better."

"I've had to notch my belt tighter. I've stopped growling at my scale."

Blake couldn't help but laugh. "See? It is working." "The real test will come at the party."

"Yeah," Blake said and again wondered why he wasn't happy at the prospect.

* * * *

Wes liked what he saw in the mirror. He knew he had a ways to go, but he was definitely on the way. He felt much better about himself than a couple weeks ago, and he felt better in general. He had more energy and vitality, and he wasn't missing food anymore. He enjoyed working out with Blake, and what surprised him was that he enjoyed working out even if Blake wasn't there. Being with Blake made it sweeter, but even if Blake were to cut him loose, he'd want to keep up with the boxing. It made him feel good. It made him feel more in control of himself. The guys at work no longer dissed him, and the boss didn't talk down to him anymore.

He decided to take a test run to see if he could get a rise out of Blake. He sidled up to Clay and batted his lashes, "How about letting me play catcher. I've been helping Blake."

Clay looked at him as if he had two heads, and his nostrils flared. "You? Catch behind the plate? You can't catch in outfield. I don't think so."

Wes bit back a snarl. "I tell you, I've really been practicing. Blake's been working with me. I'm sick of outfield."

"Show me something better in outfield, then we'll see." Clay flounced away with his nose high in the air.

Wes couldn't care less what Clay thought beyond getting stuck in outfield again which sucked. He chanced a glance at Blake, and his heart did a little jig to find Blake staring at them with his mouth slightly parted and his dark eyes intense. He hoped Blake was at least a little jealous.

Not wanting Blake to catch onto his real purpose, he took his place on the bench and gave the high five to Ryan, the team's second baseman.

Ryan gave him a smile. "You're looking really good. There's a new guy, isn't there?"

"Maybe. Why do you say that?" Wes kept his voice low not wanting Blake to hear anything he shouldn't.

"I know that twinkle in your eyes. It's that same one Drew gets when he looks at me."

"If only I could be so lucky as you and Drew, I'd be blessed."

"Yep, I'm blessed all right. I've never been happier." He got a dreamy look in his eyes.

"I'm working on it. We'll see." He tried not to glance at Blake and give himself away. He couldn't blow it now. He was so close. At least, he hoped so.

Drew ambled up to Ryan, sat on his lap and looped his arms around his lover. He rubbed noses with Ryan then tilted his head and drank of his lips.

Wes swooned, wishing that was himself and Blake. Some people were so lucky.

"Love is the best," Ryan said when he came up for air.

Clay swaggered over, pointed at Ryan, and barked, "Git on deck. Git your mind back on the ballgame."

Ryan dumped Drew on his ass but gave him a come hither look. Then he looked at Clay and said Soto voce, "Believe me. My mind is very much on the 'ball game'."

Wes almost choked and bit his tongue. He slapped his thigh as tears ran unchecked down his cheeks.

"We're here to play. Not play around," Clay said and rolled his eyes. He swore when Ryan struck out and threw down his batting helmet.

Devon, their team's shortstop, crowded the plate as Wes finally got on deck. He kept back as Devon was known to throw the bat and he wasn't ready to take it in the gut even if his abs were tightening up.

Devon struck out, too, and with a deep intake of breath, he stepped up to the plate. "Please Lord, don't let me be the last out. Not again."

Sheila, the ump, said in a low voice, "He's throwing drop balls. Be on the lookout."

Surprised, he whispered, "Thanks." He wondered why the blue was taking pity on him and risking getting herself banned from the field.

Armed with the knowledge, he stood high in the box. He glared at the pitcher and waited. He felt Blake's gaze tearing through him, and he couldn't bear to fail in front of him. He ripped the ball and took off running.

Clay was a blur where he stood coaching first base and frantically waving Wes onto the next base as Wes rounded first base without slowing. Since the outfielders looked to be fumbling the ball, he rounded second. He heard Blake scream, "Keep going. Go home," so he put down his head and ran using every ounce of energy he could muster despite the way his lungs burned.

When Blake shouted, "Slide! Feet first," he slid into home.

The pitcher ran home to help the catcher, but Wes's foot touched the plate first.

Sheila threw off her mask and yelled, "Safe!"

His team jumped off the bench and cheered. Blake met him halfway to the dugout, grabbed him in a big bear hug and whirled him around. Then he gave Wes a big smack on the lips.

Surprised and giddy, his heart hammering against his ribs, Wes grabbed Blake to him and kissed him back. He was so happy, he didn't want to break the embrace.

Finally, Blake pulled back and stared at him. "Clay got an eye full. Good job."

A jumble of emotions, Wes wasn't sure what to think. His lips tingled, and his cock was on fire. "I've never hit a homerun before. That was the best feeling in the world." Well, second only to kissing Blake and holding him in his arms.

"Way to go. I mean it, buddy," Blake said and thumped him on the back.

Wes didn't like the sound of 'buddy'. It wasn't exactly the endearment he longed to hear, but the kiss rocked his world.

Ryan and Drew gave him the high five. "You go, girl!"

Wes smiled shyly as the other guys joined in. Devon mussed his hair. Mitch gave him a smack on the lips, too. And then Robbie.

As much as he wanted to gauge Blake's reaction to his new found acceptance by the team, he dared not look.

