



Oh, George
Christiane France

OH, GEORGE

...George visibly relaxed and smiled, a sexy, knowing smile that softened the wide mouth and did strange things to Zack's pulse rate. George shrugged, folded his arms and leaned his back against the office door. "Am I to assume you've had a rethink and decided you'd like to be friends after all?"

"Friends?"

George's smile deepened. "Okay, so you want to be more than friends."

"You have any objection?"

"None I can think of."

"Does that mean you have some idea what my problem is?"

"Offhand, I'd say you're desperate for a little action." The smile broadened a little, and the tip of George's tongue appeared and traced the outline of his upper lip. "But why waste time guessing, hmm? Why don't you come over here so we can find out if that's what you really want, or if it's all in your mind."

The crisp British accent and the unexpected take-charge attitude was a turn-on all by itself. Zack joined George by the door.

The man continued to regard him through half-closed eyes as he hooked one arm around Zack's waist and pulled him close. Zack could smell George's male scent beneath a faint

hint of mouthwash, and that excited him even more. He closed his eyes as George's lips brushed against his, then George's tongue slipped into his mouth for a moment to taste and tease. Breaking the kiss, George's mouth moved down Zack's neck, while he used his free hand to unzip Zack's pants.

Zack could barely breathe as George's cool fingers slipped inside the opening and slid seductively down the length of his shaft...

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OH, GEORGE

BY

CHRISTIANE FRANCE

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OH, GEORGE
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*For Roy and The Boys.
And thanks to Dee for coming up
with the power failure.*

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He lay stretched out on the bed, naked as the day he was born, holding his breath and trembling with anticipation as he watched the other man disrobe...first, he slipped off the highly polished black shoes, the black socks, then the pearl gray jacket and pants, his underpants, and, last of all, the navy silk tie and tailored white shirt.

His anticipation kicked up a notch as the man kicked the discarded clothing aside and came over to where he waited on the bed. A lock of dark hair had fallen over his forehead, making him look even sexier...wanton. He lifted a hand and pushed the errant strand of black silk back.

He could smell the other man's scent now, an intoxicating

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mixture of soap, sex, and his own special essence. For now, they were content to just look at one another and enjoy this first precious moment of intimacy.

Then the other man smiled and lay down beside him. He felt his cool fingers trail across his overheated flesh, and he heard the soft words of encouragement as the man drew him closer and closer until he felt his rampant shaft nudge seductively against his belly.

This man who held him was handsome beyond belief, with a sensational body and beautiful, well-shaped hands. Clever, knowledgeable hands that knew how to tease and arouse and whose full range of talents he could barely wait to experience. He relaxed, luxuriating in the delicious sensation of the long, inquisitive fingers skimming over his skin, touching, exploring and slowly bringing him to the edge.

At last, the moment he'd been waiting for arrived. His new lover knelt between his legs and, grasping his stiff and aching cock firmly in both hands, brought it to his lips. He began to love him slowly, licking and nibbling the tip before sucking him into the warm, slippery wetness of his wide mouth one tiny, delicious millimeter at a time. As the nuzzling waned, the sucking grew harder, and the other man's hands became more urgent. An insistent finger pushed hard against his hole, seeking entry. He was alive with a thousand new sensations and ready to die from pure pleasure. He knew he couldn't hold back for more than a few more seconds at the most, he needed to let go, to—

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* * *

“Excuse me, sir.”

Zachary Hannington ripped himself out of his X-rated daydream, sat up so fast he almost fell out of the chair, but somehow managed to recover just in time to grab a document from the file in front of him. “Yes, Ramona? What is it?”

“Feeling a little under the weather this morning, are we, sir?”

“No, Ramona. *We* feel just fine. What’s the problem?”

“It’s Daniel, sir. His sister called a few minutes ago to let us know Daniel won’t be in today. He’s in the hospital. She said he was at a restaurant yesterday evening having dinner with friends and was taken ill suddenly. The doctors figure it’s either one of those bugs that are always making the rounds, or a mild case of food poisoning. Anyway, rather than take chances, they’re keeping him in today and running tests to make sure it’s nothing more serious.”

Zack shook his head, trying to dislodge the remnants of the daydream and, at the same time, comprehend what Ramona was saying. “Daniel? Our Daniel?”

“I’m afraid so. He’ll be off work today and maybe tomorrow, too. Depends on how long the tests take and what the results are.”

“That’s awful. Poor old Danny. I hope for his sake it’s nothing serious. But I agree the doctors need to check it out.”

Until Ramona came in, Zack had been enjoying what had lately become a delicious and very addictive daydream and feeling right on top of his very successful world. Now, all the

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good feelings disappeared as his mood took a direct dive straight down to zero. How on earth was he supposed to close one of the most important deals his company had ever undertaken without his personal assistant here by his side to check and double check every detail and make sure it all went smoothly?

The unpleasant truth was the mere thought of taking those kind of chances made him nervous. He was one man and a busy one, always juggling a dozen different things, so he depended on Danny to catch anything he missed. As his personal assistant, details were Danny's department. As the new owner of his late father's company, Zack's job was to track down and acquire business—such as the contract they would be signing the final documents for later today covering the renovation and upgrading into luxury boutique style hotels of a dozen or so small, rundown inns and guesthouses recently acquired by the Tarasios Group. It would also be Zack's responsibility to oversee the project through to completion.

Zack knew Tarasios owned properties worldwide, and being given a chance to show what his company could do for them was like a dream come true. If the owners were happy with the finished result, the sky was the limit.

"This is the absolute worst..." he muttered, searching his mind for a way out of the problem. Zack had inherited Danny with the company. He'd been Zack's father's PA, he knew the company inside and out, and was worth more than his weight in gold. Zack relied on him for just about everything, and to go into a meeting this important without Danny by his side

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was unsettling to say the very least.

“I know, sir. And it’s much too late to reschedule. The people from Tarasios will be here in less than two hours.”

“Yes, I realize that. But let’s deal with first things first. I want you to contact the hospital and make certain Danny has the best of everything—a private room, top notch medical care, outside specialists, whatever he needs. And send flowers, magazines, and anything else you feel is appropriate in the circumstances. Now, as far as today is concerned...” Zack hesitated, frowning and flipping the corner of the report with his thumb as he regarded the beautiful, well-dressed woman who’d been the company’s personnel manager for the past several years. “I need someone capable of replacing Danny for this closing. And, since Alan’s away this week,” he said, referring to the company’s senior vice-president, “perhaps you can ask his assistant if she’ll be kind enough to step in and help me out.”

Ramona grimaced. “I’m sure she would, but I’m afraid Lorna’s not here either. With Alan away, she decided to grab a few of her vacation days to visit her sister in Boston. And the only other qualified people we have are all busy with other deals.” She hesitated, frowning. “I’ll do a little shuffling around and see what I can come up with. Or, I can call that executive help agency we sometimes use and see if they have a temporary they can send over. Their people are well trained and—”

“Absolutely not! Remember what happened during last winter’s flu epidemic when we hired a couple of their

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temporaries to help with our bid to design the décor for that new hotel in Dubai?"

A faint blush traveled up Ramona's neck and into her face. "Oh, right. The time the details became public knowledge before the bid was even delivered. We don't know for sure it was one of them who sold us out."

"No, we don't. And whoever it was had better hope I never do. It was a very important job. The kind that would have put us on top of a very competitive heap." Zack tapped his fingers impatiently on the polished wood of his antique desk. "Surely, there has to be someone in the secretarial pool who can help me until Danny is back. I realize they won't be as qualified or experienced as Danny or Lorna, but at least they'll have some knowledge of the company and its business."

"In that case, what about George Parker?"

"Who?"

"You know, the Englishman."

"No, Ramona, I don't know. We're one of the biggest commercial design companies in the country. We have over two hundred employees, not counting any part-time people, and with all the constant comings and goings a staff this size generates, I'm afraid it's more than a little difficult to keep track."

"I'm sorry," Ramona soothed, in what Zack privately thought of as her "mother hen voice." "I understand all that. I'm the one who does the hiring and sometimes even I can get a little fuzzy when it comes to linking names to faces. But I'm sure you've seen George around the office. He's rather a

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standout.”

“When did you hire him?”

“A couple of months ago. We were short-staffed after Meg went on maternity leave and Janey decided to go back to school to finish her degree. And with both Danny and Lorna saying they were seriously thinking of retiring before the end of this year, we both knew something needed to be done about the situation. Don’t you remember? You and I did discuss it—at quite some length actually.”

“Vaguely. So you hired George?”

“I happened to be in reception the day George came into the office to drop off a copy of his resumé, so I interviewed him on the spot and hired him then and there. I knew right away he was the kind of person we were looking for.”

“He’s worked as a PA before?”

“For about three years, so he knows the drill. He’s very personable and extremely efficient. Ambitious, too. I think you’ll like him. He’s also familiar with the details of today’s closing because he helped Danny with some of the extra paperwork. If Danny’s going to be away for any length of time, then this could work out just fine for you.”

“What does this George look like?”

“Come on, Zack. I’m sure you know as well as I do what the man looks like. He’s tall, slim, and very handsome. He looks more like a male model than a secretary.”

Zack’s stomach gave a sudden, uncomfortable lurch and he felt himself start to sweat a little. “Black hair, pale, pearl gray suits and white shirts with French cuffs?”

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Ramona relaxed a little and smiled. “See! I knew you’d noticed him.”

