

A tropical sunset scene with palm trees and two people in the foreground. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and purple. The palm trees are silhouetted against the bright sky. Two people are visible in the foreground, their faces partially obscured by the palm fronds. One person is on the left, looking towards the right. The other person is on the right, looking towards the left. They appear to be looking at each other or at something in the distance.

fl. J. LLEWELLYN

D. J. MANLY

**BACK TO
BLACK POINT**

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Back to Black Point

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BACK TO BLACK POINT

BY

**A.J. LLEWELLYN
AND D.J. MANLY**

DEDICATION

*A.J. would like to dedicate this to D.J. because
without him, these beautiful books would never
have happened xoxo*

CHAPTER ONE

They had the house to themselves. They kicked off their shoes at the front door, as was the custom in the *Hawaiian* Islands and, with the soft, fragrant breeze luring them from the wide-open sliding glass doors across the spacious living room, Matt and Thomas looked at each other. Ryan and Cole could come home at any moment. Did they dare take advantage of the living room with its elegant furnishings, spicy ginger stems in cut glass vases and lovingly placed, vintage coral statues? It was Thomas who stepped forward and took Matt's face in his hands, his tongue sweeping across his mouth.

"This is just like one of your books."

Matt grinned. "Or one of yours..."

"No." Thomas kissed him again. "In my books, my men don't linger with their tongues over their lovers' bodies..."

"You need to linger over mine?" Matt's words were swamped by the sensation of Thomas' mouth on his throat, moving up toward his ear.

Thomas licked a long, languid line up Matt's neck. He moved behind him, putting a row of kisses on the nape.

"Man, I wanted to do that all day."

Matt moved around to feel Thomas' hard, perfect body in his arms, shifting the groceries from one hand to the other. "Maybe we should put this stuff in the fridge."

"Maybe you should focus on the issue at hand, Matt." Thomas put a possessive hand on Matt's crotch, rubbing in an assured way, taking the plastic sack from him and tossing it onto the ottoman. It bounced with a sickening crash of glass to the floor.

He stepped up his unnecessary seduction, with lingering swabs, wherever his mouth happened to land. It was hard for Matt to stay vertical with Thomas licking and kissing him everywhere.

"Take your clothes off. Leave your underpants on."

Matt stripped quickly, leaving on his black Calvin briefs, Thomas stripped down to his white ones, sporting a nice hard cock. He rubbed against Matt for one sweet moment, quickly dropped to his knees to trace the outline of Matt's hardening cock with his relentless tongue. He sucked in the head through the stretch fabric, causing Matt to moan in a mixture of joy and frustration. He wanted to feel Thomas' hot mouth on his skin.

Thomas pushed him to the huge, comfortable sofa, spreading his legs and licking a trail from Matt's ass to the band that ended just above the private path of his treasure trail.

Thomas knelt between his legs and their kissing continued. Thomas refused to join him on the sofa. He wanted a full exploration of Matt's body and Matt was ecstatic when Thomas finally decided the voyage ended with his toes and retraced his tongue dancing back to the pleasure zone.

"Oh, my baby's hungry for me." Thomas lowered the underpants over Matt's rigid cock and suckled the ripe, juicy head with a tender voraciousness. "I love how hard you get for me," he mumbled, putting his lips right back over him. Matt panted underneath him and Thomas pushed the underpants down until they dangled from one foot. "Open your legs, baby. Daddy's hungry."

Matt cried out when Thomas' tongue stabbed at his ass. His hands reached forward to curve over Thomas' chest and arms. He loved the feel of him, had almost memorized each muscle, each tiny blemish like the scar from a hula hoop accident when he was five. He loved, loved, *loved* this man. Then Thomas pulled back.

"God, you are beautiful." He reached up again for more kisses, kisses that deepened and seemed to go on for hours. The only sounds in the world were the lovers' sighs, their mutual, completely

absorbed enjoyment of one another and the ocean breaking outside.

"I am so glad I'm gay," Matt said aloud.

"Yeah, I'm glad you are, too." Thomas planted a trail of hot kisses along Matt's groin, stroking his hand across his belly. Matt found it endearing that Thomas liked to do this. It was an intimate gesture, not one anybody but a lover would make, but it was clean enough that Thomas could do it in public and he did, often.

"I love knowing that when I fuck you hard, you can feel me in your belly, that it's mine," Thomas had told him during their early morning walk. "Each time I touch you there, I can't wait for you to feel me in you again."

Thomas had a raging erection and he looked helplessly at Matt. "I—"

Matt pushed him back on the sofa, ripping the white underpants from his boyfriend's body, going straight for the cock beckoning him. He took it into his mouth, all the way to the root, making Thomas jump.

"Yeah...oh yeah...oh Matt, that's so hot. You haven't shaved yet and it feels so good against my skin, baby."

Matt kept moving up and down on Thomas' long, thick shaft and Thomas tried to move Matt back over his face, but Matt was too strong and kept a grip on Thomas, keeping him where he was

until his lover exploded with unprecedented force, straight down his throat.

When Thomas could speak at last, he groaned. "How did that happen? Where does it all come from? The way we've been fucking all weekend, I can't believe I could come like that again."

"The fat lady hasn't even begun scales yet, baby." Matt nudged Thomas' knees apart and with one more loving lick at Thomas' ass hole, plunged into him, making them both cry out. He knew Thomas was still feeling tender from their marathon lovemaking, but his lover's stiff cock told him everything. Thomas wasn't making sense, the love stuff stumbling out in his altered state. It was like a stream of consciousness only Matt could understand, a destination only he could fulfill for the man he loved.

Over and over again he drove deeper into Thomas who clutched Matt's ass and screamed, "Don't stop...don't stop, don't—"

* * * *

"Stop!" Matt's dream was as vivid as daylight. He tried to ignore the alarm. For hours, he'd woken up every half hour and now it was six thirty and the world was telling him it was time to wake up...alone...without Thomas. How could he wake up when he was about to make Thomas come? For

a second he allowed himself a satisfied smile. That last tumble in the living room the day before had been awesome. Matt grew hard just thinking about it.

He bunched up the pillow beside him and hugged it to him. Twelve hours ago, it was Thomas he'd been holding. Thomas....whom he'd spent hours learning and pleasuring. They had spent every possible second together at that wonderful house in *Black Point*. Their island idyll had prompted talk of the future. They reached out for one another in repose, finished each other's sentences in their waking hours. They wore the same size clothing and shoes. Their conversations had turned from the impossibility of how things could work out when Thomas lived in Canada and Matt lived in California...to their love being able to conquer everything.

Thomas had snuggled into him and Matt loved the feeling of the dark head on his shoulder, the trust shimmering back and forth between them. He wanted, with all his soul to be with Thomas, to love him, protect him and make all his dreams possible.

Matt punched the pillow, turned over and sighed...he had come home empty handed. He didn't appreciate his twin brother Ryan joking that the state of *Hawaii* would appreciate him coming home with nothing but memories and

photographs. Photographs. He'd taken a few provocative photos of Thomas and he knew already these would be cherished possessions. No full frontal nudes...but near enough. It had been the perfect introduction to two men meeting and falling in love.

And then, the north wind blew, or so it seemed to Matt. It started in the shower they took together right before leaving for the airport.

"I can't wait to soap you up like this every morning," Matt said and something dark glittered in Thomas' eyes. He let the moment pass until they returned the car at the airport.

When Matt tried to pin him down to their next meeting, Thomas hesitated. "I can't leave Canada. I have a business. I have to work you know, apart from my writing career."

"I can come to you. I need to be with you," Matt said instantly.

"You'd move to Canada for me?"

"Yes." It would be a wrench leaving his close-knit family, but he had stated it as fact. *I will move to Canada if that's what it takes. I want to be with you.*

And Thomas had smiled, suggesting they visit each other. *Let's not rush into things...* Matt's heart sagged at Thomas' parting words. Boy did he feel set up. He'd tried to be open and honest and Thomas had thrown him under a bus.

"...Now how's this for a heart-warming family

story?" Matt felt himself tugged from his maudlin thoughts back to the present as radio host Bill Handel related a tale of a married woman who took a part time job to help support her family during a rough financial patch.

"...and she's working in this fast food restaurant...true story folks, and just as she's closing, three masked robbers hold her up at gun point. Unfortunately, she still managed to recognize them. It was her mother, her father and...wait for it, her husband!"

Matt laughed out loud.

"Did she report them?" Handel's co-host asked him.

"Hell yah, she reported them. Can you imagine though? Sticking a gun in your wife's face? *Your money or your fries*. That's grounds for divorce right there."

"Especially if there was no ketchup handy..."

Matt reached over and turned off the radio. Love sucked for a lot of people, it seemed. Six thirty six. Christ, could he be acting any more of a lovesick loser? He touched his lips. They were still chapped from all the kissing he and Thomas had been doing. They were perfect together. They loved each other. They both said it. In three days, they had fallen into blissful love, not arguing about a single thing. Until...*Let's not rush into things...*

He couldn't forget those words. Would Thomas still be traveling? Nope...by now he'd be home. Why hadn't he called? Matt had sent two text messages, left a voice mail and an email. He threw the bed covers back. He had his typical morning hard-on. *Oh, is that for me?* Thomas said the first morning they awoke together and he found Matt's body naturally responding to the close proximity of the man who'd brought it unexpected and unparalleled joy.

"You must be psychic, Matty. I love sucking cock first thing in the morning!"

Matt sagged back down onto the bed. He was too depressed to masturbate and too...in love to do more than ponder the thought. His body still ached from the righteous fucking he'd enjoyed and he wished he could feel this way forever. He threw on sweat pants and a t-shirt and padded into the kitchen. He was out of coffee, he was out of milk and just about out of patience.

He'd come home on the overnight flight from *Oahu* and there had been no food service even in first class. He, Ryan and Ryan's husband Cole had persuaded the space waiter to take pity on them with tiny bags of macadamia nuts. Starving, he had stared at his cell phone, his computer screen, praying for a text, an email...anything. He tried to kid himself he was going to write. And instead, for two hours he stared at old emails from Thomas,

whom he'd always thought was female romance novelist, Rose Carter.

The sum total of his work efforts were two words, *Chapter One*. For the first time since he'd accepted his downsizing movie company's golden parachute, he had not been able to meet his self-imposed then thousand word daily quota. Unless you counted *Thomas*. Delete. *Thomas*. Delete. He knew he needed food and knew how impossible he was in the morning without coffee. He needed *Thomas*. Delete.

He yawned and stretched, checking his cell phone. Nope. No messages. He had two text messages *Thomas* had sent when he'd had to leave their bed to go and do author interviews with their publisher back in *Waikiki*. A spiteful, self-pitying side of him wanted to delete them. Why wasn't *Thomas* calling him? How could they have gone from, *I love you. Just wanted to say I miss you already. I love how you make me feel. Come and sit at the bar. I need to look at you* to this, dead air. *Thomas* would be home now, he knew that for certain. And where was home, Montreal's *Gay Villiage*. He thought *Thomas* was making up the name at first except that *Cole* had been there. Gorgeous, globetrotting, guy's best pal *Cole*.

Cole and *Ryan* had been with them on the trip, having their own love fest in their private part of that magical house in *Black Point*. They, too, had

grown close to Thomas and thoroughly approved of him. Matt opened and closed the fridge several times as his mind raced over his thoughts. Nope, no matter how many times he checked, it remained empty. It wasn't a dream. And neither was the silent phone. It was a freakin' nightmare.

He heard a car pull up. On Mulholland Drive where he lived, it was so peaceful and quiet, you could hear everything. It was either a carload of girls looking for the former resident, Keanu Reeves, it could be his crummy ex Wayne looking for a quick bit of head...or it could be...he heard the sound of a baby giggling and his heart lifted just a little even though he was determined to isolate and put words on screen.

A pair of knocks on the front door. Matt covered the short distance from kitchen to hallway and found his niece, Daphne, in her father Cole's arms. They were both wearing sunglasses and they both looked adorable. Daphne's ripple of laughter crossed the threshold to him and Matt frowned.

"It's the crack of dawn. Some of us are still sleeping, you know."

Cole's mouth formed into a big, mocking O. "Somebody hasn't had his coffee, I see."

Matt took the baby and allowed her to give him sweet kisses as Cole brought his ideologically sound reusable grocery bag into the house. Matt

smelled coffee, noticed a huge baguette and a papaya peeking through the top and suddenly felt a whole lot friendlier.

Cole studied him for a moment. "You have a chat with Daphne and I'll rustle up some food."

"What's going on?" Matt stared at Cole's SUV parked neatly outside his house and was relieved to see it wasn't packed to the gills with Cole's possessions. It didn't look like he'd left Ryan again.

"Ryan doesn't want us home alone. He doesn't trust me."

Matt closed the front door and held his niece a little closer, kissing her sweet smelling head. "He doesn't trust *you*?"

"I know! Is that sexy or what?"

Matt blinked. Ryan had done the unthinkable and shagged his chiropractor, Christian, who also turned out to be a romance novelist like Thomas and Matt and now he was writing a series with Thomas...*what if Christian was in Montreal with Thomas? What if they were in bed and Thomas was begging Christian for his tongue on his cock?*

Matt felt immediately disloyal for thinking such thoughts and checked his cell phone again as he passed through to the kitchen.

Let's not rush into things...

"Does he think you're going to get even?" Matt asked as he let Daphne down gently. She was

wearing tiny pink workout pants that had three red roses painted across the tush, pink princess sneakers he himself had bought her and a little pink and red T with ladybugs hand-painted on it. He guessed this outfit was a Cole original. Daphne roared around the house and neither man worried. Matt had baby proofed the house long ago. Even his armoire where he stashed all his gay porn had a childproof latch on it. Cole handed him a warm croissant and he relaxed as the kettle stopped boiling. Cole filled the French press.

Matt waited until Cole turned to look at him. Cole sighed. "I might have mentioned he's still on probation. I might have mentioned...*getting even*."

"Getting even? You mentioned *that* to my brother? I'm surprised he even left the house this morning without handcuffing you to the bed."

"He does love me, doesn't he?" Cole's eyes clouded again. What he didn't say was, *Why did he cheat on me then?* Cole was the original Pollyanna. He smiled now at Matt. "He said he would be comfortable if we came over and hung out with you."

Ryan's comfort? I'm not comfortable! I'm in fucking hell, here!

Matt bit into the croissant and moaned with pleasure. It was filled with almond paste, his favorite. His phone rang and he answered it, devastated when it wasn't Thomas.

"Hey, Matt." He recognized his brother's voice of course and the tremor of anxiety in it. "Did Cole come over there?"

"Yep." *What if I said no?* Nope, even in his bad mood he couldn't do it to his brother.

"Good....good. Um...listen, please don't tell him I called. I don't want him to think I'm checking up on him."

"Umm...might be hard. He's standing right next to me."

"Is that my husband?" Cole looked ecstatic. "Oh, how exciting! He's checking up on me. How hot is *that?*"

For the first time since he'd kissed his lover goodbye, Matt laughed with real amusement. He handed Cole the phone, taking a second croissant. He didn't care about his figure. He didn't care about his book. He didn't care about anything. No, not at all. He drifted into the living room where his unopened suitcase awaited his attention. He knew Thomas' white Calvins were right on top.

They're to tide you over until we can see each other again, Thomas had said. Now he didn't want to look at them, to touch them and be reminded of what he thought was the happiest day of his life. He ignored the suitcase, stepping around it and padding over to his laptop. Maybe there was an email? A quick, almost furtive search showed him his worst fears had come to pass.

Thomas had arrived home in Montreal and in spite of his promises, the last, deep kiss, he hadn't contacted Matt to let him know he was okay. Matt felt stupid. Helpless. They'd written a book all about it, he just didn't think it was about him. Now he knew it was...*He's Just Not That Into You*.

"Why are you depressed?" Cole startled him by reaching over to pour him more coffee.

"It shows, huh?"

"Yeah, like a flashing red light. Now what's going on?"

"He hasn't called, hasn't written..."

"Could you be anymore gay?" Cole looked exasperated. "Good thing we came over here. You need to get up and dance."

"I'm not dancing. Get outta here!"

"Daphne...you ever seen such a grumpy man before?" Cole glanced at his daughter, who shook her little head, her face grave. "Come on, Matt, you're even depressing the baby for God's sake. Get out of that chair. I want to show you something."

"What are you doing?"

Cole pressed the coffee pot into his hands and slid into Matt's chair, got online and the sound of a hypnotic, persuasive disco beat filled the room. Matt squinted at the screen.

"What is that?"

"*Gay Villiage*. Where your husband lives. This is

a YouTube video. You have to see this, it's awesome."

Matt loved that word, *husband*, and grinned as Cole and Daphne began dancing. He however, was transfixed by the six and a half minute video of the suburb where even now the man he loved was probably asleep. The snapshots of the neighborhood revealed its blend of cultures. Not just its French and English street and shop names, but the joy on people's faces. One store even had a neon saying *God is Busy, Can I Help You?* He drank it all in and when it was over, he was as captivated by *Gay Villiage* as he had been by Thomas. He pressed the replay button and got up and danced with Daphne and Cole. When the number was up, they all fell on the floor, laughing.

"You do know, don't you?" Cole asked.

Matt was startled. Out of breath, he asked, "Know what?"

"He's as scared to death as you are. You're going to have to go there."

"Are you mad? I can't go there." The brief high he felt from the dancing evaporated.

"Why not? Did he pack your balls in his suitcase?" Before Matt could respond, Cole picked himself off the floor. "It's time to man up, baby. You need to go kidnap your husband."

CHAPTER TWO

Matt was saved from having to argue the foolishness of running off to Canada after a man who couldn't even bother to call. He received a ridiculously early phone call from Carly Ann Westaway, a newly installed development executive at Paramount Pictures. Seven o'clock in the morning was never too early in an eager young studio executive's life. Carly Ann clearly knew nothing of Matt except that he recently held the position of Vice President of creative development at a rival studio. He knew a lot about *her* though and listened silently as she ran down the list of their mutual acquaintances.

She talked at an impressive clip as she negotiated freeway traffic, a drive-through order of coffee and cookies at McDonalds and a terrifying bout of road rage at an old lady crossing the street.

"So..." her voice returned to normal after calling the old lady a *ho*. "I have an offer I'd like to

discuss with you." The new hands-free cell phone law in California meant everybody was on a blue tooth and they screamed. Loudly.

"Can you meet me at eleven?"

"I'll be there." Matt replaced the receiver. She was a midlevel executive. She had the clout to green light projects into the development phase, but could not shepherd an actual movie into production. His mind raced through all the angles. She meant business if she wanted to see him before lunch. He smiled, knowing that some unpaid intern would have to cancel pitch meetings with at least two writers to accommodate her whimsy.

"Fabulous." Cole, the original cheerleader, loved good news. "Daphne and I will take you and we'll shop Melrose and wait for you. Then we'll buy you lunch."

Matt was about to argue. He was the original lone wolf, but now he didn't like that so much, especially since he thought he'd found the perfect mate to share his cave. He nodded. "Fantastic."

Cole drove the SUV, singing songs with Daphne, and dropped him outside the big archway of Paramount Pictures. "Call us when you're ready. We'll find some place cool for lunch."

"Great." Matt kissed Cole's cheek and opened the back door to kiss the baby goodbye. She

beamed at him and his heart melted. She had Ryan's face, but her heart, her spirit were one hundred percent, pure Cole.

Matt loved Paramount Studios. Long before he began his career as a film development executive, he imagined himself in one of the writers' buildings, working on some big movie or a hit TV show as a writer, the thing he loved. The exact nature of his work was blurry, but his vision of how it would be was very detailed. He would stride from *his* assigned space in the open-air parking lot past the Cecil B. de Mille Building. No matter where his office was, he simply had to walk past the Lucille Ball Building. He loved Lucy! He would pass, no matter what, the small office still an industry legend where producer Gene Rodenberry persuaded Lucille to produce a crazy little TV show he had in mind and she agreed, just because she had a *funny feeling* about his idea, a sci-fi show called *Star Trek*.

In Matt's gold-tinted vision, he would have lunch on the very bench used in *Forrest Gump*, while pondering the tree Desi Arnaz and Lucille planted right next to the fishpond—still there—they had constructed. Matt's vision had slight variations, but in all of the extended daydreams, he was employed by the studio and he was very happy there.

In her third floor office of the Gloria Swanson

building, Matt waited twenty minutes and could hear the shrieks of laughter coming from Carly Ann Westaway's office. Some writer had her in stitches.

"Can I get you a water?" some flunky asked him for the third time and this time he agreed. He'd just taken a sip from the Evian bottle when the door to Carly Ann's office flew open. A writer, looking like he wasn't even of legal drinking age, sauntered out in faded jeans, tennis shoes and messenger bag slung across his shoulders. Oh man, he felt old. The thing about Los Angeles that never failed to distress him was this underlying panic in town to make it by the age of twelve. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the writer waiting until he was just out of the door before flipping his cell phone open, calling his agent with exciting news.

"You can go in." The flunky gave Matt a sympathetic smile.

"Thanks so much. And thanks for the water."

"*Por nada.*" In California, you were bi lingual or you died.

He walked into Carly Ann's office and was startled that it was heavily decorated and looked like somebody's living room. In a gothic castle. At his old office, his only nod to personal touches had been his favorite movie posters and his cherished collection of 1960s lunchboxes lining the shelves.

"Good to meet you." Carly Ann Westaway stepped forward, a whippet in a business suit, a grip like a Sumo wrestler. He almost screamed, but bit his tongue. "Have a seat. Put the water bottle on the floor. It'll leave rings on my desk."

They were off to be a bad start. She got into her chair and stared at him, as if unsure of what he was doing there. Outside the windows, Lucille Ball's tree swayed in the wind. What was the line from the Queen song, *Any way the wind blows...*

"Matt, Matt, Matt..." She bit the tip of a *Montblanc* pen like it was a Bic. Disposable. She was twenty-seven, reed thin, mildly attractive, connected and cold.

"That's me." He laughed, still wondering why he was here.

She tilted her head to one side. "My first boyfriend...he was a gondolier in Venice..." Something about him must have made her decide to add, "In Italy." She seemed to be waiting for a response. He was too busy groping around for one so she plunged ahead. "I haven't seen him for seven years and he's in town. He's at the W Hotel in Westwood, lying naked in his hotel room and he wants to fuck me. What would you do if you were me?"

This was worse than the time he had to get a root canal without laughing gas. Worse than the time the doctor called him into his office to

personally receive the mandatory HIV blood test results for his last job. At least he was given a clean bill of health. Smoothing down the lapels of her black Chanel pantsuit, Carly Ann Westaway swished her immaculate brunette hair in a provocative swag over her left shoulder.

“Why...why are you asking *me* that?” He was astonished that she was starting a business meeting in this fashion. She swished her hair again and he became annoyed.

The gesture was wasted on him being a gay man, but he knew straight men fell like rotten tree branches over her. He knew all about Carly Ann Westaway. She broke up the marriage of the most powerful agent in Hollywood and they were now engaged. Her half a million dollar Tiffany engagement ring was now bouncing painful prisms of sharp light straight into his left eye.

Carly Ann gave him a coy smile and Matt waited. She was crazy, as crazy as he’d heard. When he trained new junior executives, Matt liked to tell newbies that dealing with Hollywood is like negotiating with barricaded gunmen who have taken hostages.

At thirty, he felt inexplicably ancient next to Carly Ann Westaway and her high-jumping hair.

“What’s the worst date you ever went on?” she suddenly asked.

Oh, she was a poster kid for bipolar disorder.

He blinked. Should he leave? Nah, dammit, he still needed to keep his foot in the door of the industry, especially if Thomas was going to have his first book made into a movie. He needed to help him, protect him from the idiots like Carly Ann Westaway.

"I'd have to say my date from a few weeks ago." He felt sick. A few weeks ago. Before he fell irrevocably in love with Thomas.

She cocked a perfectly arched brow and he dutifully went ahead with his tale. "We were set up by my agent. This guy—you probably know I'm gay—he took me to this new Japanese restaurant and it's supposed to be the hot new place, but it was dreadful."

"Bad sushi?" She was squatting on her chair like a small bird gathering into itself. He'd been told about her habit of doing this. And a weird thing about lining up Gummi Bears on her desk and eating them by color, although he didn't really believe anybody would do that.

"Worse than that. He ordered us both live shrimp."

She gawped at him and almost tumbled off her perch. "*Live...shrimp?*"

"Yeah. They decapitate them in the kitchen and bring the heads out, only the heads on plates. Their antenna and eyes are still twitching. They remain alive a few minutes after decapitation. It

wasn't pretty."

She roared with laughter. Now he didn't think the story was funny. He was still traumatized. Carly Ann sat back down in her chair like an adult.

"I have a problem." She was tilting her head in that cutesy way again. "And I think you're the person to help me with it. What would you do if you were me? You know, about the gondolier?"

Was this a trick question? How could he answer it? He didn't want to be having this conversation. "I have no experience with gondoliers," he said finally. "Just weirdoes."

She giggled like he'd said the funniest thing in the world. "My gondolier's so hot!" She threw her arms wide.

He didn't know what to say. He just couldn't think. Carly Ann had broken up one of the longest, happiest marriages in Hollywood. She and her panting, aged fiancé had formed a production company. And now God help him, she was lining up Gummi Bears on her desk while he pondered how best not to commit career suicide. He wasn't officially supposed to know the details of her private life, but the front pages of all the trades reported that her fiancé had bought Cary Grant's old house for her. He was making a fool of himself. She was about to get him there even faster now that his wife was getting half of every last

cent he ever earned.