Robbie, the catcher, twisted his ankle when he was up to bat, and it had to be iced. When Wes was traipsing out to left field, Clay stopped him. "You still want to catch?"

Wes sucked in his breath. Did he ever! "Sure. You mean now?"

"I don't mean yesterday! Git in there. Borrow Devon's mitt and gear if it fits. Don't let me down. Keep up the good work."

High on the praise, Wes nodded. "I swear I won't let you down." He knew a few sessions with Blake didn't make him Johnny Bench. Still, he put his entire heart and soul into the job and basked in the glow of his success and Blake's eyes.

He put his sole concentration on the ball. He blocked Blake's face from his mind and became a catching machine. He ignored the pain and discomfort, and most of all the fear of getting hit. After getting walloped a couple times and realising it didn't hurt so badly, his fear subsided.

He joked with Sheila between batters and spit out the dust they kicked into his mouth.

When, Frankie, the star player from the opposing team led off third base, growling at him, he growled back and vowed to sacrifice his body rather than let a ball get by if it came.

Two balls and a grounder to second later, Frankie bore down on him, dust preceding him like a tornado.

"Focus," Wes gritted out between his teeth as he blocked the plate, itching for the ball to arrive.

"Don't blow it," he chanted under his breath. He tried not to trip over Sheila or Blake who also crowded the plate.

The ball sailed high in the air, lost for several moments in the blinding field lights. He tore off his mask and threw it behind him. The fence moaned at the abuse as each team cheered on their side.

When he spied the ball descending from the sky, his insides threatened to implode and his blood boiled. That ball was his!

"I've got it!" he called, holding up his glove, his gaze glued to it.

But the ball glanced off his glove, and his team moaned. Clay spit and turned around in disgust. Wes and Blake dove for the ball and collided on the ground. They grappled, a tangle of arms and legs.

Wes grabbed the ball as the runner leapt over them. He held up the ball and felt it connect to the runner's leg.

His team cheered as Sheila sprinted over and squinted. He waited with bated breath for her call. He prayed she'd seen the clear out.

"Safe!" She splayed wide her arms and looked at the scoreboard operator.

Blake glared at her. "Are you blind? He was out! The catcher tagged him before he touched home."

"I didn't see it."

"I'd like to appeal to the other ump." Blake turned to Sheila's partner who was far out in the field.

Sheila trudged out to the other blue, and they bent their heads in consultation.

Blake grumbled under his breath. "She needs to get glasses. How could she not see it?"

Wes screwed up his face. It was the story of his life. No one saw the good things he did, but they never missed his screw ups. At least, Blake had caught it which lifted his spirits.

Blake pointed at Clay. "You're the manager, manage. Tell them the guy was out."

Clay rubbed his neck. "I didn't see it."

Blake got up in the coach's face. "You're blind. What good are you?"

"You think you can do better? You manage! I'm tired of you no-talent pricks who think you're God's gift to baseball." Clay marched off the field.

"Just great!" Blake muttered. "Some manager."

Then he looked at Wes and remorse filled his eyes. "Shit! I forgot." He took off at a run after the coach and caught up to him. They talked for several moments before returning together.

"What are you turkeys standing around for?" Clay yelled. "We've got a game to win." He walked up to Wes and patted him on the back. "Good job. Sorry how I acted."

Aware Blake watched them from the corner of his eye, he sidled closer and tilted his head hoping to spark some jealousy. "I'm giving you my all."

"If only all the guys would..."

* * * *

Wes caught himself singing Jesus Christ Superstar under his breath again, and with a self-conscious glance around him to make sure no one was close enough to hear, he sighed in relief and let himself continue. It added a lilt to his step and pretty soon, he was bopping along to his own beat. He realised he'd never seen the movie, so he rented it, popped some microwave popcorn, and glued himself to his TV.

He was so immersed in the show, he didn't realise the phone was ringing until he picked it up just in time for it to stop. When he glanced at the display, he gulped. He'd missed Blake's call.

Putting the show on pause, he returned Blake's call. "Yo, dude. Whazzup?"

"Yo, dude? Whazzup?" Blake parodied him. "Listen to yourself. You sound like you're still in high school. Somehow, I doubt Clay wants a teeny bopper."

Wes's shoulders slumped, and he massaged the ache between his eyes. He was glad Blake couldn't see him. "How do you suggest I greet someone?"

"For starters, be adult. Friendly is always good. Cordial is good unless you're well acquainted. Something like 'Hi. May I speak to Blake?'"

Boring! Wes hated boring. But he would admit that he was sometimes a little too flamboyant. Perhaps he could bring himself down a few pegs.

"Let's role play. Okay?" Blake said. "Start over. Pretend you've just called me. Do it the right way this time."

Wes plopped onto his favourite chair and wrinkled his nose. Did he really have to?

"Hi. May I speak to Blake?" He patted back a yawn and pinched himself to stay awake.

"This is Blake." Blake paused for a few seconds then ploughed ahead, "That was much better."

Wes stretched up a brow. "If you say so."

"I do."

"I saw you called. Whazzup?"

"Do you have a date for the team's Valentine's Day party?"

Wes sucked in his breath and almost choked. He forced himself to exhale. "No. I thought we might go together—to make Clay jealous. That is if you don't already have a date."