“It would be difficult not to. Like you say, he looks like he belongs on a runway rather than in an office. I didn’t realize he was part of the pool.” He paused. He’d wondered about the man the first time he saw him. Now he had the perfect opportunity to find out for sure. “I suppose he has the female staff in a complete uproar?”

“Not since he made it clear he’s not interested.” Ramona hesitated, looking a trifle uncomfortable. “I may be wrong, but I having a feeling he’s not interested in women, period.”

“Really?” Zack sat up a little straighter in his chair, glad to know he’d guessed correctly.

“Really. Anyway, you know who I mean now.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Zack took a paper clip from the glass dish on his desk and began to fiddle with it. If he were to tell Ramona the truth, he’d done a lot more than merely notice the latest male member of the secretarial pool. Chemistry exploded between the two of them each and every time they caught sight of one another—to the point where Zack had become so obsessed with the other man’s handsome face, wide mouth and slim figure it was starting to mess with both his head and his sleep.

Problem was he knew he’d seen George somewhere before—somewhere outside the office—but he couldn’t recall where or when. And it wasn’t the man’s face he remembered so much as he did his voice, the way he carried himself, and the aura of confidence he projected. *Like an actor, or a movie*

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star, or someone trying to make an impression...

Perhaps he'd seen the guy at one of those new masquerade auctions where everything was on display, except for the identity of the man foolish or brave enough to put himself and his favors on the auction block and spout what he would or might considering doing to drive the price up. There had been a rash of those ridiculous auctions recently and their only saving grace, in Zack's opinion, was that the proceeds always went to a couple of worthwhile local charities. Or perhaps he'd seen George in one of those dark-as-sin nightclubs where he occasionally took certain special clients? The kind of establishment where the only light was directed to the action on stage—you could barely see the black-suited serving staff who delivered the drinks, and you wouldn't know if your mother was sitting right next to you.

The first time he saw George, he'd suspected the man was gay, and now Ramona had confirmed his suspicion. In fact, now that he thought about it, George looked to be the type who would be right at home in the glow of a peepshow spotlight, either ramming his rod up some pretty boy's ass or, even better, sucking on the dick of some huge wrestler type.

Wherever they'd met before—and Zack was one hundred percent positive they had—he just wished he knew if what he thought he remembered about that meeting had actually happened, or if he'd only imagined it. Whether real or imagined, an image of that slim body stripped of its pretty clothes and those full lips wrapped around his cock had taken up permanent residence in his head and was driving him

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insane. Snatches of the daydream Ramona had interrupted came back in complete and exquisite detail, and he found himself remembering the way the man had taken him into his mouth—one tiny, delicious millimeter at a time and then how he'd sucked him...a gentle supping at first to excite him to the point where his juices began to flow. Then the sucking had changed to hard, fast and so urgent, he'd thought the man intended to swallow him whole.

He gave a quick shake of his head in an effort to dislodge the disturbing memory. Too much partying, combined with too many late nights at the office, were starting to get to him. He needed to slow down. Maybe what he thought he remembered was nothing more than wishful thinking. At least that's what he hoped. George worked for his company. And, as far as Zack was concerned, regardless of what he *thought* he remembered or how much he *thought* he'd enjoyed the experience, his employees were and always would be strictly off limits, no matter how tantalizing or delectable they might appear. It was far safer that way.

“So, what do you think, sir? Shall I send George up?”

“Umm...” George at a distance, he could handle. George up close was a whole different matter. “You're quite sure there's no one more experienced who could pinch hit just for today?”

“Positive.”

“In that case...” Perspiration trickled down Zack's back, and he ran a finger under his collar in the hope of loosening it a little. He wondered what Ramona would think if he stood up

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and moved around in an effort to try and ease the sudden tightness in his pants.

But pacing wasn't his thing, and rather than have Ramona wonder why he, the king of cool, had suddenly lost it, he decided to stay put and suffer. Ramona knew most of his secrets, but not quite all of them. As far as she was concerned, he was one of the town's most eligible bachelors. He always appeared in public with a different beauty on his arm, so it was generally assumed he was a swinger rather than the settling down kind, and that suited him just fine. If Ramona suspected otherwise, she kept it to herself.

It was just his bad luck Lorna wasn't here. Lorna had been with the company for as long if not longer than Danny and was completely married to the job. Even if he was interested in women, which he wasn't, Lorna was a middle-aged, slightly overweight grandmother. In other words, she was safe. With Lorna around, he'd never have to worry about backsliding into a sexy daydream or two. George was a whole different proposition. Keeping his mind on business while George was within touching distance sounded like the worst kind of torture.

For a split second Zack considered going into the closing alone. But in this day and age, any businessman worth his salt had at least one PA in tow for a closing this important. In the upper echelons of the kind of high-end business where he spent most of his time, some of them often had two or more.

"If you don't want George, maybe you can make do with one of the other secretaries. None of them have anywhere near

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his experience, but they're all eager to learn."

He hesitated. This was one meeting where an experienced, confident assistant was essential if he hoped to project the right image. In any event, it wasn't like he had to be alone with the man. They would be in a roomful of people. And the best part was he didn't have to worry about George shooting off his mouth and divulging details of the contract to the wrong people. The job was a done deal, except for signing this last round of paperwork, and George was a company employee—someone who'd signed on the dotted line not to reveal company secrets, policies, or how many sugar cubes his boss required in his morning coffee.

"I'm sure George will be fine." He gave a long, drawn out sigh. "He'll have to be. I don't really have a choice, do I?"

Ramona smiled. "No. Not today you don't."

He returned Ramona's smile. "Okay, so I'll leave it to you to explain the situation. Just put him in Danny's room and give him the Tarasios files. If he has any questions, he can call me. Otherwise, I'll see him in the boardroom just before two."

* * *

A few minutes before two o'clock, Zack unlocked the connecting door between his office and the elegant, dark wood-paneled boardroom. The large, oval table was set up, ready for the closing with the usual legal pads, pens and pencils, and a moment later, the main door opened and George ushered the clients inside.

"Zack! How are you?" Ari Tarasios, with whom Zack had

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hammered out the details of the contract, hurried forward and grasped Zack's hand. "Nice to see you again. I'd like you to meet my father, Stavros. And this is our chief accountant, Ben Wong."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, sir." Zack shook the older man's hand before turning to greet the accountant. "You, too, Mr. Wong. I gather my assistant has already introduced himself?" He glanced down the room to the sideboard that dominated the far wall. "I see George has coffee ready and waiting, so shall we sit down and make ourselves comfortable?"

Once they were seated, Zack watched as George served the coffee—his beautiful, long-fingered hands deftly handling the china and pouring the aromatic brew, as well if not better than a highly trained English butler.

As George brought Zack his coffee, Zack felt the other man's cool fingers brush against his hand. The touch produced a sensation that traveled up Zack's arm like an electric shock, and as he looked up, George snagged and held his gaze for what felt like an hour, but was probably less than a heartbeat.

"Sugar, sir?" George inquired with a faint but unnervingly knowing smile Zack knew was intended to press any remaining buttons the brief physical contact had missed.

He knew damn well the touch had been deliberate. As George returned the tray to the sideboard, Zack followed him with his eyes, wishing the Tarasios people were anywhere but here, demanding his attention. He also wished George was not his employee. The man was a walking advertisement for

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poetry in motion—the perfectly tailored pants encasing those tight buns, the smooth, flowing walk that made him appear to glide across the carpet, was not only wonderful to behold, it was giving Zack the biggest, most painful hard-on he'd had in weeks.

He took a deep breath and changed position slightly. If George wanted him stirred up, his wish had been granted. He felt hot and slightly dizzy, and while he desperately wanted a glass of ice water, he knew better than to ask for it. He'd met guys like George before—arrogant, assured little bastards who knew exactly how they affected their victims and how they enjoyed watching them squirm. Well, for George's information, Zack Hannington didn't squirm for anyone. Not today, not ever. And the absolute last thing he wanted to do was let George think he had the upper hand.

Warning himself to cool it was a waste of time. He wanted George. And he wanted him now. He wanted to feel his stiff cock pushing into that tight ass over and over and... Once he was finished with Tarasios, he'd tell George to meet him in his office, and he'd lock the door, and—

“Did you hear what I said, Zack?”

Ari's voice demolished Zack's x-rated thoughts and his hard-on faster than a bucket of cold water. “I'm sorry, I was just thinking about a possible scheduling problem.”

“To do with our job?”

“Yes. A little timing thing with the Reno job, but it's nothing that can't be solved once the team has a chance to sit down and put their heads together. Anyway, I'm sorry. You

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were saying?”

“I just thought you might like to know it was Ben here who recommended your work to us. He took Dad and me to see what you did with what I understand was once an old rooming house just off Times Square. He said he couldn’t believe it was the same place. You knew it from your student days, right, Ben?”

“Right.” Ben smiled. “Quite the transformation. I congratulate you, Mr. Hannington. In the old days, that particular hotel was just barely within an impoverished student’s means. Today, I imagine it is probably well beyond them.”

“Did you have to gut that building and start over from scratch?” Tarasios senior wanted to know.

“We had to. There were a dozen different problems that made it more practical for us to take it right back to the bare brick and start over than try to fix them. Cheaper, too, in the long run.”

The older man smiled knowingly. “Ari tells me it might be necessary to take similar harsh measures with one or two of our recent purchases.”