As he racked his lovelorn, sleep-deprived brain, her hand hovered as if she couldn't decide whether to start with red or orange Gummi Bears. He felt bewildered and furious. He'd never in all his years as an executive behaved so unprofessionally in a creative meeting. A part of him wanted to jump on the next plane to Montreal. He stared at the trees outside and inexplicably, felt a warmth spreading in his belly, as if Thomas' thoughts had come back to him, some part of the love they talked about had returned. In truth, he could still feel Thomas inside him. He probably always would.

Carly Ann was now obsessively swapping Gummi Bears in order of *shades* of colors. Talking about some gondola boy was definitely paddling in the wrong direction as far as he was concerned.

Matt shifted in his seat. "May I get...personal?"

With a sweep of her hand, she granted consent.

"I see you have a beautiful engagement ring...or is that a wedding ring?"

She colored slightly, her eyes looking a bit dazed. "Engagement ring." Methodically, she picked up two lime green Gummi Bears that did not fit in with the rest of her line up and swallowed them.

"How would he feel?" Matt kept his voice gentle.

"He would never find out."

"Are you sure about that?"

Her eyes narrowed. The cogs were turning, he could tell. The huge intercom system on her desk buzzed, making them both jump.

"Yes!" she barked.

"Leonard is on the phone," a voice crackled. *My fiancé*, Carly Ann mouthed to Matt, then put him on speakerphone. "Hi, sexy."

"Happy Wednesday to you," he began to sing. His voice was so bad the babies in the day care nursery one floor down started to wail. Carly Ann Westaway hopped up and down in her chair, clapping her hands. She told Leonard he was the best. The biggest and the best.

"You're my magic muffin man," she crooned.

Holy moly. Matt thought he might puke.

She let Leonard go after promising him a night of endless passion. If she didn't have to work late. She and Matt traded glances. They were both thinking about gondolas. When she ended the call, she tossed her hair in that maddening, affected way again, making him wish for a pair of scissors.

"I know you disapprove, but Paolo's so sweet...and he's got a magnificent cock."

Thanks for sharing, Carly Ann. Matt slipped into big brother mode. "Tell me about him."

"Paolo." Her face got dreamy. She prattled about her boring escapades and he cast furtive

looks at her over-decorated surroundings. There was a huge chair covered in chocolate crushed silk. On the wall beside it was a painting of the same chair. He wasn't sure which came first, but the effect was bizarre. All her windows had gothic, black iron curtain rods and watermarked beige sheers. The sofa was lavishly topped with cushions. The coffee table to his right held two books, Henry Rollins's *Get In The Van*, which surprised him. She didn't seem weird or intellectual enough to appreciate Henry's music or poetry. Beside that was a book about Venice. He tried not to laugh.

"So what do you think?" she asked breathlessly.

I think you're a brainless, vacuous twit. He was spared having to respond because she was rifling through the messages Paulo had left on her Blackberry. He listened to one long message, keeping a neutral look on his face. Matt looked at her. "He doesn't sound Italian."

"He's not. He's from Boise, Idaho."

"What's he doing here? Given up the canals?"

"We've sorta been...e-mailing." She ran around her desk to the coffee table, flapping the pages to a shot of a handsome stud on a gondola.

"He's really hot." Matt was impressed.

"That's not him. That was another guy I fucked. This is Paolo here."

Her pinky fingernail pointed to a dark-haired guy in shades leaning from a hotel window, laughing.

"You have excellent taste in men. Are you a Henry Rollins fan?"

"Are you kidding? He terrifies me. He's so angry! I don't understand a thing he writes, but..."

"Let me guess. Paolo was a Black Flag fan?" Black Flag was Henry's 80s punk band before he reinvented himself as an indie talk show host on IFC.

She laughed. "Paolo sent me this book from Italy. It's his original copy. He just turned up in LA this morning. Totally surprised me."

"Personally, I think you're asking for trouble."

"Nooo," she whined like a five year old. "You're a romantic. You believe in love." She startled him.

"How do you know that?"

Carly Ann wagged her finger at him. "I know you're a successful gay erotic fiction author."

He was flabbergasted. "How do you know *that*?" She seemed thrilled to see him in such discomfort. He'd totally underestimated her. Somebody had taught her well. Figure out what the guy wants and give it to him. Did she know about him and Thomas? Carly Ann clapped her hands in that idiotic way of hers again. *My God*, he

thought. *Baby Daphne's more mature than this woman.*

His silence prompted her to speak. "My chiropractor—"

Oh, Buddah.

"...is Christian. He told me all about you."

Up until ten days ago, Matt had never heard of Christian and had bodily thrown him out of Ryan and Cole's house, where he'd been staying. Poor Cole caught the two men in bed and furious sparks flew, but it was Matt who was able to dynamite the guy out of the house. And then he went to *Black Point*, met Thomas and found out he was working with Christian. The guy was like a bad dose of the clap. He just kept coming back.

"He told me all about how you're a successful author. He lent me two of your ebooks. I downloaded them onto my Sony Reader."

Geez, was he supposed to feel good about them sharing his hard-earned work? It wasn't like the downloads were expensive. Five bucks a pop. His head wrestled unhappily with swampy thoughts and emotions.

"I never knew two men together could be so hot. I must say...I think Paolo would be a great cover model. You should think about using him. I can hook you up."

When he didn't respond, Carly Ann piped in with more bad news from the storm front.

"He told me all about your brother, Damien, and all about his drug problem."

"How does he know about Damien? He's never even met him." Matt was furious now. Most men's pillow talk was sexual. Ryan would be a lousy secret agent. He couldn't keep his hands or family secrets to himself. But Damien...this was too much. Matt hated Christian more than ever. "Why would my family's problems be of any interest to you?" He could not keep the chill out of his voice and she looked surprised.

"Christian loves Ryan."

"He does not love Ryan. He hasn't a hope in hell of ever being with Ryan." *I hope.*

She laughed, clapping like a maniacal toy clown and he wanted to throw her out of the window. "You're such a man! Listen, you understand the love of men—"

"And you don't?" he arched a brow at her and she shrugged.

"Paolo is...impetuous...different."

I'll bet. He's just a horny asshole who thinks he's gonna get laid. What was it about the one that got away? Why did they always appear so alluring? He thought about his own quick fixes with his ex Wayne and yeah, he might understand the love of men. It didn't mean he had any solutions. He was still armed with the same empty rulebook the rest of the population had. "Does Paolo know you're

getting married?"

She did damage to a quick succession of pale yellow Gummi Bears. Her hand hovered over the dark yellow ones and she looked at him. "No, he doesn't know."

Boy, what a dunce. Henry Rollins the non-believer of love would denounce Paolo as a card-carrying fan. Now if she was talking about meeting Henry Rollins at the W Hotel, Matt thought he could turn homicidal out of sheer jealousy.

"You know, I liked your books," she suddenly said.

"Thank you."

"You should think about writing them as books and getting them published."

"They are books. Published books."

She looked confused for a moment.

"Ebooks are still books. Mine happen to be best sellers. When my third one is published in the spring, my publisher told me she's going to release them as a paperback trilogy."

She wasn't listening. "Read some of Paolo's e-mails."

Now he understood why he was here. He dutifully read their cut-rate smut and could offer no insight to their online lunacy. He didn't even like to read back his own online sex sessions, back in the days when he wasted his time, let alone

anybody else's.

"He's a poet, isn't he?"

"No. I am afraid he isn't."

She burst into laughter, surprising him. "They told me you were sharp. You're the only studio executive I know who accepted a company takeover and walked away to try your hand at writing and you're actually doing it. I thought..." Here her vulnerability showed here. "I thought...maybe you could talk to Paolo for me. Find out how he feels about me."

He stared at her and she stumbled over her words.

"You threw Christian out of his lover's house. You could get rid of Paolo for me. Send him...you know, back to Venice."

He snorted. "You have to be kidding me."

"Well, I have to do something. I'm supposed to meet him at six. I thought...maybe you could tell him you'll talk to your publisher if you think his writing is any good. That way he won't be leaving empty handed."

Man, was she two donuts short of a baker's dozen.

"Absolutely not."

"But he's a wonderful writer."

"No, he is not. He wrote online porn. Any beer swilling yahoo can tell a woman she makes his cock hard."

"He writes poetry, too. There were some lines in there—"

"Yeah, I noticed. All of it was lifted. *Stolen*. I recognized a few of his lines straight from the pages of Henry Rollins's diaries. He sent you the book." Matt gestured toward the coffee table. "He must have figured you'd never read it. There was one line I sort of had memorized because it's kind of how I used to feel about looking for love. *I wish I could meet a woman that could show me something. One who could make my blood stop screaming.*"

She stared at him.

"Doesn't it bother you that he is stealing words? That he's unoriginal?"

She shook her head. "I'm a studio executive. I don't believe in originality."

That explained why ninety per cent of the movies being turned out in Hollywood were such crap.

"I still don't understand...if you think I need to send Paolo away, why you won't help me?"

"Because it's not my problem. *You're* not my problem."

"But Christian said you stormed into his bedroom and called him mean things and threw him out of the house!"

"Christian is an asshole who took advantage of my brother-in-law's kindness and my own twin's total stupidity. I did what I had to do. This is my

family. I won't let anybody walk in and ruin it."

She stared at him, as if in awe. "You know Christian kinda has a crush on you, don't you?"

He didn't care who Christian crushed on...except if he set his sights on Thomas. *Thomas...*

"Christian thinks Ryan and Cole are weeks away from a divorce. That's what Ryan told him."

"Not true." He was furious now. Ryan had gone too far this time. They'd had a wonderful vacation in *Hawaii*. It had been a renewal of devotion for Ryan and Cole, and they'd all joked, an early honeymoon for him and Thomas. They'd only just returned this morning. When the hell did Ryan get time to see or speak to Christian? He felt he could never go away to Montreal to be with Thomas. Not if Christian was circling the waters like a demented tiger shark zooming in on easy prey. He had to protect Ryan's family.

"What should I do?"

"About what?" he snapped.

She looked at him.

"Tell him the truth."

Her assistant buzzed her to let her know her next appointment was waiting. He stood up to leave. She shook his hand. He felt his finger bones creaking in protest at the strength of her grip and he realized she respected him, even though he still left her in a quandary. She needed a big brother,

not a former studio executive who *understood the love of men*.

“Tell me something...” She tilted her head in that way of hers. “Have you found the man who makes your blood stop screaming?”

“Yeah, I think I have.”

CHAPTER THREE

“You look upset.”

“No, I’m fine.” Matt forced a smile onto his face that became the real deal the second his gaze connected with his beautiful niece’s as he slid into the seat opposite Cole and the baby. Cole had snagged an excellent corner table at Tommy Tang’s on Melrose, still the best Thai restaurant in Los Angeles. Daphne was now wearing clear plastic glasses in the shape of pink stars and she stared at her uncle.

“Cool glasses, bunny. You’re styling!” Matt reached across the table and she lifted her little legs, tucking them under her as he swept her onto his lap.

Cole watched them, a blissful look on his face. “We just bought her a bunch of new glasses at this street stall on the corner of Curson. Doesn’t she look cute? She’s my little star.” Cole’s love for his child was like a physical force of warmth and grace.

"She's my little star, too." Matt kissed her index finger and then she held up another finger. One by one, he had to kiss them all. The waiter bustled over.

"Cole! How are you darling? Hey, Ryan." He stopped. "Oops. Not Ryan. Sorry, Matt."

"Don't be sorry." Matt chuckled, his good humor restored by a little girl with ten tiny fingers and a big, big heart.

"Want me to order?"

It was a moot point. Cole knew Matt's tastes well and always ordered the best dishes anyplace they went.

"We'll have the crispy duck with the honey ginger sauce, please." Cole scanned the menu though he must have known it by heart. "The baby loves the chicken noodles. Can we get that with extra Chinese broccoli, please?"

"Sure thing."

"And...the grilled tiger prawns, the spinach chicken salad and oh, three wonton soups with extra ginger and shrimp, please, Kai." Cole paused. "Can we get some apple juice for the baby?" He glanced at Matt. "Would you like a beer?"

"Perfect."

"Two Singhas, please." Cole pronounced it the correct way, Sing, the *has* being silent. Kai kept scrawling on his order pad.

"Edamame, daddy."

Cole laughed. "Bad daddy. How could I forget?"

"I would have brought some anyway. I love how you introduce her to new foods so early."

Cole smiled. Daphne ate whatever Cole and Ryan ate. She was already a little gourmand. "Thanks, Kai. I think this place is our favorite though, isn't it, Daph?"

"Yah!"

The waiter joined their ripple of laughter.

Daphne reached for Cole and he took possession of her again. As she began to sort through the crayons, Kai thoughtfully put on a blank piece of paper in front of her, Cole focused on Matt.

"Bad meeting?"

"You could say that."

Their drinks arrived and Kai deposited the nicely salted edamame, soybean pods on a big dish in the middle of the table. Daphne reached across the table and grabbed one, sucking the outside skin and expertly wedging the beans from the top with her little teeth, depositing the mangled pod into a small dish. She immediately bent her head and resumed the important work of coloring.

"So, what happened?"

Matt blew out a breath. He did not want to tell

Cole about the meeting. He did not want to talk about Christian.

"You know what, I think you should come and stay with us for a few days. Get you past this funk." Cole glanced at his daughter, her tongue tip protruding from her little mouth. She was drawing a house, at least it looked like a house. She had a creative way about her artwork. Suddenly, her green crayon went straight into her mouth and with a practiced air, Cole removed it.

Daphne laughed and began to draw stick figures outside her house.

"Who's that, darling?" He pointed to the tallest figure.

"Mmmm...that's you, daddy."

"And this one?"

"Daddy."

"And this one?"

She giggled. "My Matty."

"Out of the mouths of babes," Cole grinned, scooping his daughter into his arms.

* * * *

Ryan arrived home from his law firm at around six. He wore his usual scowl that in Matt's experience vanished with a hug from his daughter and a kiss from his husband. His scowl stayed put however, and Matt, who had just spent a very

pleasant afternoon with Cole and Daphne, became worried.

“Go say a private hello, you two. I want to see you both smiling when you come out of that bedroom. Daphne and I will amuse ourselves.”

Ryan’s eyes revealed his instantly revved up engine.

Matt popped open a bottle of Coppola cabernet sauvignon. “Here...sex and red wine. It’s a good thing.”

Cole took two glasses from him and raced away with Ryan. Matt picked up Daphne and took her outside. Though the weather was cool, Cole and Ryan had an indoor, heated pool they were fortunate to use year round. Daphne was still wearing her pink and lime green swimsuit from their afternoon in the pool. Matt was wearing board shorts and they entered the water, the toddler shrieking with the coldness greeting her skin. He was teaching her to swim and she was a born water baby. Just like Ryan, Damien and Matt himself, water was her best friend.

The baby splashed and kicked and he laughed as she delighted in the simple art of making waves. He held her in his arms and, just like he’d taught her earlier in the day, she kept one arm around his neck as he did an extended one-armed breast stroke across the pool with her. She shrieked with glee when they touched the wall.

They turned around and went back again. A few more laps and Matt came out of the water and swaddled Daphne in a big, fluffy towel. They came out of the pool area. Cole and Ryan's bedroom overlooked the pool and he glanced up to see Ryan moving away from the windows. Had he been watching them? Why wasn't he in bed with Cole?

Sunset came so early now and it was already getting dark. He took Daphne upstairs and stripped off her soaking swimsuit and left it in her bathroom sink. They ran a tub full of water together and she helped him squirt in different colored bath paints. He bathed her and she picked out the pajamas she wanted to wear. He slipped a fresh pair of pull up diapers over her resistant legs and finally her pajama bottoms. She wriggled out of his grasp, tore out of his arms and ran to her fathers' bedroom. Matt ran after her, but she was quick. She jumped a couple of times, finally reaching the door handle and thrust it open. Matt snatched her up, quickly closing the door.

"Daddy!" She pointed at the door.

"That's right. Your daddies are in there. Let's go and check on dinner, shall we?" he kissed her little head.

"I want daddy!"

"Aren't I good enough?"

"No." She said this with an impish smile

though. Boy was she a little pistol.

"Did you say no?" He put her on the ground and she balled her fist into her mouth. "Oh, you're in trouble now, missy." He chased her from room to room, little Daphne delighted with this new game. He'd just caught her in his arms when Cole and Ryan came out of their bedroom. Ryan looked ecstatic, Cole looked totally depleted. Matt's spirits sank. Is this what he did to Thomas? Did he suck up all his energy, wearing him out? Is that why Thomas didn't call?

Ryan drifted past him with the gait of the conquering hero. He plucked Daphne out of Matt's arms, tickling her and the little girl's happy squeals filled the house. Down in the kitchen, Matt helped Cole organize dinner while Ryan roughoused with the baby.

"Everything okay?" Matt asked Cole.

"Yes, honey." Cole glanced at him. "I've never..." he broke off his own words.

"You've never what?"

"He just seems hungry for me again. It's so nice."

"Been a long time?" Matt blurted.

"Yeah, as it happens." Cole garnished the huge platter of tri-colored pasta with a handful of chopped herbs and freshly shaved parmesan cheese. "Ever since we had the baby, he's been different. Like I'm not his sole property anymore."

Matt's heart went out to him. "Jesus...are you sure you wanna stick with the Lucas family? I'm beginning to think we're all pretty fucked up."

Cole let the remark pass, squeezing fresh lemon on seared *ahi* tuna steaks. "He told me Christian called him."

Matt felt the clenching in his belly easing up. "He...did?"

Cole seemed to be experiencing his own emotions. "I don't think he's going to give up on Ryan."

"You don't?"

Cole shook his head. "Ryan had breakfast with him." Matt started, but Cole put his hand on his arm. "He told me before it happened. We had a huge fight this morning. That's why we came to you."

"And what happened at breakfast?"

Cole shrugged. "Christian thinks he's Ryan's soul mate."

Matt's stomach muscles started clenching again. "That little prick. I'll —"

Cole laughed. "I feel so protected. Ryan's freaked out that I might cheat on him. I think I'll torture him just a little longer, although between you and me, I am addicted to your brother. I couldn't...touch another man, not like that. But it won't hurt to keep him off balance for a while."

Ryan lit a fire in the living room fireplace. The

nights up in the hills were very cold, but the living room was a huge, warm, sunken affair with massive, unadorned windows giving out onto the Hollywood Hills. The stars of the city glittered back at them as Matt regaled them with the safer points of his meeting with Carly Ann Westaway.

"You'll be able to help Thomas now he's entering the movie fray," Ryan pointed out. "And remind him I'm an entertainment attorney. I'll be his bulldog if he wants."

"I'll do that." Matt felt a little queasy. Thomas had kept the movie contract deal pretty close to the chest. He tried to tell him he would need a good entertainment attorney as well as his literary agent in Hollywood to broker the deal. Thomas seemed reluctant to discuss the issue very much, very surprised to learn that Matt had recently been a big player and, by his own choice, was no longer marching to the Hollywood studio beat.

After dinner, they made smores in the fireplace, the chocolate sending Daphne into a sugar high and then sent her helplessly sleepy, despite her efforts to remain awake. Matt tucked her into her bed, giving Cole and Ryan the living room to themselves. He didn't even get a chance to read to her. Her little eyes drifted shut the second he put her into bed.

There were so many things he wanted to do with her...books to share with her, songs,

stories...

"Hey..."

Matt jumped. It was Ryan, standing behind him, gazing down at Daphne.

"You are the luckiest man alive," Matt whispered. Ryan nodded.

"You heard from Thomas yet?"

Matt shrugged. "No calls. Maybe he emailed me." He saw the troubled expression skitter across Ryan's face. He hugged his brother. "Go back to the fire and molest your husband. I'm gonna go to my room and do some work."

Ryan hugged him hard. "I'm glad you're here. We're all glad you're here."

Out in the hallway, Matt gave himself a mental push and went into the guest room, most recently vacated by Christian and before that, his younger brother Damien. Who was now in a sixty-day lockdown facility in the middle of the desert. Only his parents knew where he was. It pained him that he couldn't see or speak to Damien. In many ways, he was closer to Damien than Ryan, since they were both single, but at twenty-six, Damien had sunk into a terrible depression, self-medicating on a variety of drugs. It was Matt who found him unconscious on the floor of his downtown artist's loft and who saved his life.

He had been in hospital for three days, a mandatory seventy-two hour hold after that and

then...he disappeared. He came and went from their lives, living on the streets sometimes, living with Cole and Ryan sometimes, living with Matt sometimes...until a second almost fatal overdose. The Los Angeles court mandated he must enter a lockdown facility voluntarily or serve time in jail.

It was Cole and Ryan who took legal custody of him for two days until Matt and Ryan's parents could secure a lockdown program. Damien had been released by the court to Cole who nurtured him like a baby. Now it was Matt's turn. At the desk in his tastefully decorated bedroom, he fired up his laptop.

No emails. God, what if something had happened to him? He quickly accessed Thomas' yahoo group—actually his nom de plume, Rose Carter's yahoo group—and saw lots of discussions taking place about Rose's *coming-out party* in *Honolulu*. Rose had very loyal fans who didn't care what gender she was, judging by the posts. A few snarky people wrote things like, *I knew he had to be a guy*.

There was some discussion about Thomas' new partnership with Steve Strong, AKA Christian, the home wrecker.

He should be writing a book with Matt Malone, somebody wrote. That made Matt feel good. There were no posts from Thomas and his concern became real. His AOL mailbox pinged and he

checked his new mail.

Praise God. An email from Thomas. *Hi, got in okay...long flight delay. Hope all is good. Be in touch soon. xo*

On the one hand, he was thrilled to get *something*, on the other hand, not thrilled to be getting *nothing*...no glimmer of hope, no word of affection. He gave himself a stern talking to reminding himself Thomas must have been exhausted. Hell, *he* was exhausted, but he'd still managed to text, leave a voice mail message and an email. Email. He was savvy enough to know email was a call avoidance mechanism. Still, he felt a bit special because Rose's readers were wondering where he was...and Matt had an actual email from him. He flipped back to Rose's yahoo group and felt devastated when he saw a flurry of quite...*wordy* posts from Rose.

"At least he emailed you first," Matt mumbled to himself. Not by much. As soon as the email had been sent to Matt, Thomas started posting about his trip, his news...and his new book with Steve. Matt read as much he could stomach and went to bed, tossing and turning all night until Ryan came and woke him at six.

"Wanna go for a run?"

He didn't hesitate and the two brothers took a long, leisurely run from the trail at the back of the house through the hills. A small rattlesnake lay

curled up beside them and as their thundering feet soared over the reptile, Matt heard the snake's warning rattle. For two miles, they ran up the back spine of Bronson Canyon, which was lush and green in parts and desert-like in others. It was a three-mile loop and they were finishing the trail when they encountered a guy with two small dogs bounding up the trail off leash.

"There's a snake on trail." Matt stopped, his breathing labored.

"Thanks for telling me." The guy quickly leashed the energetic pups as Matt and Ryan explained exactly where the snake was. The twins walked the rest of the way back to the house and Ryan glanced at him.

"You're really depressed about Thomas, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

"You haven't heard from him?"

"Oh, I got an email last night saying he was home."

Ryan nodded. "He'll miss you."

"I don't think so."

Ryan frowned. "Matty, when did you lose all that lovely confidence you used to have?"

Matt felt the emotion stirring an ugly, unpalatable soup in his belly. "I don't know..."

"Was it...was it when Wayne screwed you over or was it when you found Damien half-dead?"

Matt opened his mouth.

Ryan held up his hand. "You allowed your employer to steamroller you out of a job you loved and kicked ass for. You allowed Wayne to walk all over you and now you're allowing Thomas to walk away from you."

"That's not fair. I've tried to contact him. He's holding out on me."

"The Matt I know would be on the next flight to Montreal to get the guy he wants. How come you can kick ass for my family, for my relationship and not yours?"

Matt blinked a few times. Ryan couldn't have hurt him more with an actual, physical shot to the jaw. "Is it over with Christian?" Matt asked. "I mean really over?"

"Of course it's over."

Matt told Ryan what he had not told Cole, the entire story about his meeting with Carly Ann Westaway.

Ryan snorted. "I'm not in love with Christian, I made a terrible mistake and I will spend a long time paying for it."

"Why'd you do it?"

Ryan's expression faltered. "He gave me attention. I know, I know...I get plenty from Cole, but Christian had this..." he sighed. "He makes you feel like you alone in the world make his world a beautiful place."

Matt hated hearing that. It alluded to an emotional connection beyond a quick fuck. "Is that why does he thinks you and Cole are breaking up?"

"I never gave him the idea I was leaving Cole. He's a writer. He's got a fanciful imagination. Who knows?"

"Why did you tell Christian about Damien? I don't get that." Matt was lashing out now.

Ryan stared at him. "Because I was afraid of losing him. I don't want Damien to die. I...Matty, I don't want to lose you either. You are my best friend. But I know you love Thomas and clearly, you can't live without him. You need to go to him. I am not going to watch you wallow in despair and maybe do something...bad."

Matt was shocked. "I'm not in danger of doing that."

"I didn't think Damien would either..." Ryan's eyes teared up. "You came close to losing it when things went bad with Wayne and you didn't have those feelings for him that you have for Thomas." Ryan hesitated. "I think Christian has his sights set on Thomas if things don't work out with me and I can tell you right now, things are *not* going to work out with me."

Matt was silent.

"I don't want you to move to Canada. But I also know I cannot lose another brother. Not you,

Matt. You are a big part of my world, but you can't stay here and fight for my family. You can't hide behind us. We'll be okay. We love having you here, but you need to be happy, too."