The pause on the other end of the line was pregnant, so long that Wes lost hope and sank further down in his chair.

"I'm going with Duane."

"Oh, of course." He knew it was too good to be true. Guys like Blake had dates lined up for big days like this a year in advance.

"My old college chum, Mitch, is in from out of town, and he needs a date. I thought it might be the perfect opportunity for the two of you to have fun and move you closer to your goal."

Deflated, not sure if he even wanted to go and watch Blake with another man, Wes nodded. Then he remembered Blake

couldn't hear him on the other end of the line. "Fine. Sure. Thanks."

"Are you sure it's okay? You don't sound too enthused."

He swallowed his pride. Going into this crazy scheme, he'd known this wasn't going to be easy. At least, he'd feared it wouldn't be. And he'd been right.

His gut clenched as he envisioned Blake slow dancing in Duane's arms. He could see their gazes meet—just a dusky, flirty glance at first—then their lips would come close as they decided if they should kiss. And then the romantic mists would swirl around them and bewitch them with Valentine's magic, and before they knew it, they'd be necking on the dance floor.

Then hand in hand, they'd go to Duane's house. Or maybe to Blake's.

And Wes's heart would shrivel.

He tried to temper his sigh and looked up at the ceiling, wishing the visions would dissipate and stop torturing him.

He remembered Gidget. She wasn't a quitter.

But he'd been making a play for his man, and he saw no sign it was working. Duane was proof.

[Back to Table of Contents]

Chapter Four

Wes counted down to Valentine's Day. He prayed for a miracle, that he'd get his man before the stroke of midnight.

"Are you going to turn into a pumpkin?" he asked himself with a rueful grin.

"Yep," he answered. "If I'm not already."

He took pen to paper and wrote out his timeline with specific goals. Under his breath, he hummed *Let the Sun Shine In*.

There wasn't much time 'til Valentine's Day so he snickered at himself. "I need a fairy godmother." He waited with bated breath for one to pop out of thin air, but not so much as a wisp of smoke disturbed the air.

He sighed. Oh well, did he really believe in hocus pocus, fairy godmothers, or even Hollywood's silver screen magic?

Gidget was really Sandra Dee, a huge superstar and gorgeous woman ... and him? He was just Wesley Charles Donovan, son of Carrie and Clarence Donovan.

What was he thinking, setting himself an impossible goal by Valentine's Day?

The phone rang, and he checked the display before answering and his heart went pitter patter when he saw it was Blake. His breath caught in his throat and his palms got itchy. Anxious to speak to his love, he dove for the phone, but then he calmed himself and counted to three before answering.

"Don't be a dork," he counselled himself. "Don't sound so desperate. Do you want to scare off the man forever?"

When he picked up the phone, he recited the script Blake had suggested, adding his sultriest voice. "Hello. Wes here."

"Hi, guy," Blake said in his rich chocolaty tones that melted over Wes, making him quiver.

"Mitch is here, and we wondered if you'd like to join us for lunch. I've told him about you, and he's eager to meet you."

Pleasure rippled down Wes' spine, and he barely bit back an enthused, "Really?" Instead, he replaced it with a collected, "That'd be cool. About when were you thinking?"

Blake named a popular salad bar Wes had been to a couple times. His stomach protested at the rabbit food, but he choked back his dislike and said, "Okay. See you there."

The refrigerator called to him, coaxing him to eat real food before he went. But then he curled his arm and tested his muscle still in its infancy, and he stepped away. Maybe Blake was onto something, so he ordered his stomach, "Shut up and fly right."

* * * *

Blake and Mitch waited out front of the restaurant for Wes. Blake could never get enough of Florida with its great cloud formations unlike any others he'd seen on all his travels, the ducks that fearlessly waddled out in front of cars, the geckos that scampered up and down the walls and around the palm trees. He loved the year-round balmy weather.

Was Florida fabulous or what? It was perfect for his ballplaying passion.

When his student approached with the sunlight haloing him, and with all the upgrades he'd made, Blake's heart lurched.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Mitch square his shoulders and stand taller as his attention riveted on the newcomer. He could feel the change in Mitch's temperature, could hear his faster, shallower breathing, and he didn't like it.

When Wes reached them Blake introduced the two men and noted how their fingers lingered too long in each other's hand. He couldn't miss Mitch's gushing, "It's so nice to meet you. Blake's told me how wonderful you are."

He put himself in the middle of the two men, broke them apart, and heartily clapped the newcomer on the back. "Glad you could make it, bud. Hope you're hungry."

Wes gave him a killer smile and said in a sultry voice, "Very."

Blake's heart flipped. Had Wes meant for his reply to be a double entendre? If so, just who was he hungry for?

Suddenly, Blake wished he hadn't introduced Wes to Mitch. It was his worst idea ever.

Why?

He told his small voice to shut up. He didn't want to know 'why'.

Once inside, Mitch beat him to the seat beside Wes, and Blake cursed himself for not being speedier. Then he cursed himself for caring. Wasn't this what he wanted? To get these two great guys together and keep Wes away from that imbecile Clay?

When a rumble of emotion thundered through him, he was taken aback. He knew Mitch would be good for Wes and the new, improved Wes would be good for Mitch.