Zack nodded. “Looks that way. The one in Seattle, for sure, and perhaps the one in Reno, too. Our inspections showed both buildings to be structurally sound, but years of bad housekeeping standards and plumbing problems no one bothered to fix wreaked considerably more havoc than the average person might imagine. Plus the Seattle location has been empty for more than a year, and with most of the

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windows broken, I'm afraid the weather has taken its toll."

While the digital clock on the wall ticked away the minutes, George moved efficiently around the table, indicating where the clients' signatures were required on the various documents, and Zack continued to answer more questions posed by the father and son team and their accountant.

Zack believed in giving all his clients topnotch, quality service—it was the one thing guaranteed to bring repeat business and referrals. For this reason, his mind needed to be one hundred per cent on the job at hand. Today, it was maybe five per cent on business, while the rest was on the potential delights of George's delectable ass. He couldn't remember where he'd met the guy before or under what circumstances, but from the odd sly glance George was sending his way, he had the unsettling feeling George not only remembered, he also recalled every last tiny detail.

"So, you intend to start in San Diego, then move north to Seattle and Reno," Ari said, intruding once more into Zack's thoughts. "Any chance the San Diego location will be finished by Christmas?"

"Well before Christmas if everything goes according to plan. I'll know better once we get started."

"Good. My parents usually spend part of the winter in the San Diego area. It would be nice if they could spend it at one of our properties."

By the time they were finished, it was a little after five o'clock. As Zack walked the three clients out to the elevator, he noticed the receptionist had already tidied her desk and

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looked ready to leave.

“Do you need me for anything else?” the young woman inquired the moment he returned.

“Not that I can think of, thank you, Rose. Is anyone else here?”

“Just you and George.”

The meeting had run much longer than Zack had expected, and the realization he would be alone with George sent a surge of panic flooding through his veins. For one, totally irrational moment, he considered inventing a client with an after hours appointment and asking Rose to stay. However, there was no way he could do that. Rose was a single mother and it wouldn't be fair to involve her in extra babysitting charges because he was scared of George.

Scared? Or should he make that terrified?

He pulled back his shoulders and stiffened his spine. He was behaving like a child. He was the boss; George was one of his employees. And he didn't make out with his employees. As for being scared...it would take more than a self-confident little prick like George Parker to scare him. He needed to cool it. Stop working himself up for nothing. If they had met before, so what? This was the workplace, and right now George would be doing exactly what Danny would have done if he'd been here. While Zack was seeing the clients out, George would have tidied up the boardroom, and by the time Zack returned to his office, he'd have finished for the day and departed via the rear entrance.

Zack opened the boardroom door. As he'd expected, all

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evidence of the Tarasios closing had been removed. After closing the door behind him, he returned to his own office. And again, as expected, he found the closing documents had been left in a neat pile on his desk so he could give them one final run through.

With nothing on his personal agenda until later in the evening, he opened the top file and took out the first document. It would take him more than hour to do the final run through and it would be one less job for tomorrow.

Halfway through the first paragraph, he heard a tap on the outer door, and then it was pushed open to admit George with a bottle of champagne and two glasses.

“I hope this is okay,” he said, waving the bottle in Zack’s direction. “Ramona told me you and Danny always toast the success of a big job after the contracts are signed, and since this will be a big job, I didn’t want to mess with tradition.”

With no other choice in sight, short of being downright rude, Zack cleared a corner of his desk for George to put down the glasses. “I guess it has become a tradition. One that was originally started by my father.” He knew Ramona had meant well, but sometimes he wished she’d stop trying to mother him.

“I may be new here, but I realize this contract is important.” George smiled, showing off perfect, even white teeth and a fascinating little dimple at the corner of his mouth. “The Tarasios people are very heavy hitters.”

“And how do you know all that?” Having George this close made Zack feel nervous and as edgy as a virgin on a first

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date. He began searching his mind for an excuse to have just one quick drink and leave without seeming too obvious. All the doctors' and dentists' offices would be closed at this hour, so they were out.

"The business section of the newspaper. I try to at least scan it every day, and from what I've read, the Tarasios family is richer than God. Apparently, Stavros has spent most of his life buying garbage and turning it into gold, and now Ari is following in Papa's footsteps. These properties they're upgrading into boutique hotels with your help are perfect examples. Most of them have been on the market for months, if not years, and they're riddled with rats, roaches and street people, so they got them at bargain basement prices. And when they're completed, Ramona reckons the only people who'll be able to afford to stay in them are the super rich."

"Is that so? Well, I'm glad to know you've done your homework. But I think Ramona is exaggerating a little." Zack held his breath while George removed the cork from the champagne, then relaxed when it slipped out with a soft, well-bred sigh. "The degree of luxury we build into each small hotel is strictly in accordance with what the client feels will best suit his guests' needs. Not all guests want gold-plated taps and oyster bars in their rooms."

"Is that what's in the one Ben Wong mentioned?"

Zack permitted himself a small smile. The Flower, as the owner's mother insisted on naming it, had been Zack's first super-luxury upgrade and he'd gone all out. He'd done it as a favor for a friend, and since money was no object, the result

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had been spectacular. “That and a whole lot more. The main guests there are oil sheiks and their friends. Highly sophisticated men with expensive tastes and the money to satisfy every whim.”

George filled the two champagne flutes and handed one to Zack. “Well, cheers, boss, as we Brits say. I hope this project will be another profitable success for Hannington’s.”

“Thank you.” Zack clicked his glass against George’s, careful to ensure it was only the glasses that made contact, before taking a small sip of the pale gold liquid. “And you’re right about the Tarasios Group. They’re very powerful and very influential. And if we do a good job for them, I’d say the future of this company is pretty much assured.”

George sat down in the nearest chair. “The success of this company is important to you, right?”

“Of course. Starting any business operation from virtually nothing and building it into what you see now the way my father did, took teamwork and dedication. I’m proud of what he did and I’m proud I’ve been given the opportunity to continue and expand what he started. We’ve gained a reputation for being both innovative and reliable, and that’s important in any business, especially one as competitive as ours.”

“Is that why you don’t advertise the fact you’re gay? You’re worried about scaring off the uptight and the upright?”

“What?” The mouthful of champagne he’d just taken went down the wrong way, and for a moment Zack thought he would choke.

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“I said—”

“I heard exactly what you said.”

“Well, is it?”

Zack’s temper flared in response to George’s mind-boggling bluntness, but no way could he afford the luxury of allowing it to explode. Taking a deep breath, he released it slowly, then took his time counting to ten. “I don’t know where you got the idea I’m gay. But regardless, I don’t think my sexual orientation is any of your business. And now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to leave. I have an appointment.”

“Sorry! I didn’t mean to offend you. But I’ve seen you at the Peony Club, so I just wondered why. That’s all.”

“You’re a member?”

“No. But I’ve been there with friends who are.”

Zack swallowed his anger and forced what he hoped passed for a smile. Mystery solved. The Peony must be where he’d seen George before. “Okay, so I’m gay. So are thousands of other men. So what?”

“Nothing. I’d hoped we could be friends.” George sighed. “More than friends, if I’m honest. But then I realized it’s not something you advertise. You prefer to keep your personal and business lives separate, and I respect and understand that...” He hesitated, looking a little confused. “You weren’t uptight like this the first time we met. You were very nice to me.” He shrugged, finished the rest of his champagne, and got to his feet. “I know we only met the one time. And it seems you made a bigger impression on me than I did on you, which is really too bad. But, as you Yanks say, that’s the way it goes

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sometimes.” He started toward the door. “Anyway, I’m sorry if I’ve upset you. That was not my intention. So...have a good night, sir. And I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Uptight? That was the least of what Zack was feeling right now. He felt like he was on a runaway train, and there wasn’t a single damn thing he could do except hold on tight. “You’re quite sure we’ve met somewhere before?”

“Of course I’m sure. I wouldn’t make up a thing like that. I’m a little surprised you don’t remember, but as I said a moment ago—”

“That’s the way it goes sometimes. Right, I heard you. Even so, I’m quite sure you’ve mistaken me for someone else. But that’s okay. I understand we all have a twin somewhere.”

“It was no mistake, I swear.” The corners of George’s wide mouth turned down, making him look a trifle sad. “But since you don’t remember, let’s forget I ever mentioned it.”

Zack was no longer sure of a damn thing, but even so he stood his ground. “I have a good memory for faces, and I’m afraid yours isn’t even slightly familiar.”

“That’s too bad, sir.”

“Isn’t it just?” Zack hesitated. If he could just remember one or two details of when he’d met George—and obviously it had been at the Peony, maybe the rest would click into place. Until he did, though, he knew the problem would continue to nag at him like a toothache. “In any event, I don’t have the patience for guessing games. So why don’t you just spit it out as to where and when you think we met. Was it in the Peony?”

“Not in the club, no.” He hesitated, then he said,

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“Obviously, you’ve forgotten, and that’s fine. You’re a busy man. I understand.”

“Well, it’s not fine with me because I don’t understand.” Zack was beginning to get really annoyed. He hated game playing, especially the cat and mouse variety. “I don’t play games, Parker. In fact, if the long arm of coincidence hadn’t accidentally found you a job here, we wouldn’t even be having this conversation. Right?”

“No! You’ve got it all wrong. I was having a bad day, and you were kind enough to give me some timely assistance. That’s all.” George opened the door to leave. “It happened late one night a couple of months ago. Think about it, sir. Once you do, I’m sure you’ll remember.”

Think about it? Who the fuck did the sonofabitch think he was, telling him what to do? And what was he supposed to remember?