Matt dropped his head. The feelings of despair were overwhelming.

Ryan put his hand on his shoulder. "The Matt I know has dauntless composure and he takes action. Always. That's the man Thomas loves. So find him in you and get on a fucking plane or else."

Matt smiled. "Or else what?"

"I'll go up that trail, find that goddam snake and stick him into your bed tonight."

* * * *

Which was how, seven hours later, Matt found himself disembarking from a five hour and nine minute American Airlines flight from LAX to Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport in Montreal. He felt the strongest and most alive he ever felt, even as he went through customs and immigration, collecting his small, wheeled suitcase. As he walked through the sleek terminal, he wondered if he should have called Thomas first. He called Cole instead. It was six thirty in the evening in Montreal, which was four hours ahead of Los Angeles. Cole was at a modeling shoot with

Daphne.

"I'm so proud of you," Cole gushed. He put the baby on the phone.

"Love you, *Unca* Matty," she burred. Matt allowed their love to steel him inward in the last bit of his journey. He was startled to see a man in uniform holding up a sign saying M. Lucas.

"We booked you a limousine." Cole was laughing now. "The driver has strict instructions to give you a glass of champagne and deliver you *very* happy to Thomas' doorstep."

"Oh, my God. I'm really going to see him, aren't I?"

"Yes, you are. Stay in touch." Cole ended the call and Matt wheeled his compact bag toward the driver who grabbed it and led him outside. It was cold and very damp, but he didn't care. The Montreal Limousine's interior was clean and fresh smelling. The champagne tickled his nose. He alternated between a high and low state, trying not to get too excited, nor give into the panic demons lapping at his heels.

He saw the marked difference in the neighborhood as they entered *Gay Villiage*. Matt grinned broadly at murals of anatomically correct—and stunning—men on the sides of buildings. He knew they were close to Thomas' house now because he saw the church and the building nearby on Amherst with the words *Aids*

will disappear one day, let's learn from this written in red paint.

The driver pulled up outside a pretty Victorian terrace on St. Catherine. He looked at the three levels, the geraniums tumbling toward the pale sun from window boxes on each level. He heard a ripple of laughter, then a man's deep rumble of laughter. Not Thomas'. *God help me*, Matt thought as he thanked the driver and walked up the few shorts to the front door.

And knocked.

CHAPTER FOUR

Thomas sat on the edge of the sofa, his head slightly askew listening to Christian recount some story about an incident, which had happened to him in his office. He tried to feign interest, but damn it, he couldn't believe that he'd just turned up here out of the blue. Worse, he couldn't get the things Christian had told him about Matt, out of his mind. Thomas' face slid into his hand. Two bloody nights on Thomas' sofa, and the first night, he'd practically had to wrestle the fool out of his bedroom. God, why in the hell had he told him where he lived?

"Isn't this great?" Christian announced suddenly, throwing up his hands, a great big grin on his face. "Who would have ever thought we'd be writing together, Thomas, and in the same room."

"You can't stay here," Thomas shook his head. "There's no room and..."

"Thomas," he cooed, coming to perch on the

edge of the sofa next to him, "we could be great together."

Fuck. Not that again. The knock on the door sliced into the tension gnawing through Thomas' gut. Thomas jumped up from the sofa just as Christian reached over to put a hand on his thigh. "Someone at the door," he muttered. He lunged forward, almost tripping on the coffee table and grabbed the door handle, practically tearing the door open.

He wasn't sure who was more surprised, him or Matt. Thomas just stood there staring at him, his jaw slack. He couldn't seem to make any words. *Jesus Christ. What in the hell was this?*

Matt wasn't looking at him at all. His furious gaze was fixed beyond him to Christian who had suddenly come to stand behind Thomas.

Christian clamped a hand on Thomas' shoulder.

Thomas tried to shrug it off.

"Well, look who's come a callin'," Christian sneered. "What do you want?"

Thomas was about to give Christian a tongue lashing.

Matt growled, "I'm going to fucking kill you."

The sudden swing from Matt's fist came fast and hard as Thomas moved automatically to block it and caught it straight in the mouth. He backed up from the impact.

From the other side of the room, Christian said, "Asshole, see what you've done."

Thomas raised his hand to his mouth and tasted blood.

Matt looked stricken. "My God, Thomas, baby, are you all right?" He went to touch him, but Thomas took a step away from him.

He held up his hand. "Don't. It's okay."

"I think you should leave here," Christian hissed. "You've done—"

"Shut up," Thomas said, glaring at Christian. "Just..." he shook his head, "shut up." He sighed, looking at Matt who still had his bag slung over his shoulder.

"What is he doing here?" Matt's voice was stone cold.

"I don't know," Thomas shook his head. "Why don't you fucking ask him?"

"I don't understand what's happening, Thomas," Matt met his gaze. "What's happening with us?"

"Thomas doesn't want you," Christian laughed. "He knows what an asshole you are and..."

Matt threw his bag down and took a step.

Thomas rushed forward and blocked his path. The feel of his hard body pressing against his suddenly reminded him of how much he loved him. It made him want to die. "Fine," he muttered, throwing up his hands, "kill each other,

Goddamnit, I don't give a fuck." He pushed Matt out of the way and stormed outside.

He ignored the voice calling out to him and ran around the corner and down the street. Tears threatened and he pushed them back. He'd be Goddamned if he was going to cry. He'd thought that Matt was going to be his everything. He'd been wrong. He kept walking, past the terrace bars where throbs of techno music heightened the thick sexual mystic hugging the air.

After about twenty minutes, he turned around and headed back, ignoring the catcalls and the horny men who purposely bumped up against him. He couldn't very well leave Christian and Matt there to kill one another. When he reached his building, and trudged up the stairs, wishing he could just rewind his life and go back to *Black Point*.

He's a fake, Matt. Everything about him is false. He goes through men like nothing. He'll use you and throw you away. He tried to steal me away from his brother. He wants me for himself, tries to pretend he's all concerned about his brother. It's a lie. You've gone and fallen for a guy you met over the internet, Thomas. He'll use you. He'll steal your work. You're a big name and...

Christian was sitting on the steps outside, sulking.

"Where's Matt?"

"Inside."

"Go away, Christian. Please, go away," he sighed, stepping around him.

"Fine. I need my stuff."

"Come back in the morning. I'll leave it outside. Go get laid."

"You just can't..." He was struggling to his feet.

Thomas walked inside his apartment, shut the door and locked it behind him. Matt looked up at him from where he was sitting on the sofa, his hair in disarray. "I was going to go," he stammered. "It's just that..."

"You don't have to go," Thomas shook his head.

Matt stood up, came closer. "Your mouth, I'm so sorry. Do you have any..."

Thomas shook his head. He couldn't ever feel the pain any more anyway, the pain went much deeper.

"Why didn't you call me? Why did you write me that—" He stood up, threw up his hands. "I know why. You were here with him, fucking him."

"If you want Christian, go and get him. He's outside."

"Christian? Christian, hell! I don't want that shit head. I want you, Goddamnit. Only you. In fact, I can hardly breathe without you. I can't think, I can't fucking write. And I don't care that you were with him...in fact..." Suddenly Matt's

hands grabbed onto his shoulders, pushing him against the wall.

Thomas stumbled backward, staring at him.

"In fact, I want you now, right fucking now. I want to fuck you so hard. And I don't care anymore what you were doing with him. Do you hear me?"

Matt's expression took on a strange mix of rage and lust. His strength was suddenly overwhelming as his mouth came down on Thomas' bruised lips. Matt's hard body crushed his, grunts of unsatisfied need vibrating in his chest.

If there had been any resistance in Thomas initially, Matt's hand blindly searching for the zip on Thomas' jeans drained it out of him. His body, first stiff and uncooperative, suddenly betrayed him and relaxed against the wall, abandoning himself to the scorching kisses sucking his jaw and seizing his throat. Matt's desperate fingers found the zipper and pulled. Thomas' head bobbed against the wall as one hand yanked down his jeans and the other hastily fastened around his shaft. He grunted as Matt squeezed hard, sinking to his knees and pressing his cheek against his cock, which was also on its way to total betrayal.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God," Matt breathed, kissing and licking his shaft.

Thomas allowed himself to place a hand in

Matt's soft, dark blonde hair. He loved the streaks in it. He wanted to say something, perhaps put an end to this, but he was powerless. He loved him so much.

Matt's hands clutched his ass, pulling his groin into him, bestowing soft kisses along his shaft, sucking the skin of his balls into his mouth. Thomas moaned softly. He couldn't take much more. He was close to exploding and Matt hadn't even taken it into his mouth.

"Is this what you've reduced me to?" Matt asked, looking up at him. His eyes looked translucent, soft, very sad.

Thomas took his hand away from his hair. "Get off me," he managed, his voice strained. "What in fuck is wrong with you?" He asked the question, but already knew. He had the same affliction. He gave him a little shove, enough to knock him off balance. Matt ended up on the floor on his ass, unharmed. He suddenly looked so very far away.

"I could ask you the same question. What in fuck was that at *Black Point*?"

Thomas pulled up his pants and did up the zip. "It was, what it was."

"Don't fucking give me that, Thomas. I deserve more."

"I don't think I totally get all this stuff you got going on about Christian."

Matt got to his feet. "What's to get? He almost

fucked up my brother's marriage."

"Well, I guess good old Christian, gets around." It came out like a sneer.

"Guess so," Matt threw back. "Is he good?"

"How in fuck would I know?"

"Oh, the two of you were playing Scrabble then. Yeah, like I believe that." Matt scoffed.

"Believe what you like." Thomas shook his head. "Christian showed up here. I didn't invite him. He told me the entire story."

"What story?" Matt came closer, studying his face intently.

"Doesn't matter."

"Yeah, it fucking well does matter." Matt took his arm.

Thomas shook it off. "He's said you were a player, that you met a lot of guys off the net and..." He sighed. "He said you played him, and then got jealous because of your brother and..."

"And you believed that?" Matt put his hands on his hips.

"Well, you believed I was fucking him here."

"What am I supposed to believe? You don't call me. You don't care enough about me to send me a decent fucking email and I show up here, and there he is, looking happier than a pig in shit."

"Guilty until proven innocent, eh?"

"Damn right."

"Look. I was overwhelmed. I was trying to

make sense of everything. It all happened so fast between us and it seemed like..."

"It seemed like what?"

"Like a scene out of a book. It didn't seem real once I was away from you, damn it, I thought I was dreaming. And then he showed up and..."

"If you would have called me, talked to me about it, but no, you just bought all his horseshit. Damn it, Thomas." Matt shook his head. "Were you just going to throw everything away before even trying to talk to me about it? What in hell is wrong with you?"

"Maybe I don't believe in happy endings." When the words came out of his mouth, they stunned him. *God know my parents haven't had one. My father had run off with his secretary. My mother had suffered from depression for years. I hadn't seen either of them in a long while. They'd never approved of my sexual orientation, as if they had a right to judge.*

"You write them for Christ's sakes," Matt was saying now.

"Yeah, well it's what the readers want." He sighed heavily, feeling a sudden urge to smoke, although he'd given that up years ago.

"Why did he come here?"

Thomas plunked down on the sofa, lifting an eyebrow. "I don't know exactly."

"How long before you were in bed with him?"

Thomas looked up at him. "He slept on the

sofa, and you know what, I don't give a shit if you believe it or not."

"...because you don't give a shit about me."

Thomas shook his head. "I love you. And right now, I'm feeling especially unhappy about that."

"That's makes two of us. So, what now?"

"Well, we can just sit here seeing who can wound who the worse. Would you like that?"

"No." There was a brief pause, then Matt said, "You know, the least you can do is fuck me. You owe me that. And since I've totally lost my inspiration—" He shrugged.

Thomas' eyes widened. "You're kidding, right? I owe you a fuck?"

He turned his back. For a moment, he didn't say anything.

"Matt?" Thomas stood up.

"You still want me, don't you?"

The words sounded stilted.

He nodded, but Matt couldn't see him.

Matt turned around, his expression unreadable now. "We write about this stuff, let's have sex."

"This some new game you're playing?"

"You said I'm a player. I'm playing. Plus, a guy does what he has to do to get laid." He gave him a meaningful look. "What? Do you think I came all this way just for a kiss? Give it to me, Thomas. Give me what I came for, or I might just take it."

Thomas' first instinct was to be angry, but

instead his heart thudded in his chest like a bass drum. There was something oh so sexy about Matt at this very moment. It was quite reckless and unpredictable. "You might just have to," Thomas breathed, meeting his gaze, a ghost of a smile playing around his lips.

Matt reached out his hand and curled his fingers around Thomas' wrist, yanking him forward up to his chest. "Oh yeah? Is that so? Where's the bedroom?"

Thomas' gaze went to the open door on his left, which led into the hallway.

Matt half-dragged him down the carpeted hallway, at least Thomas allowed him to believe he was half-dragging him, but the truth was he wasn't fighting very hard. His cock was so hard, he thought he was going to come before he even got to the bed. He turned off his thoughts, at least any thought which could be conceived as rational. Matt was pulling his pants down, clumsily removing his shoes and his socks. Thomas pulled his shirt over his head, which propelled Matt to smooth his palms up over his chest, then pull his head back by the hair and bite down into his shoulder.

Thomas' chest heaved. He placed his hands on both sides of Matt's face and kissed him hotly, bumping him into the wall. One hand left his face and went to his shirt, which he ripped at, probably

tearing half the buttons off. His lips moved from Matt's mouth to his throat while he stripped down his pants and underwear, muttering in frustration when the underwear got caught on Matt's substantial erection.

Matt was as frustrated as Thomas. He pushed his hand away and hastily yanked the underwear down, stepping out of it. Thomas kicked it aside, his mouth finding one of Matt's nipples. He suckled it for a minute, grasping it between his teeth as his hand almost casually taunted Matt's cock and ball sack. "Um, Thomas, Jesus," he grunted, slamming his head against the wall. "Mercy."

Thomas was way beyond granting that. "Too late, baby," he managed, licking at the hard nipple. He raised his head again and Matt grabbed his jaw and devoured his mouth, pushing him toward the bed. They fell together, Matt on top of him, his lips working down his jaw to his throat, fingers tormenting his nipples as a knee rode up between his legs and brushed against his cock.

Thomas rolled over on him, pinning him against the mattress, managing to get a hold of his hands and bending them up over his head. He looked down into his eyes for a moment, breathing labored, his need of him spiraling out of control. "Christ," he swallowed. *No...don't think. Don't think that this might be all a game, that you*

might be allowing yourself to let passion control you...that this love might kill you just like it had drained every bit of life out of my mother. Thomas grabbed him suddenly, pushed him over onto his stomach, folded his arms around his waist and pulled him upright on all fours.

Matt didn't struggle. And when Thomas spread his legs and lowered his head to his ass, his entire body shuddered. Thomas' cock pulsed. *Hold on. Hold on.* He needed to taste him, needed to drive him to point of no return with his tongue. He reached underneath and massaged his balls, stroked his cock, delved his tongue deep inside of that most precious place, and Matt cried out something, something unintelligible. Thomas didn't wait. In fact, he couldn't wait. He clutched Matt's hips in his hands and positioned his aching cock, sinking inside of him, thrusting hard with each gasp escaping Matt's lips. Slowly when he could manage it, he slowed, trying to still the trembling, which shook his very soul. He moved his cock almost all the way out of him now, not being about to bear leaving his body entirely, then plunged deep inside him again, in a tantalizing dance of possessive heat.

"Thomas," Matt hissed. "I'm going to..."

"I know," Thomas managed, his hand jerking Matt's cock. "It's okay, baby." He jerked harder and began to literally ride him. All coherent

thought left him as his rhythm grew to a frantic pace. Matt grunted and the come slid through Thomas' fingers as he held onto his fading cock. Seconds later, he felt his own release shoot up inside Matt's ass.

Thomas collapsed on top of him, their sweat soaked body drained and peaceful. He didn't have the strength to move.

It was Matt who finally grumbled, "Get off me, will yah?"

Thomas opened his eyes. The sun was coming up. They must have fallen asleep. He lifted himself up into a sitting position, raising his knees and wrapping his arms around them. Matt turned onto his back and placed his hands behind his head. He didn't say anything.

When the silence grew painful, Thomas said, "You know for two writers, we sure as hell don't have a lot to say."

Matt reached for his hand.

Thomas, surprised, played his fingers over his, then gripped his hand tight.

"So, care to tell me what all this is about, now that I can think straight again?"

Thomas lowered his legs. He leaned back against the headboard. "I got home and everything went to shit."

"How so?"

"My message machine was full, people calling

and emailing me all over the place. I wish this had never happened, this movie shit."

"No you don't. What's really bugging you?"

Thomas looked at him. "Some stranger is writing the screenplay. I think they're going to change it to a straight love story."

"They won't do that."

"Yes, Goddamnit, they will. This is a straight man's world, Matt. And I don't want some clown writing my screenplay, turning it into some heterosexual mush. It won't be my story anymore."

"Sweetie," Matt glanced at him, "it's not your story anymore. You sold the rights, remember? Let me help you. I told you that I—"

"Sandra is handling everything."

"Why don't you want me to help you?" Matt sat up.

"It's not that I don't want you to help me. First, Sandra seems to want to run everything, and secondly, I don't want this to come between us."

"Little late for that."

"This has nothing to do with you and me."

"The fact that you won't share any of this with me does. Why didn't you tell me what you were feeling? Why didn't you call me and—"

"I didn't want all this to touch us."

"But it has. And it doesn't explain why you want to write with that fuck head."

The anger in Matt's voice exploded.

"I—"

"It also doesn't explain what in fuck he was doing here with you." Matt jumped out of bed and stalked out of the room.

"Round two," Thomas muttered under his breath. He found Matt in the living room, putting on his underwear.

"So, what in fuck was he doing here?"

"He just showed up. And about writing with him—"

"I don't want you writing with him!" He pointed a finger at him.

"Hey, wait a minute. I have a contract. I just can't—"

"Fuck the contract."

"You can't tell me who I—"

"You never asked me to write with you."

"Is that what this is all about?"

Matt raised his head stubbornly. "I could have used your help. You helped everyone else."

"That's not fair. You never needed my help. You were out and running from day one. And for the record, I haven't helped everyone else. I've given a bit of advice, an ear to a few up and coming—"

"Yeah, well looks like Christian got a hell of a lot more than just an ear." Matt racked his gaze over Thomas' naked body. "In fact, I must be

insane to think that he could resist. He's an idiot, but he's not blind."

"And what about me? What did I do in all this, just lay there and let him—"

"I'm sure you just didn't lay there. That's not your style at all."

Thomas shook his head. "I'm not even going there. And if you'd wanted to write with me so Goddamned bad, all you had to do was ask."

"Write with the great Rose Carter...well, would I have had to get on my knees. You got me on my knees for your cock all ready, why not for my career as well?"

"Too much ego, Matt."

"Oh get over yourself. You have as much ego as I do."

"What are we doing now?" Thomas shook his head. "I wish we could just go back a few hours."

"It was a fuck. I got what I came for. Now, where's my pants?"

"You don't mean that." Thomas winced, watching as Matt marched back down the hallway to the bedroom. When Thomas spotted Christian's suitcase behind the sofa, he growled, "Goddamnit." He picked it up and went to the front door. With one heave, he slung it out onto the staircase. It opened, Christian's things spilling out all over the place. He slammed the door shut.

Suddenly, he heard laughter behind him. He

turned to see Matt standing there, just howling.

"What's so funny?"

"You? I can't believe you did that."

"He forgot his stuff." Thomas muttered, going into the kitchen area and pouring some water into the coffeemaker.

Matt followed him. "Tell me you didn't fuck him."

Matt was close behind him. Thomas could almost feel his breath on his neck.

"Thomas, baby, please. I'm sorry. I lost my temper. I've been such a jerk. I didn't mean to hit you and..."

"You won't believe me if I tell you anyway, so what does it..."

Matt turned him around in his arms.

Thomas slopped the water all over himself.

Matt took the coffee pot out of his hand and sat it on the counter. "I will. If you look into my eyes and tell me, I will. God, Thomas, forgive me. Tell me you love me."

"I...I love you," he said softly. "And I don't even like Christian, really. He's obnoxious and..."

Matt pulled him up against him and kissed his mouth hard. "I believe you. I'm going to stop this because it's driving me mad. I keep picturing you with him and—"

"Stop." Thomas smiled faintly, fingering some of Matt's damp hair. "It's the writer's imagination

in you. It can be a bitch."

"I want to be with you. That's all I know."

Thomas stepped away from him. "I'm scared."

"Of what? You do love me?"

"Yeah," Thomas nodded, "that's what I'm scared of. Matt, I don't think I can live without you."

Matt crushed Thomas to him. He suppressed a sob, kissing his hair. "Then don't."

"What are we supposed to do? You're an American. I'm a Canadian. There's only so long we can live in each other's countries. What? We go back and forth for the rest of our lives?"

"Marry me?"

Thomas moved away from him. He looked up at him, stunned. "What?"

"Marry me."

Thomas laughed. "You can't be —"

"It's legal here, isn't it? I'll apply to —"

"Matt," Thomas put some distance between them. He felt giddy on one level. What a ridiculously romantic idea. Marry Matt?

"What, Thomas? I love you. I've never loved anyone like this. I know it sounds..."

Thomas put up a hand. "Look, lover," he smiled at him, "let's go get some breakfast, okay? Maybe it'll calm the insanity for a bit. I'm starved. Put your clothes on, will yeah."

Matt pursed his lips. "Okay. But you won't

forget about what I said, will you?"

"Forget it?" Thomas shook his head and took his arm. "How in hell could I forget something like that?"

CHAPTER FIVE

“So, do you know how we go about it?” Matt asked, looking around the quaint little greasy spoon restaurant as they took a seat across from one another.

“Go about what?” Thomas asked, signaling the waitress for coffee. He was thinking about how they’d stepped over Christian’s suitcase on the way down the steps. He was beginning to feel a little guilty. “Maybe I should have picked up his stuff.”

“Thomas,” Matt groaned, just as a middle-aged woman came scurrying over with the coffee pot.

“*Duex?*” she asked.

“*Oui,*” Thomas replied.

“*Pour dejeuner?*” She shoved the menu in his face.

“*Oui, merci,*” he replied, picking up the menu as she walked off. “The full breakfast is good here. I like the—”

“How do we find out?” Matt asked, pulling the

menu away from Thomas.

Thomas looked at him. "You can't be serious."
He grabbed the menu back.

"Why not?" He sure as hell looked serious.

"Because."

"Because what?"

"I...you...I mean, we...Matt!"

"I love you."

Thomas dropped the menu on the table. For a moment, he was caught helplessly in his eyes. "Matt," he whispered, reaching over and taking his hand. He tried to form words. "You really mean this."

"Of course I do. I don't take these things lightly. I know I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I knew it even before I met you even if I couldn't make sense of it then, but looking at you now." He shook his head, squeezed Thomas' hand. "I've never been more certain of anything in my life. Tell me you love me, Thomas. I kept saying it, but I..."

Thomas stood up. He came around the table and leaned down, kissing Matt long and hard. He broke away reluctantly, licking his lips to prolong the kiss. He smiled at him for a moment. Matt looked stunned. "How about that? Does that answer your question?"

Matt grinned, nodded.

Thomas went to sit back down only to pause as

a round of applause sounded around them.

"Holy shit," Matt muttered, looking embarrassed. "Is everyone watching us?"

"Practically. This is the gay village you know. People here are suckers for love stories." Thomas took a little bow and then sat down, which caused Matt to shake his head in disbelief and laugh.

"I can't believe you just did that."

"Why not?" He shrugged.

"Hey, baby," some guy shouted, "if at any time that guy you're with gives you a hard time, you can come over here and kiss me anytime."

Thomas grinned.

"You have a fan," Matt remarked.

"Only one?"

Matt smiled at him. "At least two."

"Thanks." The waitress came back and Thomas ordered for both of them in French.

"I got to learn that language. It's sexy as hell."

Thomas sat back with his coffee. "I'll teach you."

"Um, speak French to me later in bed and I'll be your sex slave."

"That's a deal."

"So, who do we talk to?"

"About this...marriage thing?"

"Yes, about the marriage thing."

"Immigration. I assume it works like any marriage. We have to prove we've lived together

for a year and then I can sponsor you for immigration. I have no idea how it works where you're from."

"Gay marriage is legal in California now, too, but I'd have to check into the immigration thing. What's..." Matt peered at the menu, "*tortiare?*"

Thomas laughed. "*Tortiere*. It's meat pie. A traditional dish here, especially at Christmas. A little greasy."

"*Poutine?*"

"French fries, gravy and cheese."

"Oh, my God."

Thomas laughed. "It's sinfully delicious, but not exactly good for the waistline or the heart."

"I want to know everything about you and about this city." He leaned forward with his elbow on the table.

A couple of guys Thomas knew headed for the cash. They waved at him on the way.

"Who are those guys?"

"Jean and Pierre, just two guys who hang out in the same places I go."

"Are they a couple?"

"No. Friends."

"Oh. So, what are we doing today?"

"What do you want to do?"

"You know what I want to do."

Thomas grinned. "Yeah. Maybe I better rephrase that. Where would you like to go?"

"To your bed."

"I can't win." Thomas laughed.

"So you want to?" He lifted an eyebrow.

"Now really. Okay, what would you like to see?"

"You, naked, spread out on the bed, cock hard and needy."

"Yeah, okay," he laughed. "I give up."

"Good, but I really did want to tie you up and spank you into submission."

Thomas squirmed a bit in his seat. His cock was halfway there just listening to Matt. "Stop it," he protested.