So why did he hate the idea?

A shadow slid over their table, and Blake glanced up surprised to see Duane.

"Hi guys. Imagine meeting you here. Mind if I join you?" Duane pinned his gaze on Blake and let it suggestively run over him.

Embarrassed at the heat in the man's eyes, Blake lowered his lashes but scooted over. "The more the merrier." Still, he felt slightly better when Duane began flirting with him, crowding him on the seat but not because his heart sped up or his respiration quickened. He didn't feel so left out as Mitch sidled up to Wes and batted his big baby blues at the man.

Worse, Wes was eating it up and hanging on Mitch's every word.

"Something wrong with the grub?" Duane pointed his fork at Blake's plate.

"Huh?" Clueless Blake followed Duane's gaze. "It's fine. Why?"

"Because you're not eating."

Because he had no appetite even though he'd been looking forward to eating out all week. This was his day to splurge. However, he grumbled, "Guess I'm not that hungry. I get that way after a workout."

Duane looked deeply into his eyes then squeezed his thigh. "I'd like to give you a workout. How about a little gymnastics?" Blake shuddered and firmly put Duane's hand back on his own leg. Aware the other two were taking this in, he didn't like it. He didn't want Wes to get the wrong impression.

His thoughts stopped short. Why did he care what Wes thought?

He masked his face, hoping no one could read him. Then he had to suppress a chuckle. Hell, how could they read him if he couldn't read himself? "Sorry, I'm all tied up today. My friend Mitch is in town. Mitch, I'd like you to meet my friend Duane. Duane, I'd like you to meet my college roommate, Mitch."

Duane leaned over the table and as he shook Mitch's hand, drawled with a lascivious grin, "Lucky bastard."

Blake pushed his lettuce around his plate but couldn't get down more than a couple bites. He was too busy casting surreptitious glances at Wes and Mitch. Damn, this was a family place with little kids running around. It looked as if they were about to do a lap dance.

He decided it was time to corral them out of here. "Is anyone up for a drink at my place?"

Duane purred and linked his fingers through Blake's.
"Count me in, lover boy. Throw in a little romantic music, and I'll throw in a couple slow dances."

Blake reclaimed his hand and merely nodded. He should teach Wes how to slow dance ... if he didn't already know how. He'd need to know before Valentine's Day. Slow dancing was a sure-fire way to a man's heart.

Mitch rubbed shoulders with Wes and gazed at him hopefully, "Say yes."

Wes checked his watch, looked up, and said, "Sure. I'm free for a couple hours.

A lazy, satisfied grin curved Mitch's lips. "I can't wait to slow dance ... with you."

Wes' Adam's apple worked, and a blush started to creep up his cheeks, but he said coolly, "Sounds like fun."

Simultaneously, Blake's heart sang and wept. He was happy yet sad, anxious to teach Wes the fine nuances of seduction and flirting yet afraid Wes wasn't ready to fly on his own. He should've kept him apart from Mitch until after he'd given this lesson. He didn't even know how well the man could kiss, and he knew how much Mitch adored a good kisser.

His gaze dwelled on Wes' lips, and he wondered how he'd missed just how firmly chiselled and sensual they were. They must've been hidden by the unkempt beard. With just a sexy five o'clock shadow, they stood out, calling to be kissed and kissed good.

Blake made a mental note to make sure Wes was a good kisser and, if not, to instruct him on the fine art. Furthermore, he needed to find out if Wes was good in bed. He was considered to be a kind and considerate lover but could turn on the heat and make a man howl for the down and dirty stuff. His pulse quickened at the idea.

Again, he stole looks at Wes's sculpted body, and he congratulated himself on his intervention. The man had really shaped up and was becoming quite a dish. His abs grew harder by the day and his arms and legs were now well-muscled with whip-cord strength.

His shoulders seemed broader, and his waist nicely tapered.

But most of all, Wes had a new, exciting confidence that wowed Blake. He could hardly believe it was the same man. This wasn't the geek who'd begged him to make a man out of him and make Clay jealous. This was a real man who anyone would be proud to be with.

At least out of bed. He couldn't certify his education as complete without adding the final lessons...

His mouth went dry, and his cock flexed as he imagined Wes in bed, nude and waiting for him with bated breath, eager to be fucked, to learn how to catch his man and forever snare him in his web. He hated the idea of creating a Picasso just to hand him over to an insensitive brute that couldn't begin to guess Wes' true value. Blake wasn't sure that even Mitch was good enough for the new, improved Wes.

His cock swelled, and he silently swore at himself and tried to walk closely behind Duane so the whole world wouldn't see the telltale bulge in his pants. He wondered how he could get rid of Mitch for a few hours so he could get Wes alone in his bed, in order to grade his skill level. From the look of his friend, he'd have to pry him loose or get him zonkered.

Under the late afternoon sun, Wes' skin shimmered with a healthy tan from all their hours of ball playing. His hair soaked in the sunlight and seemed to glow with its radiance. His deep brown eyes contrasted beautifully with his blondness. Blake loved the man's unusual colouring and thought what a masterpiece he was creating.

Creating?

The man was pretty darned perfect already. If only Blake could get him to stop humming those show tunes, if he could shift Wes' focus off that damned Clay...