For several minutes after George left his office, the other man’s words continued to stream through Zack’s mind like an unending strip of film. He stared at the door in complete confusion, convinced he was either the victim of a crazy jokester, or someone out there was trying to set him up.

Perhaps some sicko thought it would be amusing to force him out of the closet and had hired George to do it. Or maybe they had a darker purpose in mind. Although what that might be he couldn’t even begin to imagine. But if that was what was going on, two months was a long time. Why hadn’t George done his job and disappeared by now? What was he waiting around for?

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Zack knew it would help if he had at least some idea who would want to do such a stupid thing and why? He had no enemies he knew of, and while there was a ton of competition in his business, he'd never known anyone to resort to dirty tricks of any kind.

No, there had to be another reason. Even supposing a third party had deliberately set out to unmask him, what was in it for them? What did they hope to achieve? Did they think it would put him out of business? Lose him a few clients?

If that was their intention, the joke was on them. Apart from a few staid establishment types, no one seemed to care any more who was straight and who was gay. And even the establishment refrained from making a fuss, unless it happened to be in their own interests to do so.

In fact, unless there had been a sudden huge shift in public opinion he knew nothing about, no one would give a damn if tomorrow's newspaper headlines screamed

ZACHARY HANNINGTON IS GAY

in bold, foot high letters. It might raise a few eyebrows, but there was no guarantee it would even do that. And unless he was missing something, it wouldn't lose him one damn thing. The most important thing he had to lose at the moment was the Tarasios contract and there wasn't a chance in hell of him losing it because of whom he slept with, how he liked his steak cooked, or anything else. The first time he'd met Ari Tarasios was in a gay club, and Ari hadn't been the least bit

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shy in admitting he swung both ways.

He poured a himself a glass of water from the carafe on the desk, took a few sips, tried to ignore the fact his hand was shaking, and told himself to stop being paranoid.

No one was out to get him, embarrass him, or cause him trouble. In fact, he had a sneaking suspicion the real cause of the problem was George himself. He wanted George. He wanted to kiss him, taste him, fuck him, sleep with him, and possess him in every way possible. And after spending several weeks seeing something he wanted but couldn't have, it wouldn't be too surprising if the situation had started to play with his mind. He'd hardly slept in weeks. When he did manage to fall sleep, he was awakened by disturbing sexy dreams.

After what happened this morning when Ramona had walked in on him, it seemed he could dream even better awake than he did asleep. He felt stressed out and exhausted, and now, to add to his troubles, he'd started imagining things—like believing George had a hidden agenda, or he'd been hired to infiltrate the company as an undercover operative for the purpose of embarrassing him, or ruining his business, or whatever.

George was a secretary. Period. And, in all likelihood, he'd been telling the truth when he said they'd had met somewhere before. George said he'd seen him in the Peony and that's how he knew he was gay. He'd also said they hadn't met there, so it couldn't have been at one of those ridiculous auctions.

So where had they met? Zack knew it could have

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happened just about anywhere—in a bar, a club, an elevator, or even a grocery store or a theater lineup. Some place where they'd exchanged a couple of words in passing, or had a casual conversation about the weather or something equally forgettable. The kind of brief encounter with another human that happened to everyone every day, like asking for directions, or holding a door open, and was immediately forgotten.

Except for some reason unknown to Zack, the encounter had been important to George, and that's why he hadn't forgotten.

Which could only mean George wanted something.

From what George had said, he'd been to the Peony with friends. So, either the friends had told him who he was and that he owned Hannington's Design, or he'd made it his business to find out. Ramona had said George was the ambitious type. Perhaps he'd figured a job at Hannington's was his ticket to success, so he'd engineered a meeting somewhere and made his pitch.

Zack shoved his fingers roughly through his hair in a gesture of frustration. There was nothing unusual about the direct approach. It had happened to him more times than he could count. Whenever it did, he had a stock answer—he'd simply say he didn't do the hiring, but they were welcome to contact his personnel manager and put in an application.

That had to be it! George had approached him for a job, and he'd mechanically trotted out his stock answer. He'd said the same thing a thousand times to a thousand different people

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and it hadn't registered. And since he made it a rule never to engage in eye contact in those situations, there was no mystery about the lack of recognition.

Relieved he'd figured out the answer, Zack finished his glass of water and tried to relax. He'd hated the not knowing. It made him feel vulnerable and on edge...like walking down a dark alley late at night, positive someone was about to jump out from the shadows.

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, unable to stop himself from wondering if he had spared George a glance, if he'd have felt the same strong attraction to the man that he did now.

He couldn't recall having seen George at the Peony, which wasn't surprising in a place where handsome, well-dressed dudes were the norm. However, here in the office was a whole different world. Here, the man stood out like a peacock in a flock of chickens.

A particularly luscious looking peacock. Zack sighed deeply as he unzipped his pants and rubbed the ache at the juncture of his thighs. He wanted a piece of that peacock so badly he could almost taste it.

And from the looks the man had been directing his way, and something George had said earlier, he knew George wanted it, too. He sat up and opened his eyes, trying to recall the exact words. What was it he'd said? *I'd hoped we could be friends...More than friends, if I'm honest.*

If Zack was honest, he wanted exactly the same thing. He wanted a real life version of his daydream. He wanted George

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in the buff, on his knees, and sucking the hell out of him. And version two of the daydream where he was fucking George's ass would definitely be better in person.

He wanted to feel every touch, every stroke...he wanted to feel his nerve endings on fire, pleading for relief. He wondered if George was just average, or if he was big. He liked big. He loved the way his muscles stretched and strained to accommodate a big prick. He liked the way a massive, throbbing cock felt in his mouth, too.

He quickly removed his hand and closed his pants. Why bother with DIY when the real thing was available? He'd call George, say he had an emergency situation he needed help with, and ask him to come back to the office. He'd apologize for his behavior earlier, open another bottle of champagne, and let nature take its course.

Excited by the direction his thoughts were taking, he switched on his notebook, clicked on the employee database, and entered a private password known only to himself, Ramona, and Alan as vice-president and director of operations. A few seconds later, he began dialing what he'd found listed as George's home number.

His nerves began to tighten and he started to sweat as two rings turned into three, then four. What if George was busy? He could have gone out. Hell! He didn't know if the number he'd dialed was a cell or a landline, or...for all he knew, he was dialing the wrong fucking number! It could have been entered incorrectly. It could have been changed, and George hadn't said anything.

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A drop of perspiration fell onto the desk, followed by a second.

He slammed down the phone, pulled a handful of tissues from the box in the top drawer of his desk and dried his face and neck. He needed to calm down and get a grip. He needed to think...

Maybe a shot of liquor would help settle him down. He pushed back his chair with the intention of raiding the cabinet in the boardroom, but liquor would dull his senses to a degree and that was the last thing he wanted.

He picked up the phone and redialed George's number.

"Hello? This is George."

"Hi. This is Zack Hannington. I—"

"Sorry, I'm not available right now. If you'd like to leave your number, I'll get back to you asap."

Shit!

* * *

After leaving Zack's office, George felt depressed, rejected, and positive he'd totally blown his chances of ever achieving any kind of advancement at Hannington's. The job he had was okay...it paid the bills and kept a roof over his head. The thing was, he wanted a lot more out of life than being a glorified gofer, taking orders, running errands and, generally, making someone else look good. He was smart, he was ambitious, and he knew he had what it took to succeed. But if he didn't hurry up and get at least a toehold on the bottom rung of the ladder to something better, he'd likely be

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stuck in the secretarial pool forever.

The real kicker was he had no one to blame but himself for today. He'd been so eager to please Zack and show how efficient he was, he'd screwed up big time and handled everything wrong. He shouldn't have presumed on the fact he knew Zack before coming to work for him. And he shouldn't have tried to curry favor by doing the champagne thing, even though Ramona had said it was a tradition with Zack and Danny. The mere fact it was something special between him and his longtime assistant could have pissed Zack off—especially with Danny being out of commission and unavailable for such an important meeting.

George knew he shouldn't have said anything about Zack being gay either. And he shouldn't have followed it up by hitting on the man. That had been major stupid.

He knew Zack was gay because he'd seen him at the Peony Club—the town's hottest gay club. And if Zack wanted to keep his private life private, that was his business. For sure no one else at Hannington's knew. He'd realized right from the day he started there that none of them had a clue. Not even Ramona. They all thought Zack baby was swinging bachelor number one.

As if! George smothered a chuckle, recalling the first time he'd noticed Zack at the club—the time that big bruiser, Ricky, got drunk and kept trying to grab Zack's ass. The idiot wouldn't quit, so the bouncer got tough and threw Ricky out and told him not to come back.

When he reached the spot where he'd left his car, George

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hesitated, jingling his keys in his hand.

If he were completely truthful, he'd more than *noticed* Zack the night Ricky got out of hand. Zack was five, maybe ten years older than him, and he'd felt the delicious jolt that always got his adrenaline up and running whenever he noticed another man who snagged his interest. Zack had done that in spades. He'd wanted to check out his chances with Zack then and there, but Zack had been with several other guys, and they'd all left together in a group.

Later, when he found out who Zack was, he could barely believe his luck. Zack owned one of the biggest commercial design companies around, and a job in commercial design was George's dream. He'd tried to contrive a meeting with Zack, but it hadn't worked out. Either Zack was busy with someone else, or George lost his nerve at the critical moment. That was until the night in the parking lot across the street from the Peony when Zack showed up and saved him a long walk.