"Um, what's up?"

Thomas threw his napkin at him.

The waitress arrived with their breakfast and both of them ate heartily. Thomas suggested some local sites Matt might enjoy seeing. "Okay, there's old Montreal which is great, down by the Port, and oh, the Biodome. We could go shopping. There is a huge underground shopping mall...oh and not to mention the night life, I mean—"

"Let's start with the old Port. It's almost one in the afternoon. Where is this place anyway?"

"In Old Montreal. There's Chinatown there as well."

"Can we walk from here?"

"Ah...it's a little far. We'll take the metro. How is your breakfast?"

"Really good, but a little skimpy."

"Compared to American portions," Thomas laughed. "If you're still hungry, we can—"

"No. I'm fine. Let's go to a nice place for dinner, somewhere expensive."

"Chinatown has great Chinese food. There are a lot of great Greek places here to if you're in the mood."

"Chinatown sounds great."

"It's not big," Thomas said, pushing his cup forward as the waitress came around with coffee.

Matt did likewise, muttering a shy, "*Merci.*"

"Ah, that's so sweet, your little accent," Thomas chuckled.

"I'm sweet, am I?"

"Um, you taste sweet, too."

"Let's go back to your place and you can taste me all you want."

Thomas took a gulp of his coffee and stood up, nodded at him.

Matt jumped up after him and smacked him discretely on the ass. "Hot damn," he teased, "looks like someone's going to get lucky."

Thomas issued him an incredulous look and shook his head, slapping his hand away when he tried to pass him a twenty-dollar bill. "I'll get this, you get dinner."

Matt clicked his tongue, laughing. "You're wise."

"Yep," he agreed with a grin, going up to the cash to pay the bill. He scooted back to leave the tip, then took Matt's arm. "I'll race yeah."

"No fair," Matt protested, taking off after Thomas on a run. "I don't know where in the hell I'm going."

When Thomas arrived at the bottom of steps, he was breathless. He held onto the banister and tried to calm his racing heart, laughing as he saw Matt careening around the corner. "Damn you, Thomas," he accused teasingly, "I just about killed some old lady with her groceries trying to keep track of you. Damn it, boy, you can run."

Thomas laughed, reaching up and pulling Matt to him, kissing his mouth hungrily. "Just so you won't stop appreciating me, baby."

"Oh, I'll appreciate you all right," he growled, grabbing his buttocks. "Get up those stairs."

Thomas grinned, stooping to pick up what was left of Christian's belongings as he went.

"Why don't you leave them there?" Matt grumbled.

Thomas glanced at him. "Now, don't be spiteful. It wasn't very nice what I did."

"Give 'em to me, I'll do it for you."

"No you won't." Matt shoved them into the suitcase and put his key into the lock. He brought it inside and put it into the corner. "Now." He turned around and shut the door, looking at Matt.

"Where we're we?"

"You were picking up that prick's shit off the stairs," Matt muttered.

Thomas sighed. "Fine, be like that." He pulled his t-shirt off, then undid his pants right there in the hallway. He didn't have to look at Matt to know he was watching.

"That won't work."

"Maybe this won't, but I know something that will," Thomas said softly, dropping the rest of his clothes and heading for the bedroom. Thomas smiled to himself as he lay down on top of the bed. He ran a hand over his chest down to his sex. He spent a few seconds stroking his cock. It didn't take much. When he heard the movement in the room, he stroked it some more, not because it needed any help, but just because he knew it would drive Matt crazy.

"You don't play fair," Matt said, moving closer to the bed.

"All's fair in love and war, baby." Thomas met his gaze.

"God, you are so sexy."

"Take your clothes off and say that."

Matt chuckled, undoing his shirt. "You have me wrapped around your finger."

"That's not what I'd like to have you wrapped around, but it will do for now." He continued to handle his cock in long, smooth strokes. "Um, I'm

so hard."

Matt paused as he was undoing his pants, uttered a little groan, then hastily shoved them to the floor and crawled onto the bed.

His eyes shone with unrestrained lust. It was Goddamned irresistible. He could imagine looking into those eyes forever. "Let me help you," Matt breathed, brushing Thomas' hand aside and imitating those long, sensuous strokes, his gaze riveted to Thomas' shaft.

Thomas closed his eyes. The pressure of his fingers tightening around his shaft and moving up and down was creating the most delicious sensation. His hips lifted off the mattress. He moaned softly in his throat.

"You're driving me mad," Thomas whispered hoarsely, moving up higher on the bed, leaning over and placing his lips on Matt's shoulder.

"Um, good," he managed.

Matt's lips moved over and down across his chest, a tongue darting out to lick one of his nipples slowly. "You taste so good. God, Thomas, what is it that makes you so addictive?" He jerked his cock harder, increasing the speed.

Thomas' head went back, digging into the pillow. "Don't stop," he gulped, "um, don't stop."

Matt's tongue trailed along his pecs, lashed against his other nipple where he pulled and tugged on it with his teeth for a few minutes

before moving down to his stomach.

"Matt, oh, Matt," Thomas groaned, "I'm going to...ah...yeah...um."

Matt guided Thomas' cock to his lips and took it into his mouth. On contact, Thomas felt his cock pulse with release as he shouted out something and rose into a sitting position. He placed his fingers in Matt's hair, his chest heaving. Matt lifted his head and Thomas pulled him up to his chest, kissing him deeply. "Um," he breathed.

Matt pushed him back down to the bed and pinned his arms in place. He looked deep into Thomas' eyes. "You're not going to break my heart, are you?" He looked stricken suddenly.

"I'm not planning on it, no," Thomas replied, his chest heaving as Matt crawled on top of him.

"Good," he swallowed, "because I don't think I'd survive it. I've never been in love like this before."

Thomas went to say something, but Matt released one of his arms and placed a finger on his lips. Thomas brought up his hand and caressed Matt's disarrayed hair. "Don't talk," he urged, "just touch me." He took his hand from his hair and moved it down over his own chest, to his cock. "Just touch me, Thomas."

* * * *

"I don't understand why in hell he just doesn't come get his shit," Matt said as they stood together, hanging on to the metal post in the middle of the metro car.

"He will probably." Thomas looked around absently. He really didn't want to talk about Christian. He was happy, happier than he'd even been in his entire life. He didn't want to come down to earth, or discuss anything, which might get them into an argument. Christian was a touchy subject. Of course he'd had no idea of the connection between Christian and Matt when he'd first met him on line. If he had, he would have stayed clear. But it was too damn late for that now. They had a contract signed together. He knew that Sandra would let him out if he pestered her, but he had a feeling Christian would put up one hell of a stink.

"What are you thinking about?" Matt asked him, covering his hand, which was curled around the post.

"Nothing. I was ah...thinking that we need to get off soon."

"I thought we just did that...and pretty well as I remember." He grinned.

Thomas smiled. "You'll get no argument there."

"Which metro is it?"

"Place d'Armes."

"What does it mean? I assume it has something

to do with weapons?"

"Very good. You're right. *Place d'Armes* is a long-used French term for a place where a city's defenders assemble. There's a statue I'll show you when we get off, in *Place d'Armes* that commemorates *Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve's* defense of Montreal against the Iroquois."

"Cool," he said. "You're a walking history book."

Thomas laughed. "Not quite. This is our stop now."

Thomas took Matt down to the Old Port where they walked along leisurely watching the boats in the water. He showed him *Rue Saint-Paul*, and the *Nortre Dame Basilica*. They had a café latte at one of the many quaint little coffee shops, and toured the gift shops. They walked all around Chinatown and finally wandered into one of the restaurants. Exhausted and starving, they ordered several dishes, including big bowls of won ton soup and ate until they couldn't eat any more.

"Let's go dancing," Thomas said finally when they came out of the restaurant.

"Dancing? You're going to kill me," Matt howled, grabbing Thomas' arm and planting a kiss on his lips.

They got back on the metro and headed back to the village, disembarking at *Beaudry* metro.

"Tell me about this area you live in...what's it

called, *Gay Villiage?*"

"It's a neighborhood, in the East end of the city, stretching along *St.-Catherine* from *Berri* to *de Lorimier*, and on the north-south axis, from *René-Lévesque* to *Sherbrooke*."

"Ah."

They paused outside the metro for a second. "Take a look at that." Thomas pointed. "Do you see the rainbow row of columns on the outside of the metro station?"

"Yeah, wow."

"That was done in the late nineties by the city, promoting this area as the gay friendly district of Montreal. It's a tourist spot. This is the biggest gay village in North America."

"I didn't know that. I knew that Montreal had the rep of being gay friendly though."

"Not always," Thomas said. They began to walk toward his apartment, Thomas pointing out various things, telling him about an uprising similar to the Stonewall Riots, which existed in this area in the late seventies. They were deep in discussion about just that when they turned the corner and spotted Christian sitting on the steps. He got up when he saw them coming.

"I don't want trouble." He looked at Matt, then back to Thomas. "I just want my belongings."

Thomas nodded. "Of course, I have it for you inside. Wait a minute."

Christian didn't wait a minute however. He followed him inside as soon as he opened the door. Matt walked in behind Christian. Thomas really didn't want to see the expression on his face. He picked up the suitcase and handed it to Christian.

Christian touched his hand. "Thomas, wait —"

"This is not the time. Now, please, go. I'll send you an email soon."

Christian sighed. "You're making a big mistake," he said, casting a hostile look at Matt.

When he walked to the door and disappeared outside of it, Thomas breathed a sigh of relief.

"He touched your hand," Matt grumbled. "He thought I didn't see that, but —"

"Matt," Thomas said, reaching over and pulling him closer, "the only one I want touching me is you."

The expression on Matt's face relaxed into a smile. "Okay."

"Did you have a good day?" Thomas asked him, kicking off his shoes and walking into the kitchen area.

"Yeah, but do we have to go out?"

Thomas turned and looked at him. "You're in Montreal and you don't want to do the bar scene?"

"Not really. I'll go if you want to."

"I was only going for you," Thomas said.

"Let's see what's on television." He lifted an eyebrow.

"And are we actually going to watch anything?"

"No."

Thomas laughed out loud as Matt came over and took his hand. He fell on the sofa and pulled Thomas onto his lap. "There, isn't it more fun to watch television?" Matt asked, pulling him down into his arms and kissing his neck.

Thomas laughed. "Technically, doesn't the television have to be on?"

Matt looked deep into his eyes. "Naw," he said, dragging Thomas' mouth down on his.

CHAPTER SIX

When Matt finally opened his eyes, the first thing he smelled was coffee. "I'm definitely in love," he shouted out.

"What did you say?" Thomas came into the bedroom. He looked fresh from the shower, his hair damp, wearing a pair of well-worn jeans.

"I said, I'm definitely in love. You made coffee."

"Of course. It's your drug of choice. I made it for you in *Hawaii*, remember?"

"Yes, baby. I remember everything about you in *Hawaii*. If I had a limited amount of come, I wouldn't be coming anymore."

Thomas laughed. "You and me both, stud. So, me or coffee?"

Matt's eyes widened in mock horror. "No, no, please, I beg you, don't make me choose."

Thomas grinned. "Okay, you can have both."

"One, then the other?"

"The question is, which do you need most?"

Matt threw off the sheet and stood up. He looked down at his early morning erection. "Well, it's a tossup, that's for sure." He opened his arms and Thomas stepped into them. They kissed deeply, Matt stroking his hair, hugging him tight. God, it felt so damn good in his arms. "I want that coffee, baby." He kissed him on the forehead and released him.

"Damn answering machine is going nuts."

"Oh no," he groaned. "No messages. I want you."

Thomas laughed. "Sorry."

He followed his nose to the kitchen. "Did you eat?"

"No. The fridge is a war zone."

"Want to go out and eat?"

"Sure."

Matt poured some coffee into a mug and sipped. "God, that's good. Give me ten minutes to shower and shave."

"I'll wash your back."

"No, God no," he said, putting down the half-drunk coffee, "we'll never leave here if you do that."

"That's what I was counting on."

Matt shook his head. "You're incorrigible. You're driving me insane in those jeans."

"Oh my God," Thomas laughed. "These are the most un-sexy things in the world."

"Not on you they're not."

"You are insatiable."

"And incorrigible?" Matt was coming closer with that look in his eye.

"Matt."

"Thomas. I want you."

"Matt," he protested, but it wasn't convincing, not even to himself and he didn't make it to the shower for another hour, which at that time, Matt had to join him. They ate brunch at two in the afternoon, took a walk and sat in the park. He didn't want to talk about the movie or his book, although Matt made the attempt a few times. "Tell me about you, your job? You never talk about it."

"I write."

"I know that, silly, I mean the other stuff."

"It's complicated, and boring."

"Nothing about you is boring. I really like your brother and his family."

"Yeah," Matt sighed. "I hope they stick it out."

"They seem so much in love."

"What about your parents?"

"I don't...well...my mom is nuts and my Dad pulled a disappearing act a long time ago. My mom adored him. He threw her away."

"Whoa. There's a lot of pain there." Matt hugged his shoulders.

Thomas looked off into the distance for a moment, tears stinging his eyes. He didn't realize

how close the pain still was.

"Thomas," Matt said gently, "is that why you said you didn't believe in happy endings?"

Thomas swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Oh, Thomas, sweetie...Rose," he whispered in his ear, "that was your parents, not us. That's why you didn't call me when you got back, isn't it?"

Thomas nodded without looking at him. "I was thinking about you on the plane. I already told you, it was like a dream and I..."

Matt pulled him around to look at him. "But it wasn't a dream, baby. It was real. We're not going to end up like your parents."

"What if..." He stopped, took a breath. "I never wanted to love anyone this much, Matt. It scares me."

"But I love you, too, just as much as you do me, Thomas. Don't you think I'm scared, too?"

Thomas wound his arms around his neck and hugged him tight for a second. Then he released him. "This is getting intense. Let's take a walk."

They walked for a while, went for a coffee, then Matt asked Thomas if he wanted to go back to the apartment. He sighed. "I suppose so."

"Is it because you don't want to get your messages?"

Thomas grinned at him. "Yeah."

"Come on, where's my brave boy?" he teased.

Thomas smirked. "Hiding."

"I see."

"It seems my life was simple before."

"Before me?"

"No, not you...that's another issue. Before all this movie shit. I've got reporters wanting to do stories, lawyers and agents and crap."

"If you'll let me, baby, I'll help you."

Thomas nodded. "Okay. I didn't mean to shut you out. I..."

"You didn't want to let me in, in case we went to shit?"

"Something like that."

Matt chuckled as he followed him up the stairs. "Not going to happen. You're stuck with me."

Thomas and Matt listened to the messages a third time together. "Does that mean I have to go Hollywood?"

"Looks like it," Matt flopped on the sofa. "Not so bad. You can at least keep an eye on things. They want your input, at least that's something. And they're going to keep it gay."

"That I'm happy about." Thomas paced a little. After a few minutes, he stopped, looked at Matt, realizing that he hadn't said a word in a long while. He looked deep in thought. "What?"

Matt looked up. "I'm thinking."

"About what?"

"About how much I love you. About how all this can work out."

"Huh?"

"Thomas," Matt rose, "look at me."

Thomas smiled. "I'm looking. You're drop dead gorgeous."

"Yeah, yeah, you, too, but never mind that. Do you love me?"

"Matt, Goddamnit all, I—"

"Just answer the question," Matt said, placing his hands on both Thomas' shoulders.

"How many times do I have to tell you?"

"Okay," he took a breath, "then tomorrow, we get up and we find out how in the hell a couple of guys go about getting hitched in this city. I call my family. You call yours, or whoever else you want to tell. We get you packed up and I go with you to Hollywood, as your legal partner, and meanwhile, we apply to immigration to get you citizenship."

Thomas blinked. It all made sense, but damn it, did something that made that much sense have to be so bloody terrifying?

"You do love me."

"Yes," he said.

"Then stop thinking so much about what a disaster this could turn out to be and think about what it's going to be like, the two of us, together, waking up together every morning, Thomas." He shook him a little. "I'm scared, too. In fact, I think I'm euphoric...feeling a little like Scrooge did when he woke up Christmas morning."

Thomas smiled.

"Say yes, say you will, Thomas, say you'll marry me, be mine, for better or worse, richer or poorer, please." He sunk to his knees, pressed his face against his legs.

Thomas nodded. He couldn't speak. He nodded so hard, his entire body shook, causing Matt to glance up at him. Matt's face transformed into a smile. He scrambled to his feet. "That's a yes, isn't it? Isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a yes," Thomas said, holding Matt's body close to him. "God, yes, yes, yes. I'm yours, I'm yours, Matt."

Matt stood back from him, tears streaming down his cheeks. "I know you love me, now take me to bed and show me, again and again, all night long."

Thomas choked back his own tears, tried to lighten the mood. "Do I get time off for good behavior?"

Matt uttered a laugh, half mixed with a sob. He hugged him again, then led him down the hallway. "Ah, depends on how good you are, Thomas."

"That sounds like a challenge to me."

Matt issued him a flirtatious smile. "Take it as you will, Rose."

Thomas pushed Matt on the bed, pulling his t-shirt over his head. "Oh, I'll take it all right."

Matt was laughing until Thomas crushed his mouth against his and began to unzip his jeans. Then his laughter gradually faded to be replaced by an enthusiastic sound of pleasure, which started deeper in his chest and expanded, filling the room. Those sounds coming from Matt turned Thomas on like nothing else. He ripped at his own pants, yanked off Matt's and did his best to keep on coaxing those noises from his lover. When his mouth captured Matt's cock, Matt's fingernails dug into his scalp and he grunted in part from the pain, but mostly from the satisfaction of knowing that at this moment, only he had the power to do this to him. He didn't want to think about who had done it to him before. There would be no one after, he thought with determination, savoring the taste of Matt's cock in his mouth. He pulled Matt's hips up off the mattress, took his cock deeper into his throat, swallowed, his mouth filling with Matt's release.

"Jesus, Jesus! Yes, oh yeah...yeah," Matt groaned, his head moving back and forth on the pillow.

Thomas sat back, watching him, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "You were saying?" Thomas smirked, lifting an eyebrow at him when Matt finally calmed.

Matt winked at him and turned over onto his stomach. "You're only getting started."

Thomas let his gaze travel over the swell of his ass. "Aren't we supposed to save this for the wedding night?"

Matt glanced back at him. "You're not serious?"

Thomas pretended to consider it. "I'd prefer to marry a virgin."

Matt laid his head down on the pillow. "Would it help if I told you I felt like a virgin the first time we did it?"

Thomas ran both hands over his ass, then separated his ass cheeks. "I guess that will have to do," he said, lowering his head and slowly using his tongue in a way he knew would quickly get Matt's hard-on up and running again.

"Oh, ah," he hissed. "You're driving me cra...raasss....zzzzzy."

Thomas chuckled softly, putting his arms around him and pulling him to his knees. He ran his hands over his chest, toyed with his nipples, nipped his neck, fondled his erection. "You're hard."

"No kidding."

He clutched hips. "I'll get some lube."

"Don't go away."

"You can reach it if you stretch, on the nightstand."

"I see it."

"Your teeth are chattering."

"You feel all smug and superior, don't you

lover,” Matt let his head go back against Thomas’ shoulder as he spread some lube on his finger.

“No, mostly I’m horny and I need to fuck you bad...and I love you,” he said softly. “Nothing smug about that.”

A few seconds later, he was inside of him, moving slowly, content to let Matt set the pace until he could control himself no longer, and he let go, pushing Matt down into the Mattress while he slammed into him.

“Yes, go, go,” Matt cried out, and they both came to climax at almost the same time, their voices a crescendo of guttural satisfaction.

They fell asleep sometime later in each other’s arms and Thomas didn’t feel that fear clawing at his gut until the next morning when Matt looked deep into his eyes, and said, “Time to do it.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Thomas snuggled against Matt as the limo pulled away from the house, taking them to the airport.

"I can't believe we're doing this," Thomas said again.

"Believe it. I'm gonna make you my husband. God, it's nice having a lawyer in the family." Matt felt proud of Ryan stepping up, organizing a marriage license for the following day in Los Angeles and was thrilled when Thomas agreed to fly to California with him. They'd get married during the week he'd have some preliminary meetings with his studio executive.

"We'll be a hard act to ignore when it's time for me to apply for citizenship here," Matt grinned, kissing Thomas' head.

"You...you really see yourself living here?" Thomas asked, his hand snaking around Matt's body.

"Yeah. You're my life, Thomas." He leaned forward. "Can you give us some privacy, please?"

The driver nodded and the tinted glass window separating him from the two lovers nestled in the backseat cinched up without a sound.

"Would you like me to show you how much I want to marry you?" Matt dropped a kiss on Thomas' mouth.

"Right now?"

"Of course right now. You ever been fucked in a limo, baby?"

Thomas shook his head.

"Today's your lucky day." Matt's hands went to Thomas' pants, rubbed at the cock waking up inside them and he pushed Thomas back against the seat.

"You ever done this before?" Thomas asked him.

"Never."

"I know it's stupid, but that makes me really happy. Matt...God...I just love you so much. I don't ever wanna think about you doing this with somebody else."

"Never going to happen. I am like Old Yeller. Faithful to the end." He frowned. "Thomas... when I think of the crap Christian told you —"

"Don't, baby." Thomas put his fingers to Matt's lips. Matt stared down at him.

"I still can't believe I hit you. Are you sure I didn't hurt you, Thomas?"

"Not much. You've mostly kissed it better. But

there's one sore spot right here."

"Where, baby?" Matt was grinning now.

"Right here." Thomas touched his finger to his mouth and Matt kissed him with tender, tiny kisses and soon the two men were kissing greedily. Matt got between Thomas' legs, ripped the zip down in record time. Thomas was groaning as Matt put lots of kisses on the hot cock going berserk now.

They both sighed when Matt liberated it, swiping at the head with his tongue. "I do believe this cock loves me."

"Of course it does." Thomas' voice was heavy with arousal as Matt lavished his best attentions on his man's shaft. He loved the silken steel feel to Thomas' cock. It was so perfect. He swallowed it in one gulp all the way to the base, his tongue moving around on the head and shaft as he pulled back up.

Thomas' cock popped out of his mouth and both men were horrified, needing the connection. Thomas squirmed in the seat, stuffing himself back in Matt's mouth and fell sideways as Matt's hands worked to lower his pants. He grasped Thomas' shaft as his tongue swirled over the balls that seemed impossibly full when he'd worked so hard to bring them relief. He let his mouth travel down to Thomas' sweet and juicy ass, which opened up to him, humping his face.

But then, Thomas was hissing..."Suck me, Matt...please...I need your mouth on me." His hands gripped Matt's head back to his cock..."Please..." Thomas thrashed around on the seat, but Matt stayed on him, his fingers stroking the balls and ass that were his personal, private treasures and he was overjoyed when Thomas shrieked *his* name as he flooded his throat.

Thomas panted on the seat, Matt not relinquishing his hold on his lover's cock and balls. When the explosion subsided, Matt raised his head.

"Not bad for the first time, huh?"

He loved the delighted way Thomas laughed. He knew they were both remembering these were the words Matt had said the very first time they fucked, in the elevator in *Black Point*.

"You're going to have to pull my pants up now, baby." Thomas smiled at him.

"No...Matty wants baby naked right now."

"Yes, but we're at the airport now, sweetie."

Matt frowned. "Me no likeeee." He made Thomas laugh, but he wasn't laughing as Thomas insistently brushed his hands away and slipped his underpants and trousers back over that luscious body.

"You ever been fucked on a plane?" Matt asked him.

Thomas hesitated.

"You've been fucked on a plane!" Matt couldn't believe how crushed he felt.

"Oh, Matt...if you could see your face. Sweetheart...just knowing somebody else used to suck your cock before me makes me crazy."

Matt's anguish was mirrored in Thomas' eyes and he dropped the subject. He didn't care who used to fuck Thomas, as long as they didn't get to do it anymore. The limo stopped and the two men exchanged a long kiss.

"You're stuck with me now, asshole," Thomas whispered in his mouth. "We're getting married, remember." And Matt nodded. It was the only thing that made sense to him, the only thing that made the blood stop screaming in his veins.

"I love you, Thomas."

"I love you, too."

The driver opened the door and the two men climbed out.

In all his life, Matt had never been so anxious, so excited or so certain he was doing the absolutely right thing. For the entire flight to Los Angeles, they kissed and talked, slept on and off and their mutual excitement turned to terror for Thomas as the plane landed.

"What if they don't like me?"

"Who, my parents? Oh God, Thomas. They will love you. And you'll love them. I want you to love them. I need all of you, but without you, I have no

joy. You know that, don't you?"

"Yeah. I do, actually."

For the next hour, they waited in the long line for Immigration and Customs. It was your typical mid-week zoo with six flights held up and dozens of suitcases barreling out of the chute at the last minute. Somebody's dog had evidently traveled cargo and the poor critter's plaintive cries could be heard, upsetting everybody. Matt felt Thomas' increasing anxiety and constantly reassured him this was not a bad omen.

Their bags came out of the chute and Matt grabbed them. The suit bag containing Thomas' favorite, *lucky suit*, that they'd been forced to check through at the last minute, wasn't there. An airline official took down Matt's phone number and address and said they'd find the suit bag.

"We're getting married tomorrow. It's very important to Thomas," Matt told him. "Please find it."

They ran out of the sliding glass doors.

"There they are!" Matt dropped the bags and rushed forward to greet his family waiting right outside. The poor dog in the cargo area could still be heard as Matt hugged his parents, his brother Ryan, Cole and finally took baby Daphne in one arm, his other drawing Thomas to his side.