Blake hoped he could make Wes forget all the other man. He'd show him what love could and should be and what to look for in a relationship. It'd be too cruel to stop halfway and leave the man hanging out on second base at the end of the last inning of the game.

He couldn't do that.

He wanted to lick every inch of Wes' delectable flesh, to run his fingers through Wes's crisp, blond hair, to stroke his cock into a fever. He wanted to rub his naked dick against Wes'. He wanted to give him a blow job he'd never forget and leave him begging for more.

It had been eons since he'd known a love like that, and he yearned for it. Wes so deserved it. He was unlike any man Blake had ever met—sweet and quirky, sexy and godlike all at the same time. If he let himself admit it, he even found Wes' humming amusing.

The song, *Jesus Christ Superstar* replayed in his mind and he found himself humming it.

Then he chastised himself. Down boy. You're just the teacher, and teachers don't do this stuff.

But did he want to be more? And he wasn't a bona fide school teacher, and neither of them was under age.

The thought floored him, and his thoughts froze.

Did he want to be more to Wes? What was happening to him? His cock was so enflamed he was ready to come.

When they reached his car, Duane's gaze flickered to Blake's pants, and his eyes darkened. "Ooh, babe, you're so hot. I think we can skip that drink," he whispered huskily so that only Blake could hear.

Blake's desire was doused at the thought of Duane crawling into his bed, of Duane making moves on him. Duane was cute and considered to be a good catch, but the man could be pretty dense, and he was too full of himself. On the way out of the restaurant, he'd preened in the mirror the entire time. *Not cool.*

An hour later, back at his house, Blake couldn't shake Duane. Nor could he keep his gaze from stealing away to Wes with Mitch. Strains of a romantic melody whispered over him, making him dreamy and increasing his longing to take Wes in his arms and teach him how to drive a man wild with desire.

He watched him with Mitch, noting how sensually he swayed to the rhythm, how he became part of the music, how closely he melded to Mitch, and it was all he could do not to swear aloud.

"Slow dance with me," Duane murmured against his ear, rubbing against his ass, his erection raging.

Blake didn't know if he dared. He'd be leading on the man, and he had no desire to fuck him. He only wanted to fuck Wes.

But Wes was already slow dancing with Mitch, so closely no light shone between them. Their lips were within kissing distance, and Blake caught his breath, willing them to separate. Duane massaged his shoulders. "What are you waiting for? Your friends have already caught the mood."

Conflicted, Blake nodded and let Duane guide him onto the living room floor, but he wouldn't let him pull him close. He didn't want to feel the other man's cock rubbing up on him. He only wanted Wes to lay his head on his shoulder. He only wanted to feel Wes's cock against his.

When the song switched, he pulled away. "Let's switch partners."

When Duane tried to hold onto him, he sternly said, "I need to speak to Wes. Excuse me."

Mitch made a moue of his lips but didn't complain. He slashed a kiss across Wes's lips and whispered something that made Wes smile, then he winked. "Until we meet again."

Blake rolled his eyes remembering when he had found that oh so romantic and swooned in Mitch's arms. But they hadn't been an item since their college days, and Mitch's syrupy sweet charm no longer worked on him even though they'd remained the best of friends and they'd do anything for each other.

Mitch narrowed his eyes as if reading his thoughts, then let Duane sweep him away into his arms.

Now that Blake had what he wanted, he wasn't sure he could do, not with onlookers. Of course, the onlookers were insurance Wes wouldn't take him too seriously and wouldn't get the wrong idea.

Hiding his quivers and hoping Wes wouldn't feel them, he held out his hand to his pupil. "Dance with me?"

Wes slowly nodded and took his outstretched hand as if in slow motion. "I thought you'd never ask."

Blake had never heard such a sexy, compelling voice, and he swooned as he pulled the other man into his arms. He whispered so only Wes could hear, "There are a few more things I need to teach you. This will be a good opportunity."

Wes pulled back a couple inches, leaving Blake feeling an odd chill. Wes quirked his brow. "Such as?"

"Such as the art of slow dancing." He moulded Wes against him, noting how perfectly they fit. Then gently, he guided the other man's head against his shoulder and held him close. His heart sped up, pounding in tandem with Wes'. The synergy energised him.

"I love to slow dance," Wes said, swaying with him, letting his fingertips graze the sensitive nape of Blake's neck. "It's been ages since I have. I was hoping to at the Valentine's Party..."

Blake lost the rest of Wes' words. Slow dancing plus Valentine's Party equals seduction of Clay.

He recoiled at the poisonous thought and knew he couldn't send a sweet man like Wes up against a viper like Clay. "About the party..."

Wes lifted his head and looked at him with soft doe eyes. "Yes?"

"Clay isn't right for you. In fact, he's not a very good guy. In all conscience, I don't know that I can continue to help you make him jealous."

Wes's brows drew together, and he stopped. "No? Did I do something to disappoint you?"

Blake's heart raced, and his breath stuck in his throat. "God, no. I mean that you're way too good for him. He'd be toxic to you."

Wes stood stoic, regarding him with hooded, guarded eyes. "You really think so? Why?"

Blake wanted to shake sense into Wes and expose the heartless coach for the snake he suspected he was. "He's just not a good person. You must see the way he yells at you. At all of us. He's got some loose screws. You don't want to deal with that."