Except he didn't get a chance to say what he'd planned if such an opportunity arose. Everything had happened too fast.

He unlocked his car and got in. His running into Zack that night had been pure chance. And, while it hadn't gotten him the kind of job he wanted, at least he was on the inside and positions opened up all the time. He could wait. In the meantime, he'd try to keep out of Zack's sight. Give the man time to cool off, and hope he still had any kind of job there.

He sucked in a breath and expelled it slowly. Who was he kidding? Keeping out of Zack's sight for the next day or two would be impossible. Ramona had told him he was to fill in

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until Danny came back—she hadn't given him a choice.

Still, after two months, George had become used to Zack's eyes following him around the office. First off, once he realized he was the only one who knew about Zack being gay, he'd assumed Zack was trying to figure the chances of him letting the cat out of the bag. If he'd been in Zack's shoes, he'd probably have worried about that, too.

George hadn't said a word and didn't intend to, yet the looks hadn't stopped, and lately he'd gotten the distinct impression Zack might be *interested* in him. Especially after the looks gradually changed from speculative to downright hungry—a bit like a starving orphan boy looking into a bakery window and imagining wrapping his lips around a big hunk of chocolate cake...except George knew it wasn't cake Zack had in mind.

The thought of Zack wrapping his smooth lips around his prick sent a surge of excitement rippling through George's body, and he felt himself growing hard. *Yeah, like that's ever going to happen. Not in this lifetime.*

Although, if by some wild chance he was right and Zack did have the hots for him, it would explain why he'd been so uptight and snappy when he'd gone into his office with the champagne. The room had actually been quite cool, yet he'd noticed Zack was perspiring. He'd been nervous, too. So damn jumpy he hadn't managed to keep still for more than a few seconds at a time, and he'd kept running his fingers around his collar as if it were too tight.

George turned the key and started the engine. In fact, Zack

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had exhibited all the classic signs of sexual frustration, and he'd been too dumb to catch on until now. After all, it wasn't likely Zack would start anything, no matter how much he might want to. The whole company knew Zack Hannington never ever mixed business with pleasure and that any woman who tried flirting with him would soon discover she was wasting her time.

A soft chuckle escaped George's lips. A woman would definitely be wasting her time. But what about another man? Or did the boss man's rule apply to both sexes?

As he drove out of the lot, he paused at the exit and looked up at the building housing Hannington's Designs—all the way up to the sixth floor where Zack had his office. The lights were still on, and he could see someone moving around. He could also see Zack's car still parked a couple of spaces away. He'd figured Zack had invented an appointment just to get rid of him, and he wondered why. He knew it wasn't from lack of interest, so the no touchy thing must apply to both sexes. And the reason the poor sod was so wound up was because he was scared of breaking his own rules.

When he reached his apartment a few blocks away, George went through his established routine. First, he showered and put on a pair of jeans, then he fetched a cold beer from the refrigerator and checked his answering machine. There was only one call. The number wasn't familiar, and the caller hadn't left a message.

He turned on the TV and took a pull at the beer before stretching out on the sofa, wondering about the identity of the

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unknown caller. If it had been one of his friends they would have left a message, so it had to be either a telemarketer or a wrong number.

He switched channels and tried to concentrate on a program, but the two fives at the end of the caller's number struck a chord he couldn't lose. He'd seen that number somewhere, and he'd seen it today.

He got up and fetched his PDA from the bureau drawer and began checking through the numbers of Hannington employees.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered.

There was only one number ending in double five—Zack Hannington's private line, and Ramona had just given it to George that very morning.

He put down the PDA and picked up his car keys. He and Zack hadn't finished the day on very good terms, so maybe Zack had called to apologize. In any event, if they were to work together again, they needed to clear the air. He'd go back to the office and, if Zack was still there, maybe they could talk things out.

Perhaps he'd even work up the nerve to ask Zack the one question he'd been planning to ask the first time they met. He didn't expect miracles, but it just might get him a foothold on the first rung of that ladder. With Danny likely to be back at work soon, this was his one chance, and he couldn't afford to blow it.

* * *

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Zack had finished going through the files for the Tarasios job and making a few necessary notes. He was about to quit for the day when he heard a sound in the hallway outside his office.

No one worked late unless there was an emergency, and there were none he knew of. And the cleaning crew had finished and left some time ago.

Strangers couldn't just walk in after hours, but all an employee had to do was insert his or her card into the electronic access system and enter their own personal password. Perhaps one of them had forgotten something.

He'd barely completed the thought when the door opened and George stepped in. Wearing fashionably ragged jeans, a white muscle shirt, and with his black hair tousled in a casual, windblown style, he looked nothing like the man who'd left the office a couple of hours ago. But Zack much preferred the way George looked now...cool, casual, and so incredibly sexy he could come just by looking at the guy.

“You called, sir?”

Zack mentally licked his lips as he leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. “How did you know? I didn't leave a message.”

“My machine records the numbers of all callers, whether they leave a message or not.”

Something about the flat, accepting tone of George's voice sounded to Zack like the man had expected him to call, albeit for a very different reason. “I wasn't calling to fire you, if that's what you think. And I'm sorry about the way I acted

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earlier. It was uncalled for.”

He heard what sounded like a soft sigh of relief before George said, “That’s okay, sir. No problem. So, why did you call? Did I forget something? Something wrong with the files I left on your desk?”

His heart pounding and his breath coming in short, painful gasps, Zack stood and smoothed a hand down the front of his pants. “No, nothing like that. You did a great job. This is an unrelated problem. One I thought you might want to help me with.”

“A problem, sir? What kind of problem?”

“One concerning just the two of us. I thought that’s why you came back.”

George visibly relaxed and smiled, a sexy, knowing smile that softened the wide mouth and did strange things to Zack’s pulse rate. George shrugged, folded his arms and leaned his back against the door. “Am I to assume you’ve had a rethink and decided you’d like to be friends after all?”

“Friends?”

George’s smile deepened. “Okay, so you want to be more than friends.”

“You have any objection?”

“None I can think of.”

“Does that mean you have some idea what my problem is?”

“Offhand, I’d say you’re desperate for a little action.” The smile broadened a little, and the tip of George’s tongue appeared and traced the outline of his upper lip. “But why

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waste time guessing, hmm? Why don't you come over here so we can find out if that's what you really want, or if it's all in your mind."

The crisp British accent and the unexpected take-charge attitude was a turn-on all by itself. Zack joined George by the door.

The man continued to regard him through half-closed eyes as he hooked one arm around Zack's waist and pulled him close. Zack could smell George's male scent beneath a faint hint of mouthwash, and that excited him even more. He closed his eyes as George's lips brushed against his, then George's tongue slipped into his mouth for a moment to taste and tease. Breaking the kiss, George's mouth moved down Zack's neck, while he used his free hand to unzip Zack's pants.

Zack could barely breathe as George's cool fingers slipped inside the opening and slid seductively down the length of his shaft.

"You want to stay here or go somewhere more comfortable?" George asked.

"If you mean go to a hotel, I'd rather not."

"You're worried about being seen with me?"

"It's not that...it's... Look, I'm not ashamed of who I am, I...I just don't feel the need to flaunt it. Okay?"

"Fine with me. But by the feel of things, something here's getting a bit desperate." Zack shivered with excitement as George squeezed his shaft, then used his thumb to tease the tip. "Hope you're not looking for anything too kinky 'cuz I'm not into whips and the weird stuff."

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“Don’t worry, I’m not either. I enjoy watching it the odd time, but that’s my limit.”

“Ah, so you’re into watching, but you don’t want to take part? That’s okay. I get a kick out of watching, too. What about handcuffs? You enjoy a little restraint? Maybe a threesome for kicks once in a while?”

Zack sucked in a breath as George continued to rub the tip of his rod. “I’ve never done anything that adventurous, so preferably just the two of us. And no rough stuff. I’m not into pain.”

“Me neither. I like my loving slow and easy, so we should get along like a house on fire.” As he spoke, George pushed Zack’s pants and briefs down over his hips and allowed Zack’s rigid cock to spring free. “But it looks to me like this chap isn’t in a slow and easy frame of mind, so I think we ought to take care of him first.”

Before the other man could put his words into action, the room was plunged into darkness. For one horrible, panic-stricken moment, Zack was convinced the combination of frustration and excitement had robbed him of his sight. But then he heard George say, “Shit! I think we have ourselves a power failure.”

“You sure?”

“Positive. Look behind you.”

Zack turned and glanced over his shoulder to the window behind his desk. The outlines of the taller buildings were still visible against the night sky, but the only artificial light he could see was from traffic coming down Main Street and a

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string of streetlights twinkling in the distance. “Damn! Seems to be affecting the entire downtown area.”

“And being after five o’clock at night, I don’t suppose the power company will consider it a high priority emergency.”

“Probably not. I’m afraid we’re stuck here for the duration.”

He heard George suck in a breath. “You’re kidding. You mean we can’t get out?”

“Not until the power is restored we can’t.”

“There must be some kind of fail-safe or emergency procedure.”

“If there is, no one bothered to tell me.” Zack paused, thinking. “Let me find my cell phone, and I’ll call Ramona and see if she knows.”

“Let’s not.”

He felt George’s hand wrap his shaft and start caressing it back into action.

“So what if we’re stuck here for a while? I’m sure we’ll survive. In the meantime...”