"Mom, dad, this is the love of my life. I want you to meet Thomas Carter who just this morning

agreed to marry me!"

"Oh, my God!" Elise sprang forward and clasped Thomas to her bosom, tears spilling down her cheeks. "He's gorgeous. Isn't he gorgeous, Baxter?" She turned and smiled at her husband who stepped forward and hugged a shocked-looking Thomas.

Baxter finished with a non-too-subtle squeeze of Thomas' biceps.

"Matt warned me about you," Thomas chuckled. "He said you're the man to go to for boxing lessons."

"Did he now?" Baxter's chest puffed out. "I can do that, although you're in pretty good shape."

"I need to be. Your son slugged me pretty good two days ago."

"Thomas!" Matt was mortified.

"Matt!" Elise squealed.

"I didn't know you had it in you," Baxter mused. "I always thought you hit like a girl."

"Thanks a lot, dad."

Thomas was laughing now, but Matt wasn't.

"It was an accident. I was aiming for Christian." Matt felt miserable as his entire family ganged up on him.

"*Christian*? What was he doing there?" Ryan's tone was frigid.

"He turned up on my doorstep. We threw him out." Thomas glanced at Matt's stricken face and

Matt knew Thomas felt bad now for mentioning the C word.

"Who's Christian?" Baxter frowned. Knowledge dawned and he looked surprised. "You talking about the twink you threw down the stairs at Ryan's house?"

"Yes," Matt huffed and Thomas' arm tightened around his waist.

Cole, as usual, smoothed over the rough spot. "Welcome to our family, Thomas!" He hugged Thomas and Matt's smile came back as Ryan, too, gave Thomas a kiss on the cheek and a big hug. Baby Daphne finished covering Matt's face with kisses and her little arms reached out to Thomas.

"And who's this little angel?" Thomas seemed shy all of a sudden and Matt wanted to throw him on the floor and nail him on the spot. God, he loved this guy.

"This is Daphne." The entire family was shocked as the toddler leaned across her uncle's body and deposited herself in Thomas' arms, covering his face with kisses.

"Oh, she's adorable." Thomas giggled when he was able to catch his breath.

Ryan and Cole wore their patented doting parents' expression on their faces and Elise looked on jealously, but then her gaze connected with Matt and he hugged his mother.

"Mom, is everything okay for the wedding?"

She nodded. "Tomorrow afternoon at..." she cast a sly glance at Thomas. "The place you wanted."

"Where are we getting married?" Thomas grinned.

"Can I tell him? Can I tell him?" Elise begged. Matt threw up his hands as she burst forth with, "Inn of the Seventh Ray. It's Matt's favorite place in the whole world."

Thomas looked at him. "And what is it exactly?"

Matt smiled. "Heaven on earth."

The current rippling between them was electric. "That's a nice place to marry the man of dreams," Thomas whispered and Matt leaned forward and kissed him.

Daphne tapped him on the nose, batting him away.

"Look at that," Cole laughed.

"I have a rival for your affections." Matt stared at his niece who wound her little arms around Thomas' neck.

"How on earth did you leave her for those few days we were in *Hawaii*?" Thomas asked Cole.

"Don't remind him," Ryan shuddered. "We're both still kicking ourselves."

The family left the terminal and Baxter rushed to collect his massive SUV, the one with all the bells and whistles. Thomas tried putting Daphne

into her car seat, but she went crazy, wanting to be in his arms.

"I know just how she feels," Matt smiled. He and Thomas managed to winch her into the baby seat with the promise that Thomas would sit next to her. He studied and tried the catch on the safety harness himself.

"It's important, for the times we're looking after her." Thomas tried the catch a few more times and satisfied he'd mastered the trick, he swung himself beside the baby, forcing Matt to sit on her other side, separated from his love.

Thomas' arm went behind the baby seat, his fingers reaching Matt's neck. He stroked Matt's skin and smiled across at him.

Daphne put a finger to Thomas' lips.

He looked at Matt questioningly.

"She wants you to kiss it."

Thomas complied and, one by one, all the fingers on her hand found their way to Thomas' lips for kisses.

"Does this whole family have an oral fixation?" Thomas blurted.

"Yep," Baxter announced and Thomas laughed.

"Where are we going, dad?" Matt asked.

"Our place," Cole announced from the backseat. "We're having a wedding feast."

"Who's coming?" Matt asked.

"Just us...and Auntie Kay."

"Oh, no...not Auntie Kay," Matt groaned as Baxter merged with the traffic on Sepulveda, heading north into Hollywood.

"What's wrong with Auntie Kay?" asked Thomas.

"She thinks she's Queen Mary."

"Oh, Matt, don't exaggerate," Elise said over her shoulder. "She thinks she's the Empress Josephine."

Matt ran his hand over his face. "She will also kiss you and slip you some tongue," he warned Thomas.

"Really? Isn't there any way to stop her?"

"No, apparently I hit like a girl." Matt slumped against the seat.

"Baby, you hit me very hard," Thomas assured him and Matt looked stricken.

"Way to go!" Baxter chortled and Matt buried his face in his hands.

* * * *

Thomas dealt very well with the entire Lucas family—minus one brother in lockdown—at one meeting. He loved Cole and Ryan's Hollywood Hills home, but deep down Matt worried that it was all too much love for his intended groom. He watched over him, kept his champagne glass full and winced when Auntie Kay tottered through the

front door and presented her ringed hand to Thomas who bent his head and kissed it.

"A pleasure to meet you, Your Highness."

Oh, God.

He caught Cole's glance and got a thumbs up. "This is a good sign, Matty. He knows he's marrying into complete insanity, but he hasn't run out of the house screaming," Ryan whispered as he refilled Matt's glass. Matt watched Thomas and Ryan in the kitchen together and his heart swelled with love. Thomas was here. He was really here, and tomorrow they would be married and they would be starting a whole new life.

Daphne crawled up his leg and into his arms as Cole announced dinner was ready.

"He outdid himself this time." Ryan gave his husband a serious smooch and Auntie Kay shot across the table and stuck her tongue into Thomas' unsuspecting mouth.

After recovering from the initial shock, Thomas patted Matt's arm. "She kisses almost as well as you do, baby."

The entire family burst out laughing, except Matt who now, more than anything, wanted to be alone with Thomas. Cole however had indeed outdone himself with Australian John Dory filets, three different kinds of salad, homemade lobster ravioli and, for dessert, a vanilla lavender cake, the recipe of which Cole got from a restaurant in

Montreal called Cocoa Locale.

"I know that place, but this is better than the cake I tasted there," Thomas insisted. He glanced at Matt. "Do you cook like this?"

"No, but he fucks like a bunny," Aunty Kay announced, making the entire table roar with laughter.

Matt's head hit the dinner table with a thunk.

"Admit it, we're all sex monsters in the sack," Aunty Kay chortled.

"Shoot me now," Matt whimpered and Thomas laughed.

After dinner, Baxter corralled Thomas and Ryan into a discussion on politics and Matt helped Cole with the dishes.

"Congratulations, sweetie." Cole hugged him. "I knew he was *it* for you. I just knew it!"

Matt felt bleak. "I need to be alone with him, Cole."

"Take him upstairs then. I'll do the dishes."

Matt raced outside and found Ryan and Thomas dutifully listening to one of Baxter's dotty, anti-Republican tirades. His heart stopped pounding when he found Thomas' warm gaze on his face. "Dad, I need to borrow my husband."

Baxter shook his head. "He's not your husband until tomorrow afternoon."

"He was my husband the second I saw him, Dad."

Thomas jumped up and Matt took him by the hand. "Where are we going?"

But Matt couldn't speak. They ran past Elise playing with the baby in the living room, past a smiling Cole and up the stairs to the spare room.

"Oh...are we going to have that fucking you promised me on the plane?" Thomas grinned as Matt kicked the door shut, locked it and pushed him on the bed. Matt couldn't speak. He fumbled at Thomas' pants as his lover reached up, giving him hot, sweet kisses.

"Matty...it's okay, baby. I'm not going anywhere. I love my fuck bunny."

"Oh, God..." Matt dropped his head down to Thomas and kissed him. His soul screamed for communion, for that perfect connection with Thomas again and even Thomas seemed consumed by the increased heat between them.

His words became insensible as Matt's mouth roved over his face and body. Matt understood Thomas wanted him naked, too, and the room felt like a sauna by the time he peeled his own clothes off and he was kneeling between Thomas' legs. The two men moaned as their hard cocks touched when he leaned down for another kiss. He tasted lavender on Thomas' tongue and loved they way Thomas' tongue reached up for long licks from him.

Upending his man so his ass was right in his

face, Matt went to work licking and sucking at Thomas and for long moments. Thomas let him have his fill, finally begging Matt to fuck him. Matt just burrowed his face deeper into Thomas, whose hands snatched at the antique candle-wicked, butter-colored bedspread.

"Give me that cock right now," Thomas urged. "Please, Matty, please." And Matt gave it to him, feeling Thomas' internal thermostat swamping his own senses and igniting a rage of passion he'd never known before. He drove in and out of Thomas, whose body was still pulled tightly to his, Thomas' legs now thrown over Matt's shoulders. He put his cock all the way in Thomas, looked down at his lovely man and stopped moving. They stared at each other and Matt dipped down, taking Thomas' cock into his hungry mouth, his own cock still imbedded in him.

Thomas fell apart, writhing on the bed, muttering Matt's name over and over again. Matt let go of Thomas' cock with a pop, fucked him a few times, letting his cock remain inside him, nice and close, then bent to suck the rigid cock again. Thomas lost all control, clutching Matt's ass to him. He came like that, almost in the foetal position, his cock in Matt's mouth, Matt buried deep inside him. Thomas seemed to howl at the moonlight streaming through the open windows

of the guest room and Matt waited out his lover's tremendous quaking, silently screaming, *I love you* over and over again until Thomas stopped shaking. And then Matt was coming and Thomas' face shone with a blissful smile as Matt raised his head and put one hand on Thomas' face.

"Tell me you're my husband."

"I'm your husband." Thomas said it over and over as Matt moved in and out of him relentlessly until he too, was spent, and Thomas' arms reached up to hold him close.

Matt's sweaty body collapsed on Thomas and the two men listened to one another's heartbeats.

"Your parents are still like this, aren't they?" Thomas asked, his hand running down Matt's sweat-slicked back.

"According to my mother...every day." He kissed Thomas' ear and tried to raise himself.

"Nooo," Thomas moaned. "I want to feel your full weight on me. It makes me feel safe." Matt's cock throbbed inside Thomas and they both grinned at the feel of it.

"You're my ever-ready fuck bunny," Thomas grinned and Matt's mouth came over his for another long, satisfying kiss.

It was hard extricating themselves from the family, but with Daphne ready for bed, Thomas and Matt kissed her and she began to cry when she knew they were leaving.

"Can we give her a bath?" Thomas asked hopefully, cementing himself permanently in Cole's affections.

Matt loved that Thomas wanted to do this and he loved the way he and Daphne splashed each other. The two men dried her and diapered her and Cole handed them a little red nightgown for her to wear.

She resisted all efforts to go to sleep. She whimpered, even as Cole tucked her into her crib, turned on her favorite music and her eyes drifted shut, her little fist holding Thomas' finger in a vice grip.

Thomas stood staring at her for a long time and Cole ran his fingers across her brow. Daphne drifted to sleep instantly, her grip on Thomas never weakening.

"She knows a good man when she finds one." Matt kissed Thomas' cheek.

He made no move to leave her. He just kept staring down at her. "She's...wonderful, Matt. I think I'm going to love being an uncle."

Matt's spirits soared. "Good thing, because you're stuck with her, too, you know."

"I'm already in love with her." Thomas grinned as Cole gently extricated his finger from Daphne's strong hold.

"Come on, I'll drop you home."

Downstairs, Cole rushed around looking for

his keys and Matt and Thomas hugged Ryan and their parents goodbye.

"We'll see you in the morning," Elise said for the fiftieth time.

He laughed and let her hug him again. In Cole's SUV, the two men swapped languid kisses and, outside his door, Cole said, "You carry him over the threshold. I'll bring the bags."

As he'd hoped, when Matt unlocked the door to his house, Thomas looked ecstatic.

"It's beautiful, baby. Almost how I pictured it. Isn't that weird?"

Matt put his arms around him.

"What the..." Cole dropped the suitcases on the floor and Matt's gaze followed his. Somebody was out in the Jacuzzi on the sun deck.

"Who the hell is that?" Thomas fumed and marched toward the sliding glass doors.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“Who are you?”
“Who are *you*?”

“Crud on a bagel. They’re *women*.” Cole said this like women were some sort of disease.

“Don’t look at me,” Matt shrugged when Thomas kept staring at the home invaders in his hot tub, drinking beer out of bottles. “I don’t fuck women.”

“We’re here for Keanu Reeves. Doesn’t he live here?”

“Oh, my God.” Matt slapped his forehead and glanced at Thomas. “Baby, you’re gonna have to get used to this. He used to live here.” To the women, he said, “You have thirty seconds to get out of my hot tub or I’m calling the cops.”

“Keanu Reeves used to live here?” Thomas looked impressed.

The women got out of the tub, steam rising from their naked bodies and Cole screamed, covering up his eyes.

"I'll see you out." Something in his demeanor must have conveyed the severity of his intentions because the women quickly grabbed their things. One of them hesitated.

"Can you give him this? It's an astrological chart I did for him."

"Sorry...I don't know him." Matt extended his arm, pointing to the front door, but the climbed over the wooden fence of the back patio, one of them rushing back for the rest of their beer, and they crawled across a tree limb that led to the road.

"Well, I'll be...I've been wondering how they keep getting in here. This is a dead drop from the canyon."

"I'll say." Thomas peered uncertainly over the edge of the wooden railing. "Is this safe when the baby's in the house?"

"We never leave the door open or unlocked, especially when she's here."

Out on Mulholland, they heard the squeal of brakes and the roar of a car speeding away from the house.

"Tomorrow, we're getting that tree trimmed." Thomas looked at him. "Keanu Reeves really used to live here?"

Matt took him in his arms. "Yeah, and now Thomas Carter lives here with his husband." Thomas laughed and accepted Matt's kisses.

In the living room, Cole showed Thomas around. "...and this is where he writes and moons over you."

"Correction...*used* to moon over you." Matt wrapped himself around Thomas, pulling him closer. "Now I don't have to anymore."

"There's photos of *Black Point*...oh and me...on your wall." Thomas stared at the photo Matt took of him, the photo Matt loved most of Thomas, caught off guard and laughing. "Oh...I look like a crazy man. Do I really laugh like that?"

"I love that laugh." Matt's voice was soft. "That photo kept me going when I came back from *Hawaii*." Thomas put his face to Matt's chest and Matt wished sincerely that they were alone.

"What's in the armoire?" Thomas suddenly asked.

"That's his treasure chest," Cole grinned.

Thomas raised a brow. "Treasure chest?" He crossed the room.

Oh, Buddha.

"Matt, why is this thing locked?"

"Oh," replied Cole. "We baby-proofed it." He opened the trick latch and the large doors sprang open revealing the massive, one-hundred-two inch, plasma TV and Matt's carefully collected and alphabetized gay porn bonanza.

Thomas froze, eying the contents. "Look at this..." he picked up DVD cases.

Matt winced as his lover stared at each new DVD in turn. Thomas would pick one up, inspect it, put it back, pick out another. Matt was beginning to feel very warm...and not in a good way.

"Matty?" Thomas asked.

"Yes, darling?"

"You like watching these?"

"Well, um...baby, I've been single and alone a long time."

"He has. Beyond pathetic." Cole grimaced as Thomas glanced at him.

"Matty, did you have fun with all your boyfriends here?" Thomas' gaze was on him now.

"Well. Um..."

"Who's your favorite?" He pounced on the Antonio Marquez collection, his favorite Spanish gay porn star. His hand hovered at his French collection featuring the swarthy Francois Sagat.

Too late, Matt caught Cole's rabidly shaking head as Thomas' hands fell on the DVD that Matt really did treasure.

"These are your hot favorites?" Thomas smiled and it was quite...*unpleasant*.

"Um...well..." Matt knew his days beating his meat to Sagat were over.

"I'm glad you had fun with them, darling." Thomas' tone was glacial. "Because they're now banned from our house. Forever. What about this

guy?"

Matt wanted to scream. *Oh no...not Damien Crosse. He's so hot...oh...* "Can't stand him," he lied and Cole laughed hysterically.

Damien Crosse found his way to the pile on the floor.

"What about him?" Thomas was holding up a brand new Francesco D'Macho DVD.

Matt couldn't speak. All his boyfriends were getting the heave-ho. "Actually." Thomas was turning the DVD over in his hands. "He makes my dick hard. I'd like to have a look at this one."

"No, you don't." Matt frowned and snatched the DVD from Thomas' fingers, dropping it on the floor.

"I don't?" Thomas arched a brow at him. "What about this guy?"

Erik Rhodes. Oh no...don't throw Erik on the slush pile.

"Pick one you want to watch with me. The rest of them go." Thomas stood with his hands on his hips and Matt instantly reached for his favorite of all favorites, *Bone Island*.

"Is this your hero?" Thomas pointed to Matt's secret sex God.

"Yep, that's him. Antonio Marquez. Oh, he is he hot. Ever seen a cock like that?" Cole asked Thomas. "Wait until you see him in action."

"Nice mouth." Thomas was staring at his

assumed love rival.

"Didn't you ever watch any porn?" Matt could hardly believe it.

Thomas shrugged. "Strongest thing I've watched is *Dante's Cove*."

"*Dante's Cove*? But I love that show!" Cole smiled at Thomas.

"What is it?" Matt hated being in the dark.

"A kind of soft porn, gay soap opera."

My God, there's nothing soft about Bone Island except the lighting..." Thomas, I love you." Matt was frantic now.

Thomas was slitty-eyed. "You'd better, because I don't believe in divorce."

"We don't have to watch this...please, Thomas."

"Oh, but this is a good one. The bedroom scene is freakin' hot." Cole finally sensed the chill in the room and stopped prattling. "Well, since we're having a boyfriend bonfire...can I keep these?" He picked up the discarded DVDs. Matt stared in a helpless way as Cole darted from the house with a cheery wave over his shoulder.

"I meant what I said. We don't have to watch." Matt reached for Thomas.

"Yeah, we do. I know you like this guy's movies. I want to see who kept you entertained before I came along. I'm going to get a secret thrill out of knowing you're inside me and he can never

have you." Thomas' gaze moved to the hot tub. "We can start out there."

Matt grabbed him and started kissing him. He took Thomas' clothing off with great care, kissing every inch of slowly revealed skin.

"Why are you taking so long to get me naked?" Thomas asked, but his voice was tender.

"This is my last night on earth as a single man making love to the man I'm going to marry."

"Is that so?" Thomas' smile was heartbreaking and sweet and he begged Matt to get naked fast so they could enjoy the hot tub.

Matt picked Thomas up and carried him outside. The air was frigid and both men sighed with pleasure as Matt lowered Thomas into the water. They naturally gravitated toward one another.

"Think it's got girl cooties?" Matt whispered.

"I know one way to get rid of those."

"You're going to show me, I hope." Matt grinned as Thomas moved into his arms, his hard cock rubbing against Matt's thigh.

There was something about hot tubs and men's erections. The two naturally went together. They kissed and licked at one another and, when Thomas traversed the hot, bubbly water seeking out his own private treasure on Matt's lap, he climbed on board and Matt slipped straight into him. Thomas' eyes closed as he rose and fell

harder and harder on Matt, wrapping his legs around him.

"I love you," Matt's words were a mantra against Thomas' throat as the man he loved thrashed up and down on him. "Oh God, I love you." They came together and, when Matt knew Thomas was ready, he pulled out from him.

"No..." Thomas sounded anguished, like Baby Daphne...eyes closed, Thomas nestled into him, but when Matt picked him up to carry him into the living room, Thomas came to life.

"I want to watch that movie. Put on the bedroom scene, Matty."

Matt hesitated, but put Thomas on the sheepskin rug in front of the fireplace. He covered him with a huge, soft cashmere throw, lit a fire and turned around to kiss Thomas.

"I'll be back with some champagne."

"More champagne?"

"We're celebrating." He gave Thomas a lingering kiss and Thomas held onto his feet.

"Please come right back."

"I will, baby." Matt's cock was rigid when he went to the kitchen for the *Veuve Clicquot* he had way at the bottom of the fridge and two glasses. He felt Thomas' possessive gaze on him and his big hard-on as he came back to the living room.

"Matt, I love your body."

"Good. It loves you. Thomas..."

"What, baby?" Thomas reached over for him, his skin warmed by the fire and the cashmere throw. "Matt, you're freezing."

"No. I'm not. I'm the happiest I've ever been. You're my salvation. I'm...I'm not alone anymore."

Thomas reached up and pulled Matt's face to his. "What a beautiful thing to say." They swapped, sweet, syrupy kisses and Thomas gently pushed him away. "Now, mister. Show me some goddam porn."

Thomas tore himself away reluctantly and ran to the armoire, slipping on the DVD. Thomas, *his* Thomas was holding the cashmere throw open for him and he nestled on top of him as the movie started.

"Shit, he's an Adonis." Thomas watched Marquez swagger through an island cemetery. "You've never met him, have you?"

"No." Thomas was getting anxious again. He looked spooked.

"Can't you fast forward? I want to see him naked."

Matt complied and Thomas, on his knees now, sipped his champagne, watching the very hot man on man action that was *Bone Island*.

"They've all got magnificent dicks. They're all uncut. Oh, my God, Matty, we need to go to Europe."

"Why?" Matt was ready to break the DVD in two now.

"I just mean...wow...oh...here's the bedroom scene." Thomas scrunched forward away from Matt, who sat against the sofa, watching the man he loved, watching the man who once helped get him through the darkest passages of his breakup with Wayne, the fierce depression...the blow-by-blow pain. Thomas, was watching now, spellbound.

"That is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, apart from you, naked, Matty. These guys are really engaging with each other. It's not all wham-bam, thank you, man."

Matt nodded.

"It's weird to me that you love this scene, but you rarely write sex scenes in the bedroom." Thomas finally turned to look at him.

"I didn't have you," Matt said and it was the truth.

Thomas gulped at him. "You say the most incredible things to me..."

Matt scrambled over to him and kissed him as the two Spanish men on the screen fell on pristine white sheets, the heavy-lidded Antonio Marquez, fixated on his lover's cock. They did a fast and dirty sixty-nine, followed by Marquez's lover lying on his back, legs spread. Thomas was playing with his nipples now, lying on the

lambskin, legs spread as Thomas knelt between his legs. Thomas' eyes were riveted to the screen as Marquez lapped at his moaning lover's ass hole, his language incomprehensible, but it was clear he was in carnal heaven.

Leaning down to do exactly what Marquez was doing, Matt felt the little tremor in his lover's body as the nerve endings in that sensitive place shot through Thomas. For a second, Thomas' eyes closed and he bit his lip. The man on the screen was slowly stroking his own cock as Marquez kept up a relentless pace, sucking and licking his ass.

Thomas' hand moved down to his cock and Matt smiled as he licked. He wanted Thomas to come in his mouth, but Thomas, completely lost in the mirror that was the TV screen stroked himself to a fire fountain of an orgasm just like the man on screen. Unlike Marquez however, Matt raised his head from his man's ass and licked all the come from his belly.

"Oh, Matt." Thomas' arms reached up for him.

"You ready for bed?" Matt asked him.

"Uh-uh. I wanna watch the rest of this."

"I've got me a hot little ho'."

"You betcha bippy, fuck bunny. Oh, look, those nasty boys are at it again."

"Yeah," Matt kissed him. "They are, aren't they?"

"Queue it back to the scene at the *mardi gras*

where they first start kissing. That was so hot." Thomas was on fire, his cock still hard.

"Thomas —"

"Matty...think of this as research. I write gay erotic fiction, I should see it, too." He sounded astonished. "I can't believe what I've been missing."

"Aren't I enough for you?" Matt never thought these words would come out of *his* mouth. He loved watching porn, but his life, his love life with Thomas was thing of a sacred beauty.

"Matty...of course you are." Thomas lay underneath him and smiled. "You're my inspiration. The guys on that screen are...information."

"Nice save, baby."

"You like it?" Thomas wiggled his brow.

Matt hunkered down and kissed the man he was marrying in less than a day.

"Sweetie," Thomas murmured against his mouth. "Rewind the porn."

And Matt, who had enjoyed enough of these lovers to know they were addictive, pressed the buttons to take them back to the street scene.

"I want you to do that with me, too." Thomas' words came out in a rush.

"What's that?" asked Matt, lifting his mouth from Thomas' nipple.

"That." He jabbed at the screen. Marquez and

his man were in the middle of a *mardi gras*, two men in love, joined at the groin, kissing. Marquez had a way of kissing with his whole face and Matt had always fantasized about being with a man like that.

“I can do that.” Matt picked up Thomas, who laughed as they moved to the door. Matt managed to open it and took Thomas outside. In the middle of Mulholland Drive, under the soft glare of street lamps, they stood, naked in each other’s arms, in the middle of the road and kissed like Spanish porn stars...like two men in love with each other.

And the blue-black night.

CHAPTER NINE

"I'm not marrying you. I can't marry you today, Matt. It's not happening."

"What do you mean? Thomas...what the hell—"

"My suit. My lucky suit! The airline's just gone and lost it."

Matt stepped out of the shower, stunned that Thomas was flinging things around in the bathroom. He was wearing Matt's favorite boxers and looked adorable, but he was not in an adorable mood. He was out of control. Matt tried to hold him in his arms, but Thomas was having a classic meltdown. Was this about the suit, or was Thomas having second thoughts?