"Is that your business?" Wes asked, his gaze skipping to Mitch and Duane.

Blake wanted to shout and scream that, yes! it was his business. But he inhaled deeply and counted to ten before speaking. As calmly as he could, he said, "As your friend, as someone who values you, I don't want to see you get caught up with someone like him. You're too good for him."

A hint of a smile tugged at one edge of Wes's lips. "Is there any other reason you feel that way?"

Blake stared at him, wondering what to say? He wasn't ready to admit that he felt things he didn't want to feel, that he was a jumbled mess inside, that the vision of him in Mitch's arms, almost ready to kiss, tore him apart. Instead, he said, "I like you. We're buds. I care what happens to you."

Wes seemed to digest his words then nodded. Finally, he said, "Don't worry. I have feelings for someone else now. I've started to see Clay's true colours."

Relief and a burning ache filled him all at once. He thanked God Wes had seen through Clay. But Blake reeled that he'd

introduced Wes to a new amour, just as Blake was starting to feel something precious he'd not felt in a hell of a long time.

There it was! He'd finally admitted it to himself. He felt something for Wes, something special, something precious. He didn't know how he'd let himself fall in love with the former geek, but it had happened ... too late now.

All he could do was finish his tutoring, savour a few memories, wish the happy couple well and walk away. Hell, knowing Mitch, the guy would want him to be best man at their wedding. That would really bite.

And he'd do it for friendship no matter how much his heart broke.

But first, he'd steal whatever time with Wes he could.

"So, what else do you want to show me, teach?" Wes quipped, his voice lighter and airier.

Blake was thankful that the mood wasn't so edgy anymore, and he pulled Wes back into his arms where Blake wished Wes could forever stay. If Wes were his, he'd cherish every moment God gave them. He'd make Wes feel special every minute of every day. He'd never let him doubt just how much he loved and adored him.

But Wes wasn't his, and Blake's heart shrivelled. He'd given Wes away to his best friend, and he wasn't an Indian giver. Still, he said, "I need to make sure you know how to kiss."

Before Wes could protest or the others could intervene, he slid his finger beneath Wes's chin and forced him to gaze into his eyes. Electricity sizzled and lightning struck. Blake could hardly breathe as he was sucked deep into Wes's soulful

gaze. How long he stared into Wes's beautiful eyes he didn't know, how long their breath mingled, intoxicating and bewitching him, he didn't know. It could have been a moment in time or an eternity. He was lost and floating on another plane.

He lowered his lips and gently dropped a kiss on Wes's lips. When the other man's moulded to his, when a groan escaped his lips, Blake pulled him closer yet into his embrace. Then he pressed harder, capturing Wes' lips, intent on his plunder.

But Wes didn't resist. He opened his mouth and delved his tongue into Blake's mouth. Blake's blood simmered and his pulse raced. He wanted, no needed, to be closer and be one with the man. He drank deeply of Wes' lips, exploring his mouth, savouring his wickedly delightful taste.

Blake's cock burgeoned and ached for release. He cradled him between his legs. He rubbed his groin against Wes' and was delighted when Wes' cock sprang to life and Wes ground his hips against him, as well.

Breathless and panting, he broke their lip lock and leaned his forehead against Wes's. "Wow! I give you an A plus."

Wes pouted prettily and asked, "So I passed and need no further instruction?"

Blake's brow furrowed. "You're disappointed that you passed?"

"I like to study ... and practise."

Blake's heart thudded heavily against his ribs, and he was tempted to 'practise' some more. But he remembered the next lesson, and his blood turned up to a boil. By now their hips furiously ground together, and he was surprised they weren't wearing holes in their pants or that he hadn't yet come. "So do I, but there's another lesson you need to learn before you can graduate."

"And that is, professor?" Wes' hands stroked his shoulders, gliding down his arms and back up.

He loved the feeling and shuddered without thought of trying to hide his reaction. This was his time, his turn. Again he slashed his lips across Wes'. "I need to make sure you'll make a man swoon in bed. I'm going to teach you how to fuck him until he screams for mercy."

"When?" Wes asked breathily, closing his eyes and pushing his lips more firmly against Blake's.

At this point, Blake was ready to strip and take him right there in the living room. He didn't want to waste another minute. "Now. Right now. In my bedroom." He no longer gave a damn what Duane or Mitch thought. They were big boys, and they could deal with it.

He linked his fingers through Wes' and led him to his room. At the threshold, he swept Wes into his arms and carried him across. Murmuring against the other man's lips, he said, "Always keep the romance in the relationship. That little move works every time."

Wes curled his arms around Blake's shoulders and pressed moist kisses against his throat. "It sure worked for me. You're good."

A primitive growl arose from deep in his throat, born of his yearning and ravenous need for his love. It worked for him, too. He loved to spoil his lovers. He couldn't help but cherish

them and make them his. His primal need brought out the caveman in him every time. But this time, he felt more primitive, more in need than ever before. By far.

"Soft music and scented candles are a nice touch, too."

Damn, but he wished he'd thought of lighting the candles, but at least, they had the music.

Wes squirmed against him and insinuated his hand between Blake's waist and his pants and undid his button and zipper. "You talk too much. Shut up and kiss me. Fuck me until I beg for mercy."