Zack heard a faint rustling sound, then he felt George slide a condom over his erection.

“Just relax and enjoy,” the other man instructed.

It was too dark for Zack to see anything, but he realized George was on his knees when he felt strong hands grasp his hips and hot breath play over his belly. The next thing he felt were firm lips and the probing tip of a hard tongue wrapping around his aching cock and gradually sucking him into the moist, hot heaven of an eager mouth.

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It was like the dream he'd been having, except the real thing was so much more, and so much better in every way. George's mouth was hotter, his touch a thousand times more exciting, and Zack's own need to come a driving force that was taking the upper hand. Unable to keep still, he began fucking George's mouth in short urgent strokes. But the harder he stroked, the more distant his goal became...until suddenly it started to happen.

He felt the tears streaming down his face, the wonderful tightening sensation, the exquisite moment of indescribable pain as he started to climax, and he gripped George's shoulders, hard. It had been so long since he'd received this kind of loving attention, he wanted to hold back and enjoy the moment for a little longer. But it was too late for refinements like hesitating or holding back. He came in a rush, and the next thing he knew, his legs gave out, and he was down on the floor beside George, completely drained.

George held him and rubbed his back. "You okay?"

He forced a laugh. "I will be in a minute."

"I get the impression it's been a while since you've had any action."

"You could say that."

"How come? There's no one in your life? No one regular?"

"No."

"As in never, or as in not in a while?"

"Not in quite a while. My own fault, though, because I'm so involved in work, and I don't have a lot of time to spend on

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a relationship. Plus, if there's no chemistry, I'm not interested."

George chuckled. "Going without isn't healthy. And neither is working too hard. I hope you know that. Sometimes we just need to relax and unload, if you get my drift." He released Zack and stretched out on the floor. "At least you have a nice thick carpet in here."

Zack ran an experimental hand down the front of George's jeans. "What about you? What do you like?"

"Whatever works for you, my friend. But I don't like to rush. I like to anticipate." Covering Zack's hand with his, George pulled it hard against his erect shaft. "Is there some of that champagne left?"

"On my desk, but it'll be warm and flat by now."

"Who cares? The main thing is that it's wet."

Zack slipped off his shoes, then removed his pants and briefs, which were bundled around his ankles, and stood. The room was completely dark now except for the occasional reflection on the ceiling from the lights of passing traffic. After a few seconds of careful searching, he found the champagne, but decided to forget the flutes. He couldn't see to pour, and neither of them would want to spend hours in emergency having glass shards taken out of their feet and other parts.

"Here. Have some," he said, taking a small mouthful of the still slightly fizzy wine and pushing the bottle in George's general direction.

Suddenly, George started to laugh, an infectious, sexy

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sound Zack found a little out of place, given the circumstances, but also strangely arousing. “Care to share the joke?”

The laughter changed to a sigh, and George wrapped an arm around Zack, pulling him close. “No joke. I’m just finding it hard to believe the two of us are here, rolling around on your office floor in the dark.”

“If you don’t like the floor, there’s a sofa in the boardroom. The kind that opens into a bed.”

“You’re kidding! A bed in the boardroom? That’s pretty damn cool. Convenient, too, huh? One way of keeping your private life private.”

“Not really.” Zack saw no point in giving George chapter and verse on how he felt about office romances until later...not until he was sure he wanted there to be a *later*. He smoothed a hand over George’s belly, delighted to discover the man’s jeans had disappeared along with the champagne bottle. George’s cock bucked enticingly against his hand. It was bigger than he’d expected, and he moved his fingers slowly down the hard flesh from tip to root until he found and could fondle his balls. “It’s nowhere near as kinky as it sounds. And it wasn’t intentional, if that’s what you’re thinking. It was a screw-up with the people who supplied the furniture when we redid the office and added a boardroom. By the time I discovered the damn thing converted to a queen-sized bed, the design had been discontinued and it was a case of keep it or change the whole room.”

While he was talking, he felt George’s hand investigating

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his crack. A finger pressed hard against his butt hole, seeking entry. The finger slipped inside, and as his prick reacted, he bit back a groan of ecstasy.

The finger slid deeper and then withdrew. A moment later, it was joined by a second finger. It had been so long since he'd experienced anything beyond a little DIY when he was really desperate, Zack almost creamed then and there as the fingers began twisting back and forth and sliding in and out of his ass in an attempt to open him up.

"Relax, man. You're too tight," George muttered. "And I don't suppose you have anything here to help us out, do you?"

"Sorry, I don't."

"In that case, we'll just have to do it the old-fashioned way." He put a hand over Zack's mouth. "Give me some spit. That should do the trick."

With his hole properly lubricated, Zack was able to relax and enjoy the delicious sensation of George's fingers touching and exploring. But he wanted more. He wanted to feel George's big shaft inside him.

George, it seemed, wanted that, too. "I need to find another condom," he said, his voice husky with tension as he moved away, presumably in search of his jeans. "And if this is going to be good for both us, I'm afraid you'll have to come up with some more spit."

After positioning him on his hands and knees, George used Zack's spit to lubricate them both. Zack felt the other man moved in behind him and spread his ass cheeks wide. Finally, the moment he'd been waiting for arrived. He felt the

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delicious sensation of George's erect cock pushing hard against his anus and, as it gained entry, the indescribable joy of the enormous member sliding deeper and deeper inside him made him gasp with pleasure.

Once he was all the way in, George wrapped his arms around Zack's body and began to fuck him in slow, unhurried strokes. Zack closed his eyes, reveling in the closeness he'd hoped for and wanted for a very long time, but had never found, except for one brief liaison during his last year of college. He was tired of the casual, unemotional couplings he'd made do with at the Peony. It was time he found someone who could put a little stability in his life—time to face who he was, stop using business as an excuse and find a relationship he could be comfortable with.

As George upped the pace of his strokes, he nibbled and bit Zack's neck and shoulders, then his hands grasped Zack's rod, alternatively rubbing the tip and squeezing his balls until Zack was so awash in feelings and sensation, he felt more alive than he'd ever been.

Once again, he felt the tightening, the conviction it wouldn't happen. But then he came in a rush, and a moment later, he knew it had happened for his partner as well.

"Oh, George," he muttered, as they collapsed in a heap. "That was fantastic. If I'd known it would be this good, I'd have..."

"You'd have done more than just give me the eye?"

"You noticed?"

George laughed. He brushed his lips against Zack's,

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slipped his tongue into Zack's mouth for a quick foray and just as quickly retreated. "I noticed, but it's common knowledge you have a rule about never getting too friendly with the staff, so I figured looks were as far as it would get."

"It's not really a rule."

"No?"

"No. It's just something I made up after my father died and I took over the company. A couple of the women who worked here at the time seemed to think cozying up to me was the fast track to advancement, so I let them down gently by saying I didn't approve of offices romances."

"You could've told them you were gay."

"I could have. But I don't concern myself with their sexual preferences, so I don't feel obliged to tell them about mine."

"I can't argue with that. It took me a long time before I was comfortable with who I am. My family didn't want to know, and that's why I moved to America."

"How long have you been here?"

"A little over five years. I was in New York, but the guy I was living with developed an acute case of financial irresponsibility, so I left and came west."

Just then, the overhead lights flickered once and came back on.

"Well, what do you know?" Zack murmured, sitting up and surveying the assortment of crumpled clothing littering his normally immaculate office floor. "Now we can get out, which is great, because I'm starving. Have you had dinner?"

"No."

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Zack pointed to a door in the far wall. “If you want to freshen up, there’s a shower and toilet in there, and then we’ll leave and find somewhere to eat.”

George grinned. “Is there room in there for two?”

Zack smiled at the thought and shook his head. “Regrettably, no. There’s barely enough for one.”

After they’d both cleaned up, and Zack had changed into the track pants and jacket he kept at the office for the days he went to the gym, they put out the lights and left the office.

As they waited for the elevator, George lifted a hand and combed his hair in place with his fingers. “Anywhere particular you want to go?”

“There’s an Italian place a couple of blocks away. You like Italian?”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Okay, Lucca’s it is. It’s small, quiet, and the food’s great—the perfect place to relax.”

For some reason, the downtown eatery didn’t seem to be particularly busy, and the hostess immediately escorted them to a table.

“The waiter will be by in a moment to take your order,” she said, dropping two menus in the center of the table. “We have a couple of specials tonight. Vegetable lasagna, and crab cannelloni.”

Zack picked up one of the menus. He never ordered “specials.” When he was a kid, his mother had insisted they were nothing more than a rehash of leftovers from the day before, and the best way she knew of for getting a sick

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stomach. Commonsense told Zack it wasn't true of all "specials," certainly not in a place like Lucca's where everything was made fresh and nothing was frozen, nevertheless...

When the waiter arrived a moment later, he said, "I think I'll have the minestrone, then veal parmigiana, with a salad and a side of spaghetti. You drink wine with your food?" he asked George. The other man nodded. "In that case, we'll have a bottle of your best Italian red."

George glanced briefly at his copy of the menu. "Sounds good to me. I'll have the same."

Zack had missed lunch and was starving, and so, it appeared, was George, and apart from a couple of comments about the food, neither said much until the dishes were cleared and the coffee and strega were served.

"So, why don't you refresh my memory as to how we met," Zack suggested. "I've really thought about it, but I'm sorry. I just don't remember."

George frowned. "I already told you. It happened exactly like I said. I was having a bad day and you were kind enough to help me out. Nothing more, nothing less. And that's the truth."