"I wear that suit for all my special occasions and I...I bought it thinking one day I'm going to marry the man of my dreams wearing that suit."

Matt found a goofy grin spreading across his face. "You did? Aw...sweetie." For a second, Thomas allowed him a mushy moment, then he

began running around the house again, muttering in French and English. Matt was learning that his soon-to-be-husband had an endearing habit of lapsing into French when he became panic stricken.

"Merde...assholes."

Matt watched Thomas become steadily more unglued. They were getting married, suit or no suit. He was spending the rest of his life with Thomas and...oh God, they *had* to get married today. After the California elections, they might not be so lucky if Proposition Eight passed and same sex unions were banned. A future without Thomas being his husband was unthinkable.

Thomas was upstairs now, running from room to room, waving his arms and shouting. Matt paused to listen to the manic monologue.

"J'ai la gorge serrée! Matt! J'ai la gorge serrée."

Matt stared up the stairs, dumfounded as Thomas appeared to be hyperventilating. He grabbed the English-French dictionary Thomas had given him as a gift and thumbed through it. Was he saying his ass was tight? Well, that was true, but he didn't think Thomas had sex on his mind right now. Matt watched in horror as Thomas flung himself from room to room and he picked up his cell phone.

"Hello, Cole?"

"It's your wedding day!" Cole chirped.

"Cole...we have a fashion emergency."

"Well, I'm the girl for you!" Cole laughed. "What's the emergency?"

"The man I love, the man I want to marry says he won't do it without his lucky suit. And now he's running from room to room and he's speaking French and I can't understand a word he's saying."

He listened to Cole breathing on the other end of the phone as he held it up for Cole to hear.

"Oh, he's saying he's choked up. He can't breathe. You go up and hug that man and I'll be there within the hour."

"Hour? Are you kidding me? He'll spontaneously explode by then!"

Thomas' hysteria spiked and he was screaming now.

"Did he just say something about apples?" Matt whispered into the phone.

"Umm...I don't think you really want to know what he said. I'll be there in ten minutes." Cole ended the call and the house fell silent.

Matt waited a beat. The quiet was a little scary. He squared his shoulders and walked up the stairs. He didn't think Thomas had thrown himself out the window. He would have heard...*something*. He found him lying across their bed, face down, arms clenched by his sides.

"I'm not marrying you."

Matt sat beside him, stroking Thomas' back. When he was a little boy, his mother Elise used to draw patterns on his back. Stars, hearts, letters...he remembered it now, the soothing, yet stimulating feeling of his back being stroked. Thomas breathed heavily and Matt kept quiet. He just kept writing the letter *I*, followed by a heart and the letters *Y-O-U*. Over and over again, his fingers marked the letters, the intentions from his heart to Thomas' and finally, Thomas blinked.

"I love you, too."

Matt leaned down, turned his man over and kissed him. "You'd better. Honey, I need you and I don't want to wait anymore." Thomas closed his eyes when Matt kissed him a second time.

"But my suit..." He sounded so mournful and then Matt had a moment of sheer inspiration.

"You can wear it when we renew our vows next year...every year. I just know you'll still fit into it even when we're old married men."

Thomas relaxed, looking up at him. "That was a beautiful thing to say. I do love you, Matt."

"That's good, because you're stuck with me, asshole."

"Are you stealing my lines?"

"I only steal kisses, babe." He leaned down and put a serious one on Thomas, who held him in a tight grip. On the quiet mountain road that held their home, you could hear everything and he was

aware of cars pulling up, and feet running.

"Cole's here." Matt lifted his face away, but Thomas held onto him.

"No, I don't want anyone to see me like this."

"Sweetheart...Cole's here to help us."

Thomas shook his head.

"He's brought the baby. I can hear her out there. She's saying, *Thomas, Thomas.*"

Thomas' eyes widened. "We have to let them in!" He flew off the bed and raced down the stairs.

Matt watched the baby stumble into the house in her pink tutu, her fairy wand in her trusty grip and Thomas bending down to gather her in his arms.

Behind them, two very gay guys with two racks of clothes came in and Matt recognized them from a TV show.

"You're one of the grooms?" the first one, a loud, feminine blond was turning Thomas around. "Fabulous! Look at that ass, Marco! Have you ever seen steelier buns than those? I've got an Armani suit here that will love those buns!"

My buns! Matt wanted to scream. *Don't touch 'em!*

"Armani?" Thomas looked ecstatic.

Matt hurriedly changed into a pair of boxers, threw on some sweat pants and went downstairs. The baby refused to be parted from Thomas. She was clearly in love. It took some coaxing, actually,

food bribes, and he took her from Thomas, kissing her. Matt kissed Cole's cheek in greeting and felt Thomas' death ray stare. He immediately kissed Thomas on the mouth and the stare defrosted. Not much, just a little.

"Coffee, guys?" Cole trilled, Matt following him into the kitchen. As usual, Cole was armed with food and he hugged Matt.

"You're getting married today!"

"Thanks to you. He looks so happy. I don't know what I would have done..." Matt looked out at Thomas, who looked lit from within as he slipped on Armani shoes.

Cole took Matt's face in his hands. "Don't go there. I only have you as my defense against your brother. Your parents always side with him. That's not going to change now that you're...you know, *a deux*?"

"Of course not. Ryan's behaving himself, isn't he?"

"We have a sort of...problem."

"Problem?" Matt didn't think he wanted to hear this. Not today, not when Thomas was throwing open suit bags and having fun being the hottest groom on the face of the planet.

Cole sighed. "He wants to move to Palm Springs."

"Are you kidding me? He always says it's the gay sauna capital of the world."

"Exacalacaly." Cole made a face. "Your parents bought a house in Rancho Mirage and there's one right next door. It's all marble and Grecian columns. It's hideous, Matty. I'll die if he makes me move there."

Matt was amused now. "He's talking about moving to the high desert and living next door to...*my parents*? In a house with marble and Grecian columns? The guy who flipped out when he saw Travertine tile on the wall in your bathroom and had the whole bathroom ripped out?"

Cole was laughing now. "The whole house in Rancho Mirage is Travertine, Matt."

"You know...he might be having a psychotic episode. Insanity does run in my family, Cole."

"Now he tells me."

"Babe, it's not going to happen."

"You'll speak to him, right?"

"Sure, I'll speak to him."

"Promise me."

"I promise. Cole, is anything else bothering you?" When Cole didn't respond, Matt sighed. "Is he still talking to Christian?" Cole looked at him and slowly nodded his head.

"He never learns...oh...Thomas."

Thomas had just stepped into the kitchen and Matt almost came in his sweat pants.

"Look at you!" Cole fixed his party personality

back in place and everybody laughed at the way Matt just stared at Thomas.

"You're beautiful," he whispered and Thomas wedged himself around Daphne to put his arms around Matt.

"We have something for you, too."

Thomas looked so happy and Matt just felt like his heart would burst with all the love he felt for this man. When he was a boy, his father had insisted he and Ryan take afternoon bible classes at the local Catholic Church and he had been haunted ever since by the memory of Saint Imelda, who loved humanity so much, her heart exploded, bursting into pieces. "I love you, Thomas."

"Baby, I know. Come and try this suit on. It's Jean Paul Gaultier! I'm gonna have the hottest husband in town."

"That's impossible, because *you're* the hottest husband in town."

"Aren't they cute?" Cole asked, peeling Daphne's arms from around Matt's neck.

Thomas dragged Matt into the living room and he had to admit, being primped and preened by those adoring queens wasn't that bad.

"Did they cop free feels of you, too?" he asked Thomas as Cole popped a bottle of Bollinger and poured out glasses for them all.

"Yeah!" Thomas grinned. "I figured I didn't get

a stag party, this was the next best thing."

Matt felt bleak. "You wanted a stag party?"

"Oh, listen to you, mister-I've-got-a-room-full-of-porn."

"A room? Really." One of the dressers was holding up a suit bag.

"Oh, yes, help yourself fellas." Thomas pointed to the cabinet. "I've hidden the stash we're keeping. You're welcome to the rest of Matt's men."

Matt shook his head as the dressers ran to the armoire and wrestled with the childproof lock. A sound of car horns honking interrupted them and Cole raced to the front door.

Thomas leaned into Matt, his voice sotto. "Please don't kiss Cole anymore." Matt started to speak, but Thomas put his fingers to his lips. "I know it's only on the cheek but he...he's very unhappy and you're so lovely, Matt. I get so jealous. I know you've been alone a long time and having Cole give you affection has been...a comfort, but you have me now. Okay?"

"I won't do it anymore."

The looks the two men exchanged were too much for either of them and, when Matt kissed the two fingers on his lips, Thomas' eyes darkened and instinctively they reached for one another's hands and went up the stairs.

"Thank God for locks," Thomas muttered and

they dissolved into their secret, private world, if only for a few moments, shutting out the rest of the world.

They took a few precious seconds to savor the feel of the soft fabrics that made up their expensive suits.

"I can't wait to get you naked." Matt just pulled down the zipper on Thomas' pants, bent down and took out the cock he needed and loved and sipped at the head.

"You bloody tease," Matt hissed, pushing Thomas onto the bed and straddling his face, burying his own in the muted, buttery fabric of Thomas' trousers. He fumbled at the zipper, taking out that cock...*his* cock, and in a moment of sublime pleasure, felt Thomas' lips move down all the way to his crotch as he started to suck on the demanding cock bouncing in his face. Their happy, sucking sounds drowned out everything else...Matt was aware of a bee droning in the bedroom, but didn't care. He loved Thomas' legs squeezing his head as his moment of release neared. He stroked the thighs that threatened to choke him and, in the same breath, he and Thomas came, hard and fast, as his mother pounded on the bedroom door.

Thomas chuckled underneath him, giving Matt's butt a playful slap. "That's gonna have to tide you over, big boy."

"Nooo..." Matt buried his face in Thomas' crotch, loving the taste of him, the clean scent of his skin. He started licking Thomas' balls.

"Oh, no...no go dere." Thomas pushed him off and Matt stared at him bereft as Thomas zipped up his pants. "Matty...don't look at me like that."

"But I want you..."

Thomas smiled. "Yeah, I know." He looked down at Matt's cock. "Better get dressed. We have a wedding to go to."

Downstairs, the house was filling with family members. Elise gushed over her new son-in-law and Auntie Kay grabbed a handful of Thomas' ass, making him jump. In the kitchen, Cole was lining up champagne flutes filled to the brim.

"What are those for?" Matt asked as he and Thomas walked into the kitchen.

"These are for Auntie Kay. Every time she makes a beeline for Thomas, you stick a drink in her paw. Works every time."

"You sure?" Thomas asked. "She seems very determined...her tongue is like an electric eel. It just keeps coming at me."

Cole laughed, handing him a flute. "Trust me."

In the living room, Cole passed around *hors d'oeuvres*, Ryan kept tugging at his shirt collar and finally wound up half-naked as the dressers from the TV show insisted on fitting him for a new suit.

"Does my husband have a hot bod or what?"

Cole asked, coming up to Matt and kissing him on the cheek. Matt glanced at Thomas, who was laughing at something Elise was saying.

"He doesn't like us kissing each other," Matt whispered.

"Really?" Cole whispered back. "He's jealous of *me*? How sexy is that!" He topped up Matt's glass and flew across the room with the bottle just as Aunty Kay started marching in a determined line toward Thomas.

Ryan, who was going to be Matt's best man, looked stunning in his Gaultier suit and Prada shoes.

"Wow," Matt enthused. "Ryan, you're a sexy mofo when you're not wearing jeans."

"Rings!" Thomas was by Matt's side. "I forgot about wedding rings. Matt, I am *not* going to marry you without a wedding ring."

Matt gave him a smug smile. "We have wedding rings."

"We...do?"

"Family heirlooms. They're my grandpa and grandma's rings on my mom's side and they're mine...well, ours. We'll have to have them resized, but for today, they'll have to do."

"Where are they?" The sheen was back in Thomas' eyes now and Matt could happily take the guy down to the floor and...

"I have them." Baxter, who had also been

persuaded to try on a new suit, rushed over with a white handkerchief.

"Oh..." Thomas' fingers reached toward the two rings lying in the palm of Baxter's hand. Matt's arm went around him encouragingly and Thomas picked them up, obviously in awe. "I...I've never seen anything like these."

"They're nineteenth century crown gold." Elise could tell Thomas was overcome and, when tears filled his eyes, she jumped forward and hugged him.

"Thank you for making my son so happy." She held Thomas tightly and Matt kept stroking his back until Baxter peeled his wife away from him.

"Let me put it on you." Matt took the rings from Thomas' hand, aware of Cole shooting the moment on his camcorder. Grandpa's ring was too big and grandma's was too small, but it was the one that looked the best and the one that Thomas coveted.

"We can get it resized tomorrow," Matt told him.

"No. It's never leaving my hand again." Thomas clutched it to his chest. He slipped grandpa's ring on Matt's finger. Still too big for him, too, but he didn't care. He loved the feel of it, knowing that in two hours he was going to be a happily married man.

"Here...this'll help." Elise produced a small

gold, adjustable bar that she put inside the ring. It fit.

"Perfect," Matt smiled.

"Take them off and I'll give them to you in the ceremony."

"No way." Matt frowned at him and Thomas laughed.

Matt's cell phone started ringing and he grimaced when he saw it was Carly Ann Westaway, the Paramount executive. He took the call so he wouldn't have to deal with it later and she rambled forth without pausing to exchange pleasantries. He had a time following her stream of consciousness and he wanted to cut to the chase.

"What is it that you're asking me?" he shouted into the cell phone as his family erupted in laughter over Baxter's tighty whities.

"Oooh, sexy!" one of the show dresses smacked Baxter's butt and Matt watched helplessly as his father turned into a champagne-fueled show off.

"What's going on?" Carly Ann asked.

"I'm getting married today." Matt's gaze fell on Thomas. "To the most handsome man alive." Thomas turned and gave him a radiant smile.

"Congratulations. I love weddings! Can I come?"

Matt was about to say no, that it was family only, but Carly Ann surprised him.

"I was actually calling to offer you a job. I need somebody to help me on a couple of movies. We just bought two gay themed books, one of them is by Rose Carter and we need to assign a writer."

"Rose Carter?" Matt couldn't believe his luck. Thomas turned at the sound of his alter-ego's name.

"Oh, you know her?"

"Yeah, as a matter of fact." Did she not know that Thomas and Rose were the same person? Wheels started spinning slowly for him. He snapped his fingers at Ryan.

"Can you get someone in your office to write a deal memo and send it over to Carly Ann Westaway's office right now?"

"Sure."

Matt just stared at Thomas. "This day just gets better and better." He muted his cell phone. "Talk to her. I want that deal memo out within the hour. She doesn't seem to realize Thomas and I are together and I want the deal in place before she changes her mind. Please don't tell her where we're getting married. I don't want Christian gumming up the works."

"She knows Christian?" Ryan looked pale. Matt nodded and handed the phone to him. Ryan took the phone into the kitchen and Matt smiled at Thomas.

"You're looking at the new studio executive in

charge of production of your movie, baby."

"Oh...Matt! Really?" Thomas rushed into his arms and the family went crazy.

"Now I can really look after you." Matt stared into Thomas' eyes. "I already have a writer in mind who won't crush Rose Carter's prose—"

"Rose Carter!" The studio dressers were in heaven. "I love Rose Carter!"

Across the room, Aunty Kay was blowing kisses at Thomas. "Come and give me a hug, sweetie."

Baxter pushed Cole toward her. "Somebody has to make the sacrifice. Come on, Cole."

"Noooo!" Cole screamed. "Why is it always me?" Aunty Kay rushed him and Cole threw Thomas a shrewd look. "After today, sweetheart, she's all yours."

The Lucas family members all piled into the stretch limo parked like a giant black snake out front. Matt thought he really might die, like Saint Imelda, from too much love and decided it was the only way to go. He and Thomas sat together, arms around each other and thirty-four minutes later, they exited from the freeway to Topanga Canyon.

Matt didn't think he could keep his mouth off Thomas a second longer and was aware in that moment of Thomas' fingers tugging his mouth toward him. He gave his lover what he wanted

and they made out all the way to the turn off on Old Topanga Road and the wondrous, rustic charms of the Inn of the Seventh Ray.

“Oh, it’s beautiful.” Thomas came up for air, his mouth open as he took in the outdoor restaurant built into the side of a mountain. A rolling brook, a sweet little bookstore selling gemstones and crystals perched on top. They saw their names on a huge white board and Matt held Thomas to him for a precious, private moment. Then they were trooping down the stairs where the entire restaurant staff greeted them with applause.

The same minister who had married Ryan and Cole helped Matt and Thomas become husband and husband and Baxter, who walked Thomas down the aisle with tears streaming down his cheeks, sang Auld Lang Syne for the relatives and friends who were gone and couldn’t be here in person. It was a magical ceremony, one that Matt felt humbled by and when the minister told Matt and Thomas they could kiss, Thomas sighed.

“Oh, thank God!”

Their loved ones clapped, Daphne reached up to Thomas and sat on his lap for most of the wedding feast, which took place in a private room lit entirely with fairy lights and huge, thick beeswax candles mounted on wooden candlesticks. Matt loved this restaurant. Everything was organic and prepared so freshly,

everybody kept tasting from one another's plates and Baby Daphne stuck her fingers in the wedding cake.

"I can take my baby anywhere," Cole dead panned. "Second time, to apologize."

Fairy lights in the trees outside and decorating the stone seats carved into the mountain popped on, heralding the encroaching evening.

"Home, baby," Matt told Thomas. "I want to get a jump start on our honeymoon."

"Honeymoon? Oh, Matt, promise me that soon, you and I, we'll go back to *Black Point*. To that house, our house."

"I promise you." Matt kissed him and they could hardly wait to get home. Baby Daphne cried when she had to release her new uncle and, in truth, Thomas looked like it was a wrench to leave her until he got into the house that he shared with Matt.

They took a mutual, long glance at the mess in the living room, but within seconds, they started whipping each other's clothes off. They delighted in being naked for the first time as legally wedded men.

"Is your ring too tight?" Matt asked him, stroking his cheek.

"I love it," Thomas replied. "It's hugging my finger the way you hug me."

They kissed and touched one another for a long

time, then without another word, they went upstairs and to their bed. Slowly, they took their time exploring one another. Kisses, licks, long fingered stroking...they kept it up and until Thomas was on fire and jumped between Matt's thighs. He was just about to enter him when there was a hammering at the front door.

"Ignore it," Matt insisted, petrified it would be Wayne.

"Somebody wants our attention." Thomas started getting off the bed.

"Please...Thomas..."

"Matt! Open up!"

"Is that Cole?" he was shocked. He and Thomas threw towels across their bellies and ran down the stairs.

Thomas opened the door to find Cole in floods of tears, a weeping Daphne in his arms.

"Oh, my God, what happened?" Thomas asked.

"I just found Ryan...in our garage...kissing Christian. He swears nothing would have happened...but I know what I saw."

"What?" Matt didn't...he *couldn't* believe it.

"Yes. I've left him, I've taken the baby. And I'm getting a divorce."

CHAPTER TEN

Thomas sank down onto the living room sofa. Matt erupted like a volcano. Daphne, whose crying was at a whimpering level, possibly because she had been half-asleep before Matt's eruption, now had reached full volume. He ran a hand through his disheveled hair and tried not to reveal how truly annoyed he was.

"That stupid prick," Matt growled, throwing up his hands.

Cole jiggled the baby up and down in his arms trying to calm her, but with her father crying and her uncle bellowing, she was not inclined to oblige soon.

Thomas sighed in irritation and stood up. "Give her to me," he said impatiently. "I'll take her upstairs and try to settle her down."

"Thanks, Thomas," Cole nodded, putting her into his arms.

Daphne clung to his neck quite desperately. He rubbed her little back. "Come on, sweetie," he said

softly, heading to the stairs.

"I don't know which one of them to kill, that prick Christian, or my idiot brother who can't seem to keep it in his pants when that cheeky twink is around," Thomas heard Matt mutter. "He has no idea what he's got, how special you are and..."

Matt's words faded out of earshot as Thomas reached the top of the steps. Daphne had stopped crying. She was sucking her thumb, a definite sign that she was feeling insecure. "I know how you feel," Thomas sighed, taking Daphne into the room next to Matt's and laid her on the bed. She turned her head into the pillow and sighed, her eyes closed. He supposed he should call it *their* room. He took off the little girl's shoes and pulled a blanket up over her. He was sure there were pajamas somewhere down in Cole's suitcase, but to hell with it.

He stood there, watching her for a minute, hitching the towel up tighter around his waist. He wasn't sure if he should get dressed and go back downstairs, or just go to bed. Is this what he and Matt had to look forward to? What in hell was wrong with Ryan anyway? Christian was okay, but he was no Cole. Thomas wasn't surprised that Matt seemed to admire him a lot. *He has no idea how special you are?* But Matt did? How come Matt knew and Ryan didn't?

Thomas leaned down and kissed the little girl's cheek. "Goodnight, princess," he said, creeping softly out of the room and closing the door. He hesitated a minute in the hallway, then walked into Matt's...their...bedroom. He found his jeans and a t-shirt, slipped into his running shoes and ran a comb through his long, dark hair. He rubbed his jaw. Yeah, he needed a shave, but it would have to wait. He took the stairs two at a time, making a lot of noise, although he wasn't sure why he'd done that. He just felt as if he should.

As it turned out, it didn't matter. Cole was in Matt's arms, standing in almost the same spot by the door. Matt was kissing his hair, his forehead, rubbing his back, mumbling words, which were meant to sound comforting, Thomas assumed.

He stood there, watching them, digging around his insides to find his compassion, but somehow it got stuck in his throat. This was his fucking wedding night, and he knew it might be selfish, but Goddamnit all, there was Matt, holding Cole in his arms, the underwear model husband of his philandering brother, declaring how fucking special he was.

"Oh, Matthew, it should have been you," Cole choked. "If we hadn't ignored what we felt back then, we —"

Thomas cleared his throat, loudly.

Matt stroked Cole's hair and slowly withdrew

from him. He looked at Thomas who raised an eyebrow.

"Ah, yes." It was Matt's turn to clear his throat. "I think we all need a drink."

"Yes, and maybe someone needs to put some clothes on," Thomas remarked, trying not to sound too judgmental.

Matt smirked. He smirked! Thomas' expression hardened. Apparently, Matt was seeing something humorous in this situation, something that he wasn't seeing at all.

Cole sighed. "I'm so sorry, Thomas." He gave him an innocent look. For some reason, that really pissed Thomas off. He did a good job of masking the hostility, actually managed to smile.

"I think we all could use a drink," Matt repeated.

"I'll fix us a drink," Thomas said, "while you go up and change."

"Right," Matt said. He glanced at Cole. "Make yourself at home, Cole. We'll find a place for you to sleep. Where did you put the baby?"

"Next door to your bedroom," Thomas said.

Matt met his eyes. "Our bedroom?"

"Whatever," Thomas said, walking over to the bar.

Matt paused. "Hand me your suitcase, Cole," he said. "I'll take it up."

"I really hope I'm not interrupting anything. I—

"

Matt put up a hand. "No worries," he said, taking the case.

Thomas poured some brandy, listening to Matt's footsteps climbing the steps.

"Thomas," Cole said suddenly.

"Uh huh?"

"I know what bad timing this is. I didn't plan it."

Thomas turned around and handed him the brandy. Cole had taken a seat on the sofa. "Why would you assume I'd think that?"

"I'm not assuming anything. I just..."

"Yes, I heard what you said." Thomas took a sip of the brandy. God awful stuff, but he really needed it at the moment.

"What?"

"About how you chose the wrong brother."

"I didn't..." he laughed a little, embarrassed. "I never said that."

"Yes, you did, in so many words."

He sighed. "People say things under stress."

"People often say the truth under stress."

"You shouldn't be writing with him," Cole retorted.

"Christian, you mean?" Thomas lifted an eyebrow, drank another swallow of the liquor.

"Nice diversion."

"Just come out with it, Thomas. You've been

connected with this family, for what, ten minutes?" His voice sounded bitter.

"A little longer than that, but you're right." Thomas put down the glass. "You know what, I'm just going to let you cry on Matt's shoulder, but you know what, if Ryan is that inclined to crawl into bed with another man, there must be a reason, don't you think? You'd probably be better off trying to find out what that was."

Cole just stared at him.

Thomas regretted the words that came out of his mouth, almost. But damn it, it was true. Obviously, there was a problem, or was it that men were bound to wander after a few years. *What in hell did I do?* He looked up when Matt came down the stairs.

"Sorry," he said, looking at Cole curiously, then at Thomas, "I went to check on the baby. She's sleeping like a...what's wrong?"

Cole sighed, picking at the sofa. "Nothing. I just think that I should go."

"Go where?" Matt looked at Thomas.

"Why are you looking at me? I didn't tell him to go. This is your house, not mine." Thomas walked to the hall closet and rummaged for his coat. He turned around when Matt touched his shoulder.

"What's going on with you? Ryan is ripping out Cole's heart and you're acting like a..." he hesitated for a moment, "well, like a child."

"Oh really?" He finally found his coat and yanked it off the hanger. The hanger went clambering to the floor. "Well, since children have no place in this kind of discussion, I'll make myself scarce, see if I can find a fucking all night circus to go to."

Matt stepped out of the way when Thomas shrugged into his jacket. "It's late. You can't go wandering around by yourself."

"Look, it's Cole who needs you now, not me." He pulled open the door and stepped outside.