Blake could do that. In fact, he longed to do that.
Reverently, he laid his lover on the bed and looked down at him in a glow of love. He'd never seen anyone more beautiful. No one had ever made him feel like this, and he and Wes hadn't even made love yet. This went a lot deeper than sex, and he knew it was the real thing, the forever kind of thing. He couldn't let Mitch have Wes without a fight. He was going to love Wes until he was inebriated as him.

"Take off your pants, lover. I can't wait to see all of you." Wes traced his lips with the tip of his tongue and swept his dusky lashes over his eyes. The sooty crescents were longer and more beautiful than Blake had ever noticed, and he caught his breath yet again. Like a Picasso, he was constantly discovering new depths to this man. And like the Mona Lisa, Wes' smile captivated him.

Unable to resist the lure of his lover's command, he shimmied out of his clothes, letting his pants pool around his feet, then pushed his underwear down, exposing his eager

cock. He felt as if he stood on display, and he held his breath for the verdict. "You like?"

Wes' lashes swept up, and his gaze adored Blake. "No, I don't like."

Blake deflated. What? His cock began to shrivel, and it was all he could do to stand his ground and not slink away.

"I love it. Come here and love me." Wes held his arms open wide, and a brilliant come-hither smile claimed his lips.

Blake was so overjoyed, his heart almost burst through his chest. In rapture, he bounded onto the bed and on top of Wes. "And what about your clothes? Don't I get to see your cock?"

Starved, he made short shrift of his lover's shirt and pushed away the offending material. All he wanted, all he longed for, was this pure, naked man. Nothing more, nothing less.

Before Wes could open his mouth, Blake unsnapped his trousers and pushed them down to his knees. Then he sat back on his haunches and pulled off the clothes the rest of the way. He flung them across the room.

In awe of Wes's long, wide cock, so red and velvety, so swollen and ready for him, he deposited a kiss on the throbbing bulb then licked his lips and savoured the muskiness.

He reached in his nightstand drawer and pulled out his condoms and lubricant. "We can't forget our protection," he murmured, chafing at the delay. But he was already about to explode, and he'd be a bad teacher if he didn't teach safe sex nor practise what he preached.

"Here, let me do the honours," Wes huskily murmured as he scooted up on the bed. Tenderly, he rolled the condom onto Blake's cock, then he lovingly slathered the gel over it. He caressed it for several moments longer than necessary, a dreaminess on his features that enraptured Blake. "What are we waiting for, lover?"

Blake couldn't think of a thing except that Wes's hands felt so wonderful caressing him. He was going to come before he ever stuck his cock in Wes' ass. For a brief moment, his cock felt chilled as he stood on his knees between Wes's legs and hauled his lover's ass up to him.

"Am I passing so far, teach?" Wes asked as he ground his hips closer, harder.

"With flying colours," Blake murmured, barely able to speak he was so moved, so horny. He teased Wes' ass with the tip of his cock, loving how his lover squirmed and writhed. He loved making Wes feel good.

"Are you trying to make me scream for mercy?" Wes asked.

"Didn't I say I would?"

"Fuck me, please! Now! I can't stand it any longer."

"You're such a wanton slut."

"I love it when you talk dirty."

"That's another tip. Don't be a gentleman in bed." Blake was getting too far into this to give more tips, at least verbally, so he pushed his lubed finger into Wes' ass to prepare it for his cock. Little by little, he worked it in. When one finger was all the way inside, and Wes gyrating on it, groaning loudly, he pushed in a second. "Do you like that?"

"Oh, yeah. But I'd love your big cock more. Please, please, please fuck me. I want more. I want all of you. Fuck me 'til I scream."

"I love it when a man begs," Blake said, unable to wait another moment himself lest he'd come outside Wes' warmth. Driven, scorching hot, he spread Wes further and worked in his cock. Exquisite sensations flooded him, and he flung back his head and howled. "God, you're so tight. It feels wonderful."

Wes curled his hand around his dick and pumped fast and furiously. His lips parted, gasping for air. His eyes were hooded, in the throes of passion.

Blake felt the stirring in his balls, felt them tighten and expand. Then felt it in his cock. "Oh, God. I'm coming." He thrust deeper and held Wes prisoner against him as his flood erupted. He ground his hips against his lover as wave upon wave of rapture overcame him. He didn't think it would end.

Wes screamed and his cum squirted across Blake's stomach like a warm, creamy fountain.

Blake couldn't take his gaze off Wes's beautiful cock as it stood so tall, so hard, spurting his cum all over them. He supported Wes's hips until no more came and he was breathing easier, his screams subsiding.

If Blake wasn't in love before, now he was a goner. He'd met his match. He'd never had a better fuck. His heart had never been so fully involved. Finally, he pulled out, lowered his lover to the mattress, then lay atop him, lubing their bodies with their own cream.

Against his lips, Wes asked, "So, did I pass? What was my grade?"

"One-hundred-thousand percent triple A," Blake said, not caring if his love shone through in his voice or his words.

Wes wrapped his arms around Blake and squeezed. "That was awesome. I give you two-hundred-thousand percent quadruple A."

Blake had to laugh and rubbed his nose against Wes'. "Thank you," he murmured."