"Okay. But exactly where did this happen?"

"In the Peony Club parking lot a little over two months ago. You sure you don't remember?"

Zack shook his head. "Sorry. Doesn't ring any bells."

George took a sip of strega and put down the tiny liqueur glass. "I found out by chance who you were and that you

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owned Hannington's, so I'd been trying for ages to get up the nerve to have a word with you."

"Why? You find me intimidating?"

"No. A bit remote maybe. But the problem was with me, not you. I'm not in the habit of asking people for favors. I hate doing it. But the thing is, I don't want to spend my whole life doing secretarial work. Having some kind of basic skills is a good backup plan and it's kept a roof over my head. But now I have my degree in commercial design, I want to use it."

"And you've discovered finding a job as a designer isn't that easy?"

"Bloody impossible—unless you happen to know someone in the business. That sometimes pays off. So, when I found out who you were, I thought I'd ask if you had any openings for apprentice designers. If not, maybe you could give me a lead elsewhere. I know face to face often works better than putting in applications."

"But I said no?"

"That's not what I happened. In fact, I never even got around to asking you anything."

"How come? If I found your unconscious body in the lot and took you to the hospital, I'm sure I would have remembered that."

George grinned. "Nothing so dramatic. I was one hundred percent conscious. It was late, and my car wouldn't start. Most everyone had gone already, but then you happened by. Problem was I was out of gas, and you offered to drop me at the nearest gas station. You asked how I could let something

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like that happen, and I said I wasn't usually that careless, but I'd had a bad day. I'd lost my job due to downsizing at the place where I worked, and both agencies I called said things were tight all over. You then asked what I did, and I told you. A couple of minutes later when you dropped me off, you gave me your business card and said you thought there was a secretarial opening at Hannington's, and that I should drop off my resumé. I don't supposed the whole incident lasted for more than four, five minutes tops, start to finish. The gas station was less than two blocks away. You honestly don't remember?"

Zack concentrated for a moment. "Vaguely, now that you've described it to me in detail. And if it's the day I think it was, I was pretty much out of it by that point. Did I seem okay to you or not?"

"I thought you were either tired or not feeling well."

"Then it must've been the night I got back from Europe. The flight was late leaving, I was jet-lagged, and I'd eaten something that didn't agree with me. On top of that, I waited over an hour for a friend I was supposed to meet at the Peony, but he didn't show. Not the greatest of days for me either. Did you tell Ramona I sent you?"

"No. She was there when I went in with my resumé. She took it from me, said I was exactly what she needed, and hired me on the spot. I had no reason to mention your name, and I didn't. Anyway, I already had the job, so there wouldn't have been any point."

"But what you really want is a job as a designer."

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“That’s what I’m hoping for eventually.”

“I’m not sure if there are any openings at the moment, or what we may have in the coming months. I’ll have to check with Alan. But if there is something...” Zack hesitated as a sickening thought hit him with the force of a ten-ton truck. “Is this what tonight is all about? You figured you could use me? You thought sleeping with the boss would be your golden ticket to the job of your dreams?”

The hurt, angry look that flashed across George’s face was not at all what Zack had expected. Nor was the black ice that formed in his dark eyes, the sudden thinning of his lips, or the way his hands curled into tight fists before slowly relaxing as he pushed away from the table. “I don’t believe you said that.”

“No? So, why *did* you come back?”

“Because you called me. I had no idea why because you didn’t leave a message. But things didn’t feel right between us when I left, and by coming back, I hoped we could clear the air. And yes, call me opportunistic if you want, but I also hoped to have the chance to ask about other job opportunities with the company. As I said a few minutes ago, I’ve wanted to do that for some time. But as far as what happened between us is concerned...” He sighed and got to his feet. “You’re the one who came on to me, sir. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll say goodnight.” Taking his wallet from his pocket, he tossed a couple of bills on the table and left before Zack had the chance to say another word.

For a long moment, Zack stared at the restaurant door through which George had disappeared, barely able to believe

OH, GEORGE

what he'd done. He hadn't had time to decide if what he felt might be love or was just a passing crush. What he did know was, thanks to his own stupidity, everything wonderful in his life, everything that mattered, was gone.

* * *

The following morning when Zack reached the office, he half-expected to find George's resignation on his desk. Instead, he'd barely hung up his jacket and sat down when Ramona stormed in without bothering to knock.

"I have no idea how you managed it, but you've upset George. Badly."

"He told you that?"

"Not in so many words. Daniel's sister called and said Daniel has the flu, so he won't be in for the rest of the week. But when I told George I expected him to fill in during Daniel's absence, he said no."

"No? He actually said no?"

"He said the two of you are not compatible, and I should find you someone else."

"Did he say why?"

"He said..." She hesitated, biting her bottom lip. "I don't think you want to hear that part. Just know I'm really short-staffed today, so I'll have to send you one of the students who are here doing workweek from the secretarial school. She's all I have available so, please, try and treat her gently."

"What did George say?"

"You really want know?"

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Zack sucked in a breath. "I really want to know."

Ramona took a deep breath and smiled. "He said Zack Hannington is an arrogant prick who needs to get over himself and get a grip on reality."

"That all?"

"That's it. However, when I left, he was muttering something about he'd never been so insulted before in all his life. He's really upset, Zack. I don't want him to resign. He's good and he's conscientious, and that's a rare breed these days."

"You think he'll quit?"

"It depends how deeply you hurt him, how quickly he recovers, and what opportunities come his way in the meantime."

"He told me jobs are hard to find."

"Good jobs, yes. But he won't have any trouble after working here. In fact, our conversation was cut short because Rose interrupted to say there was a call for him from Ari Tarasios."

"Ari who was here yesterday?"

"There's only one. And since you may not know this, I should tell you our friend Ari has an addiction for filching other people's employees who happen to take his fancy."

"You think he called to offer George a job?"

"All I know for sure is he called. As for what he offered... Let me put it this way. I have a feeling Ari and George have certain things in common, if you know what I mean." She smiled sweetly and shrugged. "And the reason I know all

OH, GEORGE

about Ari's naughty little habits is because he headhunted my sister after doing business with her boss."

"Did she go?"

"You bet she went. She still works for him now. Says it's the best paying job she's ever had, Ari is the absolute best boss, and the fringe benefits are unbelievable."

"What fringe benefits?"

"My little sister is quite the swinger, so that's when I closed my ears."

"Shit!"

"Excuse me?"

"Do me a favor, Ramona. Get back on your broomstick and disappear before you really start to annoy me."

"Certainly, sir. Whatever you say, sir."

With a broad smile and a deep curtsy, Ramona backed out of the door, barely avoiding getting hit by the crumpled up ball of paper Zack threw in her direction.

For the next several minutes, Zack paced back and forth, wondering how to put things right with George, but not having the slightest idea where to start. He'd been rude, he'd been insulting, and if anyone had used anyone, he was the guilty party, not George.

And saying sorry just wasn't enough.

He was in love with George. And he wanted him back.

But for that to happen, he'd have to do something meaningful. Something to prove he knew he'd misjudged the man, and show he truly regretted his actions.

He picked up the phone and dialed Ramona's number. "I

OH, GEORGE

need your help. Now.”

He broke the connection and resumed pacing. George was the best thing that had happened to him in a very long time. But instead of appreciating his good fortune when he realized he and George had something special, he'd gotten cold feet, decided George was out for himself, and kicked him in the gut.

Damn!

The door opened a crack and Ramona peeked in. “Is it safe to come in?”

“Perfectly safe. It was only paper anyway.”

“Thanks. I think.” She came in and closed the door behind her. “And before you ask, Ari has either mislaid, misplaced or lost his precious gold pen. He called George to see if he'd left it here, and George asked me if I'd check the boardroom floor.”

“Is that all Ari wanted?”

“I don't know, do I? I don't monitor employees' calls.”

“Maybe you should start.”

Ramona sighed and sat down in the chair in front of Zack's desk. “Stop it, Zack. You're working yourself up into a froth, and I can't handle two of you doing it in one day. George is feeling emotional and fragile, plus he's still very upset.”

“And you think I'm not?”

“I know you're upset. But according to George, you started it.”

“So George has all your sympathy?”

“At the moment, yes. I know what a sweetheart you can be

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at times—you just kick out without thinking. And, unfortunately, George is the super sensitive type. He feels things more than most people. So if you're expecting him to get over this fast and be all smiles and chuckles by lunch time, don't."

"And you know this how? Because he's gay?"

"Don't be ridiculous. And don't generalize about people. Some of us are easily hurt, and some of us can blow anything off. And it has nothing to do with whether we're male or female, who we do it with, how we do it, or anything else. It's just the way we are. Now, what do you need help with?"

"I'm wondering if we have room for another designer. It would be for a junior position because he only recently graduated."

"It just so happens we do. Before he left, Alan said I should start looking for a couple of extra people for the Tarasios job. You have someone in mind?"

Thinking about Ari Tarasios luring George into his office and then into his bed made Zack feel ill. "Yes. But not for a big project like that. This guy has his degree, but no work experience. We must have some smaller jobs we can use him on."

Ramona looked thoughtful for a moment. "Ben Jessop is more than ready to be given more responsibility. And, to be honest, I feel he'll be wasted on that private museum renovation we'll be doing for Alan's friend in Chicago."

"Can you work a switch without raising any eyebrows?"