Matt followed. "I'm sorry. I know this didn't turn out the way —"

"Matt. Please, just give me some space right now to blow off steam."

"Or to regret today? You're just looking for an excuse."

"An excuse to what?"

"To regret marrying me."

Thomas softened. The expression on Matt's face was breaking his heart. "Baby," he said, pulling Matt into his arms, "I don't regret anything where you're concerned." He kissed his forehead, then moved away from him. "I just need time to clear my head."

"Tell me what's troubling you and maybe...is it Cole? Is it because Cole is here? We're close and —"

"I know. It's natural that he comes running to

you."

"Don't you think I'd rather be alone with you, finish what we started? It's Christian, he's an asshole. He won't leave Ryan alone and —"

"Hey, Matt, reality check. Ryan is just as...even more when it comes down to it. Christian is not in a relationship with a child."

"How can you defend that prick?"

"I am not defending him."

"Yes, you are. And I take back what I said before. I don't want you to have anything to do with that creep."

Thomas folded his arms across his chest. "Wow, we've only been married a few hours and already you're treating me like your wife." There was a ghost of a smile on Thomas' lips.

Matt lifted his finger in the air, then put it down. "You're making fun of me?"

Thomas laughed. "You're really cute when you get all infuriated and bossy. Care to carry that attitude you got going there over into the bedroom sometime?"

Matt met his gaze. "You're not angry anymore?" His voice was soft.

"Yeah, I'm still angry, but I'm mellowing. Let me take my life in my hands and go for a walk, okay? I'll be better when I come back. Go talk to Cole. He needs you." He walked down the steps, doing up his jacket as he went. How could he stay

mad? He loved him too much. All Matt had to do was look disappointed and he melted. He didn't want to make him unhappy, but this relationship between him and Cole was a little bit more intense than what one normally found among brother-in-laws. He hadn't been around long enough to truly feel apart of all this, and he told himself as he rounded the corner, not to judge, but damn it, Cole's words still echoed in his head. *Oh, Matthew, it should have been you. If we hadn't ignored what we felt back then, we...* The only consolation was that Matt had said nothing. Of course, he hadn't gotten the chance too. *Damn it, Thomas, Matt married you today, not Cole.* Yeah, but Cole was married to Matt's brother...but maybe not for much longer.

* * * *

When he came back in the door a half hour later, he was relieved to see that the light in the living room was off. It was silent. It looked like they'd gone to bed. When he turned to hang up his coat in the closet, he heard Matt say. "Thank God."

Thomas turned around, laughed a little. "What are you thanking God for?"

"A couple of things."

Thomas could see him swallow hard as he came closer.

"First, that you've come back to me, and second, that you're back in one piece."

"Ah. Well, Jack, the Ripper had a dinner engagement. So, is Cole leaving Ryan, or what?"

Matt placed both hands on his face, his chest pressing him back so that Thomas stumbled against the wall. Matt captured his mouth passionately, kissing him deeply, thoroughly. After a second, he released him, breathing hard.

Thomas met his gaze. "That was nice. What was that for?"

"I need to talk to you about something."

"Something you should have told me a few hours ago?" He laughed a little uneasily.

"Don't joke. I want us to be totally honest with each other about everything."

"Oh-oh."

"Don't joke, Thomas."

"You handle stress by screaming, I joke. Go ahead. What is it? Is it about Cole?"

"Yes."

Thomas ran a hand through his hair. "Can't it wait?"

"No, I think we should —"

"Look, Matt, Goddamnit all. It's three in the morning. This is my wedding night. It's not over yet. Tell me in the morning."

Matt nodded.

Thomas reached out and took his hand. He

switched off the hall light and started up the stairs. Matt followed. Thomas wasn't sure if this was the calm before the storm or the rush before the fall...either way, he was taking control. He'd only have one wedding night in his life. If something happened between him and Matt, well...nothing was going to happen. Nothing Matt could say would tear them apart. Nevertheless, he'd never marry again, ever. This was the one and only time, mostly because Matt was his one and only.

Inside the room, Thomas kicked the door closed. "Take off your clothes," he told him, his voice strong. He held back the inner trembling, swallowed the hot tears in his throat, turned off his mind. His body responded fairly predictably to the sight of Matt standing there now, naked, his cock hard, his expression quite easy to interpret.

"Fuck me," Matt breathed. "Thomas, I want you to fuck me. Do you know how much?"

Thomas nodded silently, reaching out for him, running his hands down over his back to his ass. The passion took him. He grunted, swinging Matt around in his arms, slamming his body against the wall. He pulled him out at the waist, spread his legs, took his hard, leaking organ into his fist, pumping into his ass as he milked the tension out of Matt. He wasn't thinking anymore. He was feeling his cock coursing with life, thumping out a

wild rhythm in Matt's ass, he was smelling Matt's skin, tasting his very soul, pinching his nipples and stroking his cock as he pummeled him into the wall and shouted out his ecstasy.

Matt's hands slid up the wall, his hips crashing against Thomas' spent cock. Thomas laid his head on Matt's damp back as he quieted. "Oh God, oh God, oh God." Matt's head hit the wall. His shoulders heaved.

Thomas lifted his head. "Matt? Are you crying? Did I hurt you?"

Matt turned around suddenly. He kissed his mouth, his cheeks, his eyes. "Oh no, God no. " He was laughing through the tears suddenly. "You excite me. You turn me on so much. That was so hot. Oh, Thomas. I love you."

Thomas pulled him into his arms, held him. He nibbled his shoulder.

"Don't ever let me go, no matter what happens, or happened in the past or..." Matt looked at him. "Know this, I've never loved anyone like this. I'll never love anyone like this again. Do you believe me?"

Thomas nodded. How could he not?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

When Thomas opened his eyes in the morning, Daphne was sitting beside him, taking the dress off her Barbie. Thomas quickly grabbed the sheet, noting that it was respectfully drawn up around his waist. Matt was fast asleep on the other side of the bed, rolled up in the blankets like an eggroll. "Well, hello there, little devil," he said, reaching out to tickle her gently.

She giggled and handed him her doll.

"Now, what exactly," he yawned, "am I supposed to do with this?"

"Um, you're asking your uncle to do something with a naked woman," Matt drawled, perched on his elbow, looking at them. "Got a Ken doll?"

"Very funny," he said. "Where's Daddy?"

She handed him the dress.

"I think she wants you to put on the dress," Matt smirked.

Thomas smiled indulgently at her. "I can hardly see, let alone dress a doll."

Matt laughed. "You'd be good with kids."

"I never agreed to have your baby, Matt," he muttered, struggling with the dress.

Matt grabbed the doll. "Let me. You're a heck of a lot better at taking clothes off than at putting them on, sweetie."

Daphne laughed at that and scrambled off the bed. She raced to the door and called out, "Da Da!"

Thomas watched Matt dress the doll. "There," he said, "isn't she chic?"

"Tres chic," Thomas mocked.

Matt reached over and kissed him softly. "Sleep well?"

"Yeah, but I could sleep more."

"It's almost eight."

"Oh My God, call the time police."

Matt got out of bed and padded across the floor naked. He closed the bedroom door. "Want to go out for breakfast? I wonder if Cole is up to it? Maybe going out would do him good. Maybe he's sleeping late."

"He probably didn't sleep at all," Thomas replied with a yawn.

Matt pulled back the curtain and looked outside, "Oh hell, he's here."

"Who's here now?"

"My fucked up brother, that's who." Matt let the curtain fall back into place. He sighed. "I better

go downstairs."

"Why? He didn't come to see you. Is Cole outside with him?"

"I don't know. I didn't see Ryan, just his car."

Thomas got up. "Look, take a shower, get dressed, take your time. If I hear them trying to kill one another, I'll go down."

Matt paused. A smile spread across his face.

"What?"

"If you knew what a gorgeous hunk you were, damn, Thomas, you are so hot. Still, I catch my breath looking at you standing there naked like that."

Thomas frowned. "Okay, okay, flattery will get you everywhere. What do you want?"

"Scrub my back in the shower?"

"Um, let me think, okay."

Matt laughed. "I'll race ya."

"Matt, it's right there," Thomas pointed to the adjoining shower.

"Yeah, but first one in the shower gets to play hide the soap."

"Oh, really? Well, in that case..." Thomas made a beeline for the bathroom door, Matt trying to block his path. They both wrestled and struggled at the entrance, trying to push each other out of the way. Finally, Thomas stood back and let Matt through.

Matt looked at him suspiciously. "Okay, Rose

Carter, why did you let me win?"

"Well," Thomas said, pulling Matt into his arms, "I want to be the one to find the soap."

Matt began to laugh as Thomas started tickling him. "Stop it...you..." He finally got away and stepped into the shower, turning on the water.

"I got an idea for where you can hide that soap," Thomas said, moving in behind him. He grabbed the bar of white cashmere soap and rubbed it into his wet palms. He could hear Matt breathing hard. He reached around his waist with his soapy hand and cuffed his erection. "Um, you're hard."

"Oh Yeah," he said, leaning his head back on Thomas' chest, "make me your slut."

Thomas struggled, running his soapy hands over Matt's chest and down his stomach, purposely avoiding his erection. Matt moaned softly, pressing his ass against Thomas' groin.

"Your cock is as ready as mine, baby."

Thomas moved his hands back to his chest. "Yes, but I'm more patient."

"Ha," Matt managed, but it lacked conviction.

"Let's see just how hard I can get your nipples. A little bit of a challenge with my slippery fingers. Um, guess I can use one hand, one nipple at a time....and ah...what should I do with the other one? Oh, I got it." He slipped his other hand down Matt's back and slid his fingers between his ass

cheeks.

Matt was squirming in his arms now, creating heavenly friction against his cock. He moaned, slammed his head against Thomas' shoulder. "Please," he pleaded.

Thomas' finger drilled up inside of Matt's ass, in and out, then two, deeper. He felt the ring of muscles give. Matt bucked his hand. "Thomas, baby." Slowly, he fucked him with those two fingers, while the other hand pinched one nipple, then the other, moving over them until they were as stiff as Matt's dick. His hand moved down to Matt's cock. He tormented it just enough to hear Matt cry out. He fucked him faster, harder, then withdrew, pinning him up against the wet tiles and pumping his cock into his ass.

Matt laid his head against the tile. Thomas squeezed his cock as he rode his ass. Matt came hard, with a triumphant shout, with Thomas coming inside of him soon after, deliriously humming his satisfaction against the skin of Matt's shoulder.

"So, I'm your bitch now, eh?" Matt teased as they began to dress moments later.

"As much as I'm yours," Thomas laughed.

Matt reached out and grabbed one of Thomas' ass cheeks. "I want that ass."

"Now?" He glanced at him, grinning.

"Soon."

Thomas put his arms around Matt from behind. He glanced at him in the mirror. "You don't like having my cock inside you?"

Matt looked in the mirror. "Are you crazy? Of course I do. I love it. I could easily get used to being the bottom all the time, but I don't want us to get stuck, you know?"

"Um, I can think of worse things than you being stuck inside of me."

Matt pushed him back with a laugh. "You know what I mean."

"Yeah, I do," he said. "And hey, I'm versatile."

"You'd tell me right?" Matt turned around.

"Tell you what?"

"Tell me if you didn't want me to do that?"

"Matt, I love your cock, doesn't matter which way I get it, I want it."

"Okay, stop that now." Matt cleared his throat. "You're turning me on big time and..." Suddenly he stopped. "I hear a car starting."

Thomas walked to the window. "The prodigal brother is taking off."

Matt sighed, brushing his hair. "I'll go down."

Thomas took a clean shirt out of the closet, then paused as he noticed Matt looking at him. "What?"

"We need to talk. You wouldn't let me tell you last night."

Thomas nodded. "There will be time later. Go

on down. I'm coming."

Matt left the room.

Whatever it was, part of him didn't want to know and the other part already knew, or at least had an idea.

* * * *

Cole was pacing the living room when Thomas came down. Thomas nodded at him, and went into the kitchen. Matt was making coffee. "Where's the baby?"

"With Ryan for the day."

Thomas nodded. "How did it go?"

"Not great." Matt took out coffee mugs. "Cole isn't hungry. You want eggs?"

"I'll make us breakfast." He was famished. "Go and talk to Cole. He's wearing out your carpet."

"Stop saying your. It's our carpet."

Matt nodded. "Not exactly my style, but..." He shrugged.

"You don't like my carpet?"

"No. But I like you."

Matt grinned. "Okay." He poured two cups, tilted his head for a quick kiss, then headed out to the living room.

Thomas made two omelets, bacon, whole wheat toast and waffles. Just as he was about to set it on

the kitchen table, Cole walked in with Matt. "It smells great," Cole said.

"There's enough for three."

"There's enough for the frigging army," Matt guffawed.

Cole reached over and grabbed Thomas, giving him a hug, which surprised the hell out of Thomas. "I want to thank you for putting up with me. I know the timing sucked. I want us to be friends." He released Thomas and stood back, waiting for some kind of response.

Thomas nodded. "No problem. Shit happens. Sit down. I'll serve."

They ate quietly. No one mentioned Ryan until Matt got up to clear the dishes.

"If it's not too much trouble," Cole announced, "I'd like to stay for a few days. I told Ryan, I need some time. The baby can stay with Ryan."

"She's no trouble," Thomas said.

"I think Ryan needs her around right now," Cole said, fiddling with the handle of his coffee mug. "We had a good talk this morning. We might be able to make it work, I don't know. We have to try."

"You still love each other," Thomas said.

Cole looked across the table at him. "Yes. We have problems, but we do love each other."

"Can I ask you something?" Thomas took a sip of his coffee.

"Sure."

"Is there a reason Ryan keeps...I mean, is it that he has feelings for Christian or...I guess I don't get it."

Matt looked over at Cole from where he stood at the sink. They exchanged a good, long look, one that was pregnant with meaning. The silence suddenly was electric. "We need to tell him," Matt said to Cole.

Thomas blinked. "You need to tell who, what?"

Matt gave Cole a pleading look. "It's nothing." Cole shook his head, looking down at the tablecloth. "Really."

"Cole," Matt snapped, the dish he was holding slipped out of his hand and went crashing to the floor.

Thomas jumped. "Are you all right? Did you cut yourself?" He stood up.

"No, I mean, yes, I'm fine," he said, starting to pick up the glass.

Thomas got the broom. He was putting the remainder of the broken glass in the garbage when Cole said, "Thomas, it's not Matt's fault. It's no one's fault, really. Ryan is blowing everything out of proportion, using it as an excuse to fuck around."

"That's what I told you," Matt said to Cole.

"Will the two of you please speak English for five seconds?" Thomas looked at Cole. "Ryan said

what?"

"Ryan thinks I still have feelings for Matt."

"Still?" he repeated.

"If I tell you this, and you want me to leave, I'll understand." Cole stood up. "There's always been the potential of something between me and Matt." He looked helplessly at Matt. "Whatever I say, it's not going to sound right."

"Then let me," Thomas said, his voice seeming to suddenly lack energy. "You're with Ryan, but sometimes you fantasize about being with Matt, especially when things with you and Ryan are on the frizz. Ryan knows that, it makes him insecure, especially in bed, and in order to feel more of a man, he fucks around. Does that sound about right?"

Cole and Matt just stared at him.

When there was no forthcoming comment, Thomas laughed a little strangely and said, "So, what did you do, Cole, call out Matt's name during sex?"

Again, there was no answer, just two sets of eyes looking at him.

"Bloody hell," he muttered, throwing up his hands. "I'll be damned."

"Thomas," Matt groaned, following him into the living room, "we need to talk. There's more to it and—"

Thomas held up his hand. "No. No more talk.

I've heard enough."

Matt lowered his head. "I'll ask Cole to leave, get a hotel."

"No. He can stay. That's fine. Let's just not talk about it, okay?"

"That's probably not the best thing to do," Matt muttered.

"Maybe not, but that's what I want to do. You should talk to your brother. Maybe you've been comforting the wrong guy."

Matt looked up, surprised. "How can you say that? Ryan is screwing Christian."

"Maybe he has a reason."

"You're blaming me for this."

"No."

"You should take your boy in hand," Matt threw at him.

"My boy?"

"Your limp dick, writing partner. Maybe you should ask him what in hell he wants with my brother. Find him a boyfriend."

Thomas didn't reply.

"Look, guys." Cole came out into the living room, "I don't want to cause arguments between you."

"It's a little late for that," Thomas told him. "Anyway," he said, going to the closet, "I'm going to find my limp-dicked writing partner."

"Thomas," Matt said, clicking his tongue, "I

didn't mean that. It's just that maybe you could talk some sense into him since he looks up to you, as a writer."

"Yeah." Thomas shrugged into his jacket. "I'll tell him who he can fuck. I'm sure he'll really like that."

"You are part of this family," Cole protested.

Matt shot a glance at Cole, with daggers attached.

"Yep," Thomas said. "And it's a far closer family than I'd imagined," he offered, leaving the house. Outside, he took out his cell phone and punched in Christian's number.

Christian answered on the second ring. "Thomas," he said.

"Are you at home?"

"Yeah."

"Give me your address, I'm coming over."

"You're here?"

"Yeah."

"With that fool, Matt?"

"Watch your mouth, that *fool* as you call him, is my husband."

Silence.

"Okay, we need to talk, give me the address."

Twenty minutes later, Thomas was ringing the doorbell of Christian's luxury apartment.

"How do you like it?" Christian waved his

hand around, leading him down into the sunk-in living room. "Look," he said, clapping his hands. Immediately the lights dimmed and soft music started to play.

"What in hell is wrong with you?" He grabbed Christian's arm and led him out of the living room.

"What?" Christian shook him off. "What's with you anyway?"

"I don't get you."

"I don't get you either, although," he smiled, "I'd like to, get you, I mean."

"Get real," Thomas muttered. "Although I never thought I'd stoop to telling someone who they can or can't fuck, here it goes, you got to stop fucking Ryan. You're ruining my life."

"Your life? What does this have to do with me?"

"It's a long story. Why, with all the men out there, do you have to fuck Ryan? Why don't you fuck someone else?"

"I do," he grinned.

Thomas didn't laugh at his joke. "Look, Christian, I don't know if this writing thing is going to work out between us."

"What? What do you mean?"

"Just that. Matt and I just got married and —"

"Married? You married that idiot?"

"Okay, that's it," Thomas said. "One more

crack about Matt and —”

“I’m sorry. Look, Tommy, we got a contract.”

Thomas cringed at *Tommy*. “Look, Chrissy,” he sneered, “I’m Rose Carter, that gives me clout. If I tell the publisher, I’m backing out of the contract with you, she’ll have to accept it. You can threaten to leave if you want, she won’t care, but she will damn well care, if I do. Got it?”

Christian sucked in some breath. “Okay, I won’t fuck Ryan anymore.”

“I want your word.” Thomas met his gaze. “It’s either Ryan, or me.”

“Um,” he ran his gaze over him.

“Me, as in Rose me.”

“Okay, I said I promise. Now, why don’t you come in and sit down. I’ll play some music and...”

Thomas gave him a look. “You got to be kidding. I’ll be in touch. One book, and that’s it.”

“I appreciate it.”

“You better.”

He walked for awhile, trying to figure out what had compelled him to get involved with that sleaze anyway. He’d felt sorry for him, wanted to give him a break, not to mention that *Steve Strong* aka Christian, had bugged the hell out of him. After a good half hour walk, Thomas hailed a cab and went home.

Matt was sitting on the sofa with Cole when he

walked in. They both looked up. Matt looked apprehensive. Thomas looked at Cole. "Christian won't be fucking Ryan anymore. That said, I suggest you resolve any ah..." he glanced at Matt, "unresolved issues you got going, because I can't guarantee that Ryan won't find a substitute if you don't."

He walked out of the room and went upstairs. He relaxed on the bed in the dark room for awhile, the hum of the television downstairs lulling him to sleep. When he opened his eyes again, Matt was lying beside him, his head on his chest. "How do I thank you?"

Thomas smiled. "Um," he murmured, kissing the top of his head and then unzipping his own jeans. "Well, let me show you where you can begin."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Matt was pacing the living room as Thomas sat on the sofa anxiously watching him.

"I don't know about a woman writing the movie, Matty."

"Will you just meet her, baby? Please? I like Elizabeth Crofthouse and I think you will, too. You will *love* her movies. She's...she's the coolest woman I ever met. Next to our niece."

Thomas grinned.

"So, let's watch her latest movie, *Sunswept*, and if you like it, I'll set up lunch."

"Lunch?" Thomas' smile widened. "That sounds very Hollywood."

Matt ran to him, dropping to his knees in front of him. "Thomas...this is going to be a long process. The movie might take a year to get in front of the cameras or it might take three. Now I'm the executive in charge of production that gives us total creative control. Elizabeth, if you end up liking her, will give you a lot of access to

the screenplay. She will let you read each draft, take into account your suggestions and the studio will know the source material is protected...and so is my husband, who wrote it in the first place."

Thomas looked into his eyes. "Am I getting this specialized treatment because you love me?"

Matt blinked. "I always looked after my writers when I was a studio executive...but yes."

"I spent a year writing and editing *Last Chance*. It's my baby. Sandra told me people wanted to make it into a movie and they were saying that I'm gonna be the next big thing and then we sell it and there's all this excitement...and then...a big nothing? Carly Ann Westaway doesn't seem to want to meet me and keeps cancelling our meetings and...and...somebody else is writing my screenplay...this is all normal?"

"Yes." Matt lifted his shoulders. "Writers are treated like shit in this town. Why do you think I walked away and wrote books, not movies?"

Thomas stared into Matt's eyes. "Sandra's so pissed at me."

Matt was sick of thinking about how everybody else in the world felt. Thomas had been so great about confronting Christian and dealing with Sandra's churlish behavior on the phone when he told her, he and Matt were married. The only people who mattered right now were Thomas and Matt.

"She's your publisher...our publisher. She is only pissed because we didn't invite her to the wedding." He slid his hands up Thomas' strong thighs. Thomas was wearing an old pair of Matt's flannel pajama bottoms and it was alluring. Was that normal? "Honey, we told her she can come to the wedding we have in Montreal."

"Montreal." Thomas looked spooked. Why was he having a hard time with the fact that Matt wanted to meet his mother? It had to happen eventually. He quickly changed the subject. They'd had enough family drama for a while.

"We'll invite Sandra to the set. Hey...we'll give her a walk-on part. That'll make it up to her."

Thomas seemed to be looking for arguments. "She wanted to be the one taking care of the studio stuff."

Matt frowned. "This isn't her area of expertise. It was out of her hands the day she signed the contract. The attorney she was working with...nice guy, but totally out of his depth. Thomas...what's the problem? Don't you trust me?"

"Of course I trust you."

"No, you don't. You're fighting me every step of the way on this."

"Oh, honey...it's just that I hoped we'd get some hot, cool gay author to do it."

"Rose Carter...we are getting the best *writer* for

the job, whoever that happens to be, man or woman."

"But what about somebody like Biff McGovern? He writes all those amazing Hollywood-based gay erotic fiction books. I love his work."

Matt sat back on his heels. "Biff McGovern? But that's the point. They're books. Not screenplays. Each studio has approved lists of writers they will work with. Thomas, with me watching your back, your material is protected. It will not be unrecognizable by the time it hits the theatres. "I guarantee you're going to meet Lizzie and you're going to love her. Neither of us will let a screenplay you don't approve one hundred per cent get anywhere near the production company. I will not let *anybody* screw my favorite writer around. Got that?"

"But a gay man would understand my characters so much better —"

"You love *Brokeback Mountain* and a woman wrote that."

This was true. Thomas seemed fresh out of arguments. Finally, he blew out a breath. "You're different when you're Mr. Dealmaker, Matt."

"Is that good or bad?"

"It's a total fucking turn on."

Matt reached up for Thomas' face and kissed him. "So, you ready to watch a little movie with no porn, no uncut cocks...no ass licking, no Mardi

Gras kissing?"

"Do I have to?" Thomas pretended to pout. "I would really prefer something with a little ass licking...some nice, tight come shots."

Matt laughed. "Tonight, we'll have some porn fun and ah...if you play your cards right while we're watching the movie, maybe I could arrange for a little...unscripted action right here on the sofa."

"Is the movie provocative?"

"Not at all. But being near you is guaranteed to get me all hot and bothered."

Thomas reached across the sofa and picked up the DVD cover, turning it over in his hands. "All right, let's watch it."

Matt kissed him. "Great, baby. I'll put it on." His cell phone rang and Matt hated seeing the tension bubble up so quickly in Thomas. He checked the readout. Cole. He switched the cell phone off. Ryan and Cole had intruded enough on his newlywed existence. To top it off, that dumb cow Carly Ann Westaway was giving him a week to assign an author, even though she was leaving town for three months to visit a movie set, get married and have a honeymoon.

Nothing would happen with the screenplay of *Last Chance* until she came back to Los Angeles. At least if he picked a writer he knew he could trust and rely on not to listen to the silly notes Carly

Ann Westaway was famous for, he would be a few steps ahead of the game. She had a list of five people she wanted for the job. Not one met his approval. That was when he suggested Elizabeth and Carly Ann threw out the word *inspired* and that left only Thomas to agree.

He didn't know her work and since Carly Ann cancelled meetings with him—both at the last minute—Thomas was very down on the whole Hollywood experience.

"Who was calling just now?" Thomas asked him as Matt slipped the DVD into the player. It was a little after nine in the morning and the mountain air was frigid.

"You want a fire, baby?" Matt asked Thomas, who lay on the sofa looking at him.

"No. I want to lie in your arms under a nice thick blanket and I want to know who called just now."

"I'll get the blanket. It was Cole."