Wes scrunched his nose and blinked. "For what?"

"For asking me to mentor you. For bringing me so much pleasure." He almost added, "For making me love you," but bit it back at the last second, afraid his love would be unrequited.

"I'm so glad I did ... ask you to mentor me, I mean." Wes spread kisses along Blake's jaw and his cheeks. He took a deep breath and said on a ragged whisper, "I have a confession."

Wes couldn't hide his love another moment. How could Blake love him like that and not *love* him? He didn't think it possible. He had to take another chance.

"Confession?" Blake pulled away and rolled onto his side beside Wes. He propped himself up on his elbow and smiled.

Wes wasn't sure if the smile was merely friendly or held a wealth more of meaning. But he'd started this and would hate himself if he didn't go through with it. Still, the words stuck in his throat so he nodded.

"What type of confession?" Blake trailed his warm fingers down Wes' chest, across his stomach, then tangled in his

curly mound of hair before wrapping around the base of his cock.

Wes gathered his courage and thought about Valentine's Day, just around the corner, hoping he finally had a Valentine of his own. He drew in a big breath and crossed his fingers. When Blake tilted his head, he blurted out, "I want you to be my Valentine. Will you?"

Blake sat up and stared at him. He wet his lips.

His heart in his throat, his stomach roiling, Wes waited. If Blake said no, if he said he just wanted to be friends, he'd die a little. Their lovemaking proved to him they were meant to be together. It was way better than he'd imagined, and he'd pictured it to be awesome.

The longer Blake took to answer, the more his hope died. Had he revealed himself prematurely? Had he misread the man? He prayed not. Surely, if Blake didn't return his feelings, he'd scare him away after this. Wes wanted to kick himself. He wished he'd bided his time and asked for more 'lessons', letting love grow, before asking too much.

After what seemed an interminable length of time, His heart sank all the way to his feet, and he rolled off the bed. With his back to Blake, he said, "That's okay. I understand. You don't have to say a word."

Yearning for escape, he hunted for his clothes. He was desperate to run home and lick his wounds. There was no way he could show his face at that Valentine's party, no way he would go and watch Blake and Duane together. In fact, he didn't know if he could stay on the team and come face-to-face with Blake week after week. The torture would be too

great. His heart couldn't take it. He blasted himself for inserting his foot into his monstrous mouth.

As he pulled up his pants, Blake stepped up to him. "Why are you leaving?"

Wes didn't know if he could speak without a crack in his voice, so he delayed answering like Blake had.

Blake gently turned the other man to face him then captured Wes' hands and brought them to his mouth, and one by one, kissed his knuckles, surprising him into freezing. "I'd be honoured to be your Valentine. I love you."

Shocked, Wes couldn't breathe. Finally, he managed to push past his petrified lips, "What?"

Blake opened Wes' hands and pressed warm lips to his palms, languorously and sensually. "I said," he enunciated slowly and carefully, "I love you. I'd love to be your Valentine ... forever and ever."

Wes blinked again, knowing he must be dreaming. Finally he squeaked out, the geek returning, "Me? Do you really mean me?"

Blake chuckled and pointedly looked around the room. "I don't see anyone else in here. Of course, I mean you. You and only you."

Finally, Wes' paralysis waned, and Blake's confession seeped in. "I love you, too. I always have." He realised the extent of his confession and gasped. Afraid Blake would change his mind for being tricked, he gazed deeply into his love's eyes. "You don't hate me, do you?"

Blake laughed and pulled him into his embrace. "Hate you? Didn't you just hear me? I love you. Thank you for opening my eyes to the wonder that is you."

Wes still couldn't believe how much providence had smiled upon him. "Things like this don't happen to me."

Blake tapped his chin and scowled. "Stop that. You were always fine. All you needed was to believe in yourself like I believe in you."

Hearing that Blake believed in him sent Wes soaring to the heavens and boosted his ego tenfold. Deep down, he knew he was a new and wiser man. A man in love.

"I hope Mitch won't be hurt by this," Blake said, regret in his eyes.

"Mitch and I only just met. What about Duane? He was supposed to be your date for the Valentine's party."

"Oh, yeah." Blake chewed his lower lip. He sifted his hand through Wes' hair.

Blake's fingers on his scalp felt so wonderful, so mesmerising he bent his head into the caress and purred. "Don't stop."

Blake let out another laugh. "About Duane, we weren't an item. It was just a date. He'll understand. He'll have to. I'm taken now. I have a Valentine."

How Wes loved to hear those words. They reverberated in his soul. He had a Valentine, not just for this Valentine's Day but forever. Wes lifted his lips to his lover's and against them he huskily murmured, as love made him warm and giddy, "As do I."

[Back to Table of Contents]

About the Author

When Ashley Ladd was 16, she made a wish to live in the paradise known as South Florida. She got her wish and for the past twenty years has lived her dream with fun in the sun.

She's held many jobs besides romance diva, including accountant, customer service manager, and waitress, but the most notable is her stint in the US Air Force. Thus, this story, like several of her others, features sexy military heroes and heroines, living the adventure she knows and loves. Her only regret is that she can't meet the real life Captain Kirk and travel through space with him, thus she has created her own sexy space captain with whom to romp and love through the universe.

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