"I'll just tell Ben it's his lucky day and we're putting his

OH, GEORGE

talents to better use elsewhere. Now, who is this new person you want me to hire?"

Zack smiled. "You already did. It's George. I need you to transfer him from secretarial to design."

"George? George is a secretary."

"He also has his degree in commercial design. That's what he really wants to do."

"I see. And by giving him his heart's desire you're hoping it will make all the bad stuff go away, and he won't be mad at you any more?"

"No! And stop trying to mother me, Ramona. I don't need it." He shoved his fingers through his hair and gave a sigh of frustration. With Ramona giving him the third degree, this wasn't going to be anywhere near as simple as he'd hoped. "If you must know, and without going into a pile of unnecessary details, I not only misjudged the guy, I insulted him, too. Ambition isn't a crime, at least it shouldn't be, and people should be able to ask a simple question without having their motives for asking the damn question examined and found wanting. In a word, I screwed up."

"That's three words. What was the question?"

"He asked if there were any openings for a graduate design student. Apparently, it took him over two months to get up the nerve to even ask me, and I...I..."

"Screwed up. So you said. Okay, I'll make the switch." She smiled and stood up. "Just as well as you told me now, though, because Victor and Ben are planning on going up to Chicago next week to get things started with the museum. Do

OH, GEORGE

you want to tell George the good news yourself, or shall I?"

"You'd better do it." Zack frowned as another thought occurred to him. "What if he says no?"

"He won't. Trust me. If he's as ambitious as you say, he'll be thrilled. And I think it's good idea to put some distance between the two of you for the next couple of weeks. Then, when he comes back, the pair of you can kiss and make up."

Zack wondered for a moment if he'd misheard. He could have sworn Ramona had no idea, but knowing Ramona...

"Just figuratively speaking, of course," she added with a cheeky grin. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

* * *

Actually, it was closer to six weeks before Zack saw George again. From what Ramona had told him, Victor, George's team leader, was so pleased with George's work he'd asked to have him along on the next job as well.

But now George was back. And Zack knew that because Monday morning he'd seen George walking into the building while he was parking his car. He thought for sure George would drop by his office sometime during the day, or at least pick up the phone. But it wasn't until late Friday afternoon, when Zack was about to leave for the day, someone tapped on his office door and it opened to admit George.

Zack's nerves tightened and his heart began to pound, and he hoped against hope his excitement wasn't apparent as he looked up at his visitor. "George... I thought you'd forgotten about me."

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George smiled and raised his dark eyebrows. “Forgotten about you, sir? Absolutely not. What an appalling thought.”

“How’s it going with your new job?”

“Fabulous. I love it. Victor is a great boss. I know I have you to thank, and I intended to do that before leaving for Chicago. However, Ramona said I should wait until I got back.”

“In other words, she told you to lie low until things had settled down?”

George smiled and shook his head. “Not exactly. She said I should keep out of sight for as long as possible because absence always makes the heart grow fonder.”

“Ramona said that?”

“Ramona’s a very smart lady. I have a feeling she doesn’t miss a thing.”

“Apparently not.” Zack’s heart continued to pound as he fiddled with a button on his jacket. “Can I take it I’m forgiven?”

“Forgiven for what? Being cautious?”

Zack didn’t realize he was holding his breath until it escaped in rush. “You busy tonight?”

“No. Do you want to meet at the Peony for a drink? Say about seven? I need to go home first. Have a quick shower, change my clothes and feed the cat.”

“You have a cat?”

“I’m pet sitting for a neighbor.”

“Maybe we can have dinner somewhere later?”

“Great idea. There’s a new steak and seafood place just

OH, GEORGE

around the corner from the Peony. I hear it's very good."

For Zack, the rest of that evening seemed like the realization of a long held dream. He couldn't believe George had forgiven him, or that they were together again—this time on what felt like much firmer ground. He knew he had Ramona to thank for the part she'd played in preventing their embryonic relationship from self-destructing, and he reminded himself to call a florist and have them send her a huge bunch of her favorite red roses.

After drinks at the club, he and George had a leisurely dinner at the new restaurant. As they were leaving, he said something about the night still being young and wondered aloud if George would like to follow him home and they'd have a nightcap at his place.

"You sure about this?" George asked as they reached the lot where they'd left their cars.

"Am I sure about you and me?" Zack reached for George's hand and gripped it hard. "You bet I'm sure. What about you?"

"I'm sure."

"Good. And I promise to do whatever's necessary to get over myself and get a grip on reality."

George chuckled, the soft, sexy chuckle that never failed to get Zack's heart pounding and raise his blood pressure. "Ah, so Ramona told you what I said."

"With a great deal of relish. I really am sorry for the way I behaved. It was quite uncalled for. I guess I was...I don't know."

OH, GEORGE

“Does it matter?”

“Not any more. Now, how about that nightcap I mentioned?”

* * *

Zack awoke just as dawn was breaking to feel George stroking his cock. The first rays of the sun were painting patterns on the blinds, and he could hear the birds singing in the trees outside his bedroom window.

George stopped what he was doing and looked up at Zack with a smile. “I know we were only together the one time before last night, but sometimes one time is enough to know the searching is over and you’ve found what you want,” he said, sounding vaguely surprised.

Zack reached over and touched his partner’s face. “I think I knew even before that first time. I had the wildest daydreams about you. I couldn’t get you out of my mind for a single minute, no matter what I did.”

“What did you dream about?”

“You and me here together in this room.”

George’s stroking became a little more urgent. “Do we have any clothes on?”

“I don’t. I’m lying here on the bed naked, and I’m holding my breath while I watch you undress. Which you manage to do in a very sexy way.”

“You mean slow motion? Like a striptease?”

“Exactly. Then...” Zack closed his eyes, trying to recall the details. “Then you come over to me. You look so good,

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I'm almost salivating."

"Only almost?"

"Okay, I'm salivating. Trembling with anticipation, too. A strand of hair has fallen down over your forehead, and I push it back. You're so close now I can smell you. You smell of soap and sex, and your own special scent. I can hardly wait for what's to happen next. But at first, we just look at one another. You seem to know I'm nervous, and you lie down beside me and talk to me. Your voice is so soft I can't make out the words, but as you talk, your hands are touching me everywhere. Soothing me, gentling me, as if you're afraid I'm going to get up and run."

"Then what do I do?"

"You pull me against you, you kiss me and nuzzle my neck, and I discover you're just as aroused as I am. By now, I'm feeling a little more relaxed. I love the way you're touching me and exploring my body as you bring me to the edge. There's no hurrying, or rushing, you just take your time, building the sensation until I'm ready to explode."

"And that's the end of the dream?"

"No way. That's when the good part starts. You get between my legs and take me into your mouth."

"You mean like this?"

At last, the moment Zack had been waiting for arrived. George took two condoms from the box on the nightstand and slipped the first over his own erection and the second over Zack's.

Kneeling between Zack's legs, George grasped Zack's stiff

OH, GEORGE

and aching cock in both hands and brought it to his lips. Then, the same as in the dream, George began to love him slow and easy, licking and nibbling the tip before sucking him into the warm, slippery wetness of his wide mouth one tiny, delicious millimeter at a time. As the nuzzling waned, the sucking grew harder, and the other man's hands became more urgent. Zack's heart began to race as an insistent finger pushed hard against his hole, seeking entry. He was alive with a thousand new sensations, and ready to die from pure pleasure. He knew he couldn't hold back for more than a few more seconds at the most, he needed to let go, to—

But this was reality. There would be no interruptions this time, and Zack knew he could hold on as George's finger slid rapidly in and out of his hole in time with the sucking. But before he could come, George was urging him up onto his knees. He felt the cool slap of lubricant against his anus, and then George was spreading his ass cheeks and pushing inside, riding him hard, the way he'd always wanted to be ridden.

George's hands wrapped around his belly, seeking and finding his aching prick, then stroking and squeezing until this time there was no stopping, and the two of them came together in one long, glorious rush.

As George released him and rolled over onto his back, he asked, "Is this the same way your dreams ended?"

Zack laughed. That was the part he remembered best of all. "Hell, no. That's when Ramona walked in on me."

"And caught you getting yourself off?"

"No. I hadn't got that far. But she sure got me at an

OH, GEORGE

inconvenient moment. I felt like an idiot.”

While Zack was talking, George had disposed of his used condom and begun playing with himself. Now his magnificent shaft jutted out from his body, long, hard, and very big. Zack couldn't wait to find out how he fit into his mouth, and what he tasted like.

“My turn, I think,” he said, moving over. But before he could swirl his tongue around the purple tip, George held him back and reached for the condoms.

As he went to open one of the foil packages, Zack stayed his hand. “Is this really necessary?”

“Meaning, am I a health risk? No. I don't sleep around. I never have sex without protection. And I have regular tests just to be sure. As of a few days ago, I was clean as a whistle, and I haven't been with anyone since then.”

“And I haven't been with anyone since that time with you at the office.”

“In that case...” George smiled and lay back against the pillows. “I'm all yours, my man.”

Zack slid one hand down George's hardened flesh, sighing with pleasure as he cupped his lover's balls with the other and gradually sucked his aroused cock into his mouth.

He was in love, and he hoped with all his heart what he had with George would last forever.

CHRISTIANE FRANCE

Christiane truly believes that love makes the world go round, so she likes stories with both happy and bittersweet endings. Christiane has been writing romance for the past twenty years and lives near Niagara Falls with her husband and The Boys—two black and white Persian cats.

* * *

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