Thomas seemed incredulous. "You sent him to voicemail?"

"They've wasted enough of our time."

"You really mean that, don't you?"

"Thomas, in case it's slipped your mind, we got married two days ago and so far it's been pretty miserable." He ran his hand over his face.

"Not completely," Thomas assured him and Matt felt bleak.

"We've had my brother here, his husband, my parents...my mad old Auntie Kay even got dragged into this nonsense. Geez...and now she's *really* nuts. She thinks she's Napoleon. His wife wasn't good enough, I guess."

"You're exaggerating again, darling. It wasn't Napoleon. She thinks she's Mary, Queen of Scots."

"What? You mean, when she was stomping around the house in my ski boots, she thought she was being Mary, Queen of Scots?"

"She was stomping around swampy marshes. The heather and the heath get muddy, remember?"

"Oh, God..." Matt's shoulders slumped. "You and Daphne kept me sane. I couldn't believe we had to sit here watching this...cabaret unfold. Thank God everybody finally went home. Cole and Ryan need to work this out."

"I'm worried about Daphne. The arguments can't be good for her. They should have left her here with us." Thomas looked stressed again.

Matt sighed. "It would have caused more problems. My parents love that baby."

"But they live so far away and we're so close."

"I know. It just would have been more drama. Thomas, the only kind I want is what we put on the written page and whatever goes on in our bed. That's nice, hot drama. I really, really have nothing more to say to my brother or Cole. But

God knows I love them both.” Matt glanced at him quickly. “In a brotherly way. I am *not* in love with Cole. Let me be clear on that.”

“I know, Matty. Can you please come and sit here now? I didn’t mean to make you tense and stressed out. I know you’ve been stuck in the middle of all of this.”

“We both have.” Matt went into the kitchen. He and Thomas had produced several meals for his family members over the last twenty-four hours. Oddly, it had been fun. Thomas seemed to be quite...comfortable with Matt’s family, despite the histrionics. They hadn’t had a chance to clean up yet, falling asleep late, waking up early to Carly Ann Westaway calling from the drive-through at Pioneer Chicken. He wondered how she managed to keep her figure with her unhealthy eating habits.

The coffee was ready. He put the coffee pot, cups and milk jug on a tray. With Thomas’ apprehensive gaze on him, he deposited it on the coffee table and dragged a blanket from the linen closet over to the sofa.

“I may hate your carpet-sorry, *our* carpet, but I love this sofa.” Thomas poured the coffee and Matt sat beside him, lying back against the huge sofa cushions. Thomas threw his body over him, covering them both with the blanket.

Matt, who was holding the remote, chuckled.

"This isn't a good movie viewing position, honey."

"It's not?" Thomas nuzzled him.

"No, this position says I'm going to be inside your ass ten seconds into the movie."

"Would that be so bad?"

Thomas kissed him. "No, no it wouldn't." He skipped through the coming attractions and straight to the feature. Thomas' hand was on his cock now, rubbing it through his pants. Matt moved Thomas' hand and put it around his body. The hand crept back and he leaned forward to grab his coffee cup. The credits rolled and the two men kissed with open-mouthed passion, their tongues lapping at one another. Matt almost lost every drop of coffee on the carpet.

"You're not supposed to kiss a man like that when he's holding a cup of scalding liquid," he chided.

"Do you realize we've never watched a movie before?" Thomas giggled. "Except for porn. You know what we should watch? We should watch *Pillow Talk*."

"No." Matt looked upset now. "He turned his face resolutely to the TV.

"What's the matter, baby? Why don't you want to watch that movie? You turned me onto Rock and Doris. It's our fantasy version of ourselves...it's—"

"It brings up bad memories of when I wasn't with you. That's the movie I watched to remind myself I believe in true love."

"Oh, Matt. Oh baby...you just say things that..." On the screen, he caught a glimpse of a white woman, a cigarette dangling from her lips, standing in the doorway of a bathroom. A teenage girl sobbing, was sitting in a bath tub filled with water.

"Go on. You just stick that coat hanger up inside you until the pains so bad you can't hardly breathe. Then you know you killed that baby for sure."

"No, mama, no."

The woman outside the tub reached down and slapped the girl hard. The girl shrieked as the woman reached between her legs, the screams becoming pitiful as the bathtub filled with blood.

Thomas snuggled deeper into Matt, whose arms tightened around him.

For the next one hundred minutes, Thomas lay in his husband's arms, not moving except to give or receive the occasional kiss and to wipe tears that just kept free falling down his face. When it was over, the two men lay there and Matt held Thomas in his arms.

"Wow," was all Thomas could say.

"Yeah. She deserved all the awards she got for that." Matt turned off the TV and extricated

himself gently from Thomas' arms.

"I don't know what to say. The emotion in that movie is so raw." Thomas sat up on the sofa, picking up the DVD cover again. "And she wrote this based on the woman's autobiography?"

Matt nodded. "It's not only faithful to the book, but in many ways better. Lizzie really worked with the writer...drew a lot of other stories from her."

"I love seeing your name on the credits here," Thomas grinned. "Have you missed it? Being in the thick of things?"

"No."

"So you really are going back for *me*?"

"Of course. I kick ass for the people I love, in case you hadn't noticed."

"I noticed. So, when is Elizabeth free for lunch? When can we meet her?"

"We'll call her right now." Matt picked up his cell phone and paced the room. Elizabeth answered on the second ring.

"Lover!" she cried. Evidently she had Caller ID. "Is it true you got married?"

"I got married," Matt laughed. "To an incredibly handsome Canadian hunk."

"You hooked a Canuck! Mazeltov!"

Matt laughed. He adored Elizabeth and was actually starting to feel guilty now about not inviting her to the wedding. "So, my husband and

I are wondering if you're free for lunch today? Has Carly Ann talked to you about Rose Carter's book?"

"No, she called my agent. I almost passed when she told me it was that twit Carly Ann. Do you know what a lunatic she is? She brought me in on a rewrite and it was a catastrophe. I got these crazy notes on pink *Barbie* paper and then she Fed Exed me a box of Gummi Bears." She paused to accommodate Matt's wild laughter. "Then I heard you were handling the movie and of course...I am beyond interested. Matty, are you very happy?"

Thomas was staring at him. "Yeah, I'm very happy, Lizzie. Listen, I want you two to meet. Have you got the book?"

"I can pick it up from my agent's office. She's right around the corner."

"Good. I want you to read it. You free for lunch today, say one o'clock? The old stomping ground?"

"The old...oh..." Elizabeth's voice fell away. "Oh, Matt...that would be wonderful. Your husband's name is Thomas, but he writes as Rose Carter?"

"That's him."

"So...this is gonna be like old times. First one there orders the Bloody Mary's."

Thomas was in his husband's arms before Matt ended the call.

“What’s the old stomping ground?”

“You’ll see, baby. You feel like a bit of a fumble in the shower, then we’ll head out and make you feel like the hotshot Hollywood writer you really are?”

Thomas kissed him hard. “No, I feel like fucking my husband until we’re both covered in sweat...then we can do...what you said.”

Matt felt himself hardening against Thomas’ warm thigh. “So it’s my turn to bottom?” he joked.

Thomas put his hand right through the front opening of Matt’s pajama bottoms and clenched his cock and balls in his fist. “Bend over, bitch.”

“Where?”

Thomas pointed to the sofa and he pushed Matt over the arm. He knelt behind him, sliding the pajamas down Matt’s legs. Matt felt the rush of breath against his thighs. He felt Thomas’ hands stroking his ass. A thumb was stroking his ass hole now, intermittently followed by very tentative tongue-tip licks. What was Thomas doing? The frustrating pattern of tiny licks and thumb swipes continued and then Thomas pulled Matt to the floor.

“Get on your hands and knees,” he barked.

Matt did as he was told, his pajamas still bunched around his knees. Thomas was behind him now, his rigid cock hard against Matt’s left leg. Thomas pressed his whole face into Matt’s ass,

kissing, licking, sucking, reaching for Matt's cock between his legs and licking from the base to the tip, pulling it out toward him. Matt arched his back as Thomas rose up, pointing his cock at Matt's ass hole.

"Push yourself back on me."

Matt pushed back and they both moaned as they once again had internal contact. Thomas gripped his hips, driving into him with a possessive force. Matt wasn't used to the quantity or the quality of the sex they'd been having, particularly since Thomas had come home with him. There was a sharp stab of pain as Thomas entered him and he steeled himself, on his elbows now, meeting Thomas' thrusts, loving the feel of having that cock buried all the way in him. His cock was hard and he longed to stroke it, but Thomas was keeping up such an aggressive pace he needed to keep his elbows on the floor to stay upright. And then it happened. Thomas knew it, too. That *titch*...that second in time when Thomas touched his prostate and the pressure...the discomfort was replaced by complete and total bliss.

Thomas reached underneath him, running his hand across Matt's belly. The fire from his prostate blazed up his spine, into his belly and Thomas' hand kept up a loving, rhythmic caress at total odds with the hard thrusts into Matt's ass. Matt

couldn't believe the range of feelings coursing through him until he arched back, back...harder...higher and Thomas' hand held Matt's belly tightly, seeking complete surrender. They were both coming...Thomas covering Matt's neck with kisses as he pumped harder still and Matt quivered at the feeling of his husband's orgasm exploding inside him.

He stayed on his knees, Thomas still glued to him and the two men panted. Conquest complete, Thomas put kisses all the way down Matt's back.

"I take back what I said about this carpet." Thomas reached underneath, running two fingers across Matt's cock head, tasting the juices. "This carpet is damned comfortable when you're fucking the tastiest piece of ass in Hollywood. It's got some cushion to it."

Matt's head dropped to his hands and he laughed.

"You know something else?" Thomas draped himself over Matt's body, his hands reaching for his face.

"What?" Matt was still shaking when Thomas kissed his cheek.

"You might be the first studio executive in history who just got *royally* screwed by a writer."

Matt laughed so hard they both fell sideways on the floor.

His cell phone rang as Matt pulled the Mustang out of the driveway. It was Thomas who answered it.

"Hey Cole. Matty's driving. We don't know where his Bluetooth is and with the hands-free law, you know...Matty says the cops are like vultures up here." There was a pause and Thomas laughed. "We don't know where anything is. The house is still a mess. I had to borrow some of his underpants and Matt had to borrow my toothbrush. I'm about to have my first Hollywood power lunch!"

Matt laughed as he pointed the car heading west. He checked for traffic on Mulholland and put a hand on Thomas' thigh.

"Where are we going?" Thomas asked him.

"Beverly Hills."

"Beverly Hills!"

Matt loved seeing the boyish joy on his face. Thomas listened to Cole talking and Matt debated between Laurel Canyon and Coldwater and chose Coldwater because it was prettier and more lush and because he wanted to see the look on his husband's face when they came down the canyon onto Beverly Drive and Thomas saw the famous palm trees that you saw in every Hollywood movie.

Thomas snapped the phone shut. "Cole says things are fine."

"Why am I sensing a but?"

"No buts." Thomas looked smug. "Ryan changed all the locks and he and Cole and the baby are going away for a few days."

Matt sighed. "*Black Point* was supposed to cement things for them."

"*Black Point* was for us, Matty. That's *our* place." He seemed to realize then that Matt's hand was on his leg and took it into both of his hands. "They're going to Malibu."

"Malibu?"

"Is that far from here?"

"About an hour."

"Cole said they're going to look for a new house there, right on the beach. Now he's caught Ryan twice in their house with that little turd Christian..."

"Excellent. Malibu's far enough away that they can't keep showing up every five minutes when I'm trying to make love to my husband."

Thomas was silent, but his fingers squeezed Matt's. "Do you think Ryan would have done it? You know, fucked Christian if Cole hadn't caught them in the garage?"

"I don't know...my heart says no."

"That's weird." Thomas' fingers laced through Matt's. "I feel the same way. I can't help feeling he would have stopped...just in time."

"I have no idea what he sees in Christian."

"Oh, I do."

"You do?" Matt almost drove off the side of the mountain road he was so surprised.

"I don't mean I personally find him attractive, but there is a thing he has."

"A thing." Matt wanted to pull over to the shoulder and have a major argument with Thomas.

"Yeah...you know...he's got a sort of confidence, you know? There are some guys that move through life operating from their waists down." Thomas grew quiet.

"What's wrong, baby?" Matt was worried now. He had to keep his eyes on the road, but Thomas seemed distant and sad.

"I miss Daphne. And if they move to the beach—"

"We will still see plenty of them. Thomas, I want to have a honeymoon. I want to go back to *Black Point*."

Thomas bit his lip and Matt glanced at him as they waited for the lights to change on Coldwater.

"I was just thinking about *Black Point*. It was so wonderful there. Is Malibu nice?"

"Not as nice as *Black Point*, so I'm taking you there as soon as possible."

"They want us to help them find a new house."

"No, they do not. They are not co-opting us into house hunting. That's their job. Cole won't listen

to anyone's opinion anyway."

"I sort of promised."

"After the honeymoon."

"You're serious then?"

"Of course I'm serious."

"Matt, really? I've never been on a honeymoon before."

"That makes two of us." The two men laughed as the lights finally changed. The car descended out of the valley floor and down into the ritziest part of town. Matt started telling Thomas where all the celebrities lived.

Thomas loved it all, laughing at Matt's descriptions and looking appropriately awed at the palm trees on Beverly Drive.

"See that house there, baby? That was Lucille Ball's house. She loved to play backgammon. My father played with her a couple of times at the Polo Lounge."

"The Polo Lounge!"

"Yeah—see the Beverly Hills Hotel—we'll go for a drink later. And oh...And this one is where James Stewart used to live." In Beverly Hills, he turned left on Little Santa Monica and then right.

"It's Rodeo Drive!" Thomas' head kept swiveling around and they parked in a structure Thomas remembered from the Brian de Palma movie, *Body Double*.

"I love it here!" he kept saying as they walked

down the street. Rodeo Drive had just had a huge makeover and the holiday decorations were still in place. Santa and his reindeer arced across the sky. The lampposts were all wrapped in big red velvet bows and there was a decided holiday atmosphere with obvious well-heeled tourists babbling in a variety of languages, hurried from store to store, taking advantage of the post-Christmas sales.

"Can we hold hands? Is this the gay part of town?" Thomas asked him, leaning in close.

"No to both questions, though I'll take you to West Hollywood after lunch. And you could grope my ass on the street and nobody would look twice." Matt gazed at Thomas lovingly and Thomas kissed his cheek.

"Is that all I get?" Matt huffed and Thomas kissed his mouth as a strange beeping sound came out of the crosswalk and people converged from all four corners across the road.

"See that hotel there, baby?" Matt jabbed his finger across the road. "Recognize it?"

Thomas scrunched his face. "Yes! The hotel from *Pretty Woman*." Matt took him up his favorite street, Little Rodeo Collection where the priciest stores in the whole city all jostled for space. It was a quaint street all the more beautiful for the multitude of poinsettias all over it.

"Oh, Matt, this is prettier than I ever expected."

They came down the stairs to Wilshire

Boulevard and walked another block.

"I grew up here and I remember all the old stores. It's changed so much." Matt stood at a corner with Thomas, blinking.

"What are you remembering?"

"There used to be a vintage car showroom right on that corner. And one day, I guess Ryan and I must have been about five, my dad brought us down here to give my mom a break and we took this old Packard for a test drive. My father looked so happy behind the wheel of that car. And we went all the way up Hollywood Boulevard and..." Matt paused, wondering where and why this memory had remained dormant for so long. "I remember a few cars on the hill and we stopped because they were stopped and I still can't believe it Thomas, but it really happened. Roy Rogers was riding Trigger down Hollywood Boulevard!"

Thomas smiled. "Did he really?"

Matt nodded. "He even waved to us. We drove my father crazy for about a year after that, begging him for a pony."

"What about Damien, honey? You never talk about him?"

Matt felt wounded. It was a sharp knife wound to the heart thinking about Damien. "I don't know what to say. It devastates me that my brother is so unhappy. I honestly can't even explain it. We had a fantastic childhood, Thomas..."

"Oh, Matt. I can see that. Can I tell you something? I've loved being around you all. Your family...it's the kind of family I dreamed about and I feel I got let into this wonderful, warm, pot of honey...sometimes people just get lost. He'll find his way back. I am sure of it."

"Thank you, baby. That was a beautiful thing to say." He put his arms around Thomas. He didn't care if he wasn't supposed to be affectionate in public. He needed to hold him. Thomas hugged him back and the feeling was indescribable. It was what he'd told Thomas before. He wasn't alone anymore.

"He's going to come out of that place and think the world's gone mad."

"Why do you say that?" Thomas held Matt's face in his hands.

"Well for one thing, there's me, his lone wolf brother now a happily married man and Ryan's the family fuck-up."

Thomas laughed.

Matt put his arm around Thomas, touching the small of his back as they reached a cavernous doorway. "We're here."

Thomas looked up and read the vertical letters of the restaurant's name. Kate Mantilini. "Hey, isn't this supposed to be a celebrity hot spot?"

Matt grinned. "You'll find a lot of writers and directors here and some of the more serious actors.

You won't find Britney Spears though. No paparazzi. Oh...and look, here's our sexy lunch date."

A tall African American woman with dreadlocks, a vintage, purple cashmere sweater buttoned over a 1940s knee length dress and combat boots was waiting just inside the doorway. She put her arms around Matt who immediately drew Thomas to him.

Elizabeth smiled shyly at Thomas. "So, you're my love rival. I should have snapped this man up when I had the chance." Matt laughed and she shucked his chin. "You picked yourself a hottie, Matt."

"Didn't I, though?"

"And I wasn't invited to the wedding because?"

"Nobody was invited. Just family."

"Was your crazy aunty there?"

"She was there." Thomas grimaced. "She slipped me some tongue."

"Is that all? You're lucky." Elizabeth threaded her arm through Thomas' as the waitress who wore a long, crisp white apron led them to a booth on the right side of the room. "I went to a party once at Ryan and Cole's and she introduced herself to me, took out her teeth and asked me to hold them for her."

Thomas laughed and as they slid in beside one another, Matt felt a little redundant as his husband

and his friend proceeded to click. Beyond click. They forgot Matt was even alive. He supposed that was good. He looked around for the waitress. He and Thomas hadn't had anything beyond a cup of coffee for breakfast and he was starving.

"Matt?"

He instantly turned his head at the sound of Thomas' voice. He was like Pavlov's Dog. Conditioned to drool each time Thomas spoke to him.

"Matt, I'm so happy!" Thomas reached across the table and took his hand. Matt didn't give a fuck if it wasn't classy for two men to hold hands in public. He perused the impossibly dense menu and the day's specials on the glass board behind the bar.

"Do we all want Bloody Mary's?" Elizabeth asked as the waitress came back.

"Yes," the guys answered in unison.

"Do you have the Dungeness Crab salads today?" Matt asked.

"Yes, we do."

"Cool. Lizzie, you want your usual, the fish tacos?"

"Yes," she grinned. "And one of those salads." He looked at Thomas whose face shone.

"Me, too," he grinned, his attention returning to Elizabeth who raved about *Last Chance* and how she envisioned the movie.

Matt plundered the breadbasket when it arrived, earning a frown from Thomas when he took his hand away from him.

"You know, we'll have to tone down the gay sex for a mainstream movie," Elizabeth was saying. She took a healthy slug of her Bloody Mary as soon as it touched the table. "It'll still be hot though." She turned her head to Matt. "Who are you thinking of as a director?"

Matt shrugged and tossed a piece of olive-oil soaked rosemary bread into his mouth. Thomas' hand reached for his again and Matt felt his toes curling in his shoes.

"We could go gay, arty...but I would love a big Hollywood director. That would shut the anti-gay parade up, wouldn't it?" He kissed Thomas' hand and grinned.

"Aren't you going to kiss my hand?" Elizabeth held her hand out to him and all three of them laughed.

"Sorry, doll. These lips are spoken for."

"He's my bitch you know," Thomas grinned at her.

"There goes my macho reputation."

"Oh, you had one?" Elizabeth chewed on a celery stalk. "By the way, Thomas, I read lots of gay erotic fiction and I don't know if Matt told you I dabble a little in writing it."

"You write it?" Thomas looked stunned.

"Sure. You mean, he really didn't tell you?"

"No." Thomas withdrew his fingers from his husband's firm grip.

"Hey!" Matt protested.

"Anything I might have read?" Thomas was being polite, Matt knew. He knew Thomas was about to get the shock of his life and watched his face for the results.

"I don't know. You read much gay erotic fiction?" Elizabeth was such a tease.

"Well, yeah, since I write it. Some authors I never miss...I love Matt's work obviously. And there's Victor J. Banis and oh...Maltese. I love William Maltese. And there's another semi legend I'm really into. Biff McGovern. I love his gay spy turned movie star stories."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really." Thomas sipped at his drink. "Why?"

"Because," Elizabeth grinned. "I'm Biff McGovern."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Thomas' face registered a myriad of emotions. Finally, he seemed to be breathing again. "Oh my God...Matt...I told you Biff McGovern should be writing my screenplay! Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's a well kept secret. You're Thomas' husband. I'm trusting you with that." Elizabeth reached into a cut-glass jar holding extra celery stalks and dunked it into her spicy drink.

"How come they've never made a movie out of one of your books?" Thomas asked her.

"My stuff's a little too close to home. Now, let's talk about actors. Who do you see in the roles of..."

Matt started to drift. Elizabeth was perfect. She had Thomas enthralled and he knew that she would turn in a great screenplay. Her first drafts were notoriously long and fluid, as he liked to call it. This meant that he and Thomas would be able to read it and decide how to streamline it and her

second draft would be excellent. By the time the senior studio executives got it and handed in their own notes, the three of them would know exactly what they wanted and would be one voice in any discussion.

By the time they ordered coffee, Thomas was relaxed and happy and Matt left the table for a few moments, knowing Thomas was in writer heaven. He was having a whale of a time, listening to a genuine Hollywood mover and shaker talking in glowing terms about his book. He took his cell phone outside and called his mother.

"What's the matter?" His mother sounded frantic. Since Ryan and Cole's romantic fiasco, Elise flipped out when she saw any of their names and numbers on Caller ID.

"Nothing, mom. Everything's beautiful. I just need your help."

She took a breath. "You do?" She lived for those words.

"I want you to book me and Thomas a honeymoon in *Black Point*. I've just emailed you the link for the house Cole rented. I want to fly out as soon possible for ten days. After the ten days, I want you and Dad to bring the baby out for a few days alone. I'm thinking that beach house we used to rent in *Kailua*, that would be beautiful, wouldn't it?"

"Oh..." Elise sounded like she was going to cry.

"We'll hang out, just the five of us. Let's say, three, four days. Thomas and I want to spend time with you and dad and the baby. And then for the final week, you can book Ryan and Cole to come out and join us. There'll be plenty of room. And the beach house is fun because it has that huge yard for Daphne. I have no idea how long it's going to be before we all get time to relax and enjoy our family like this again."

"Oh...that's a wonderful idea." She was already at the computer. He could hear her fingers moving across the keys.

"I'm going to email you my credit card details. Call me as soon as you've booked it."

"You're paying for this? I don't know, Matt...I think your father and I..."

"Have done enough for all of us. Just call me okay. And, Mom, thanks."

She blew him a kiss and he went back to the table. Elizabeth was filling Thomas in on her tangled love life. A fifty year old, divorced male Pakistani heart surgeon in London whom Elizabeth loved on and off again. Then there was Arkie, her twenty-three year old model girlfriend who was a firecracker in the sheets and a drug-addled bitch out of them.

"I went to meet her in Paris for Fashion Week and I found her in bed with another woman."

"Oh, my God! I'm sorry." Thomas looked

stricken.

"I wasn't." Elizabeth looked dreamy. "Hottest threesome I ever had."

Matt and Thomas roared with laughter.

"Say Mattie, did you know the Parisian government lends out free bicycles for people to ride?"

"We read that in the paper coming back from Montreal." He looked at Thomas. He wanted to get him home for a quickie and then to pack.

"They want to introduce it here," Elizabeth was saying. "How many of them do you think will get stolen?" She plunged onto another topic as Matt paid the check.

Thomas seemed stunned by Elizabeth's blazing energy. Matt was used to her and just enjoyed her marvelous storytelling.

"I think I need a long nap," Thomas whispered as she took a break for the restroom.

"A nap? I could go for that," Matt grinned at him as Thomas' fingers reached under the table and groped for his thigh. Matt's cell phone rang. Cell phones were strictly forbidden in the restaurant and he glanced at the readout, ignoring the furious glares left and right.

"Guess what, babe? The nap's gonna have to wait. In three and a half hours, your husband is taking you back to *Black Point*."

"Are you...are you kidding?"

"Nope. But first, we have a little shopping to do." He reached for Thomas' hand and they left the booth, meeting Elizabeth at the door. She kissed them both on both cheeks and took off, text messaging as she barreled down the street to her next appointment.

Thomas and Matt held one another's hands all the way back to Rodeo Drive, entering Geary's department store.

"This is one of the few, original department stores left here," Matt told him. "Thomas, have you ever had a *Montblanc* pen?"

"No, I haven't. I've thought about buying one, but it always seemed a frivolous thing to do. I—"

Matt had steered them toward the counter that held trays of them under immaculately polished glass. "Pick one."

Thomas hesitated and Matt insisted. "Carly Ann Westaway has one and it bothers me that she's an idiot and you're not. You're an actual writer who will write beautiful words with yours and not just make doodles. I want you to have one."

"Oh, Matty..." Thomas sighed as Matt leaned into him. "You're a writer, too, you know. I should be buying you one."

"When you make your first million, you can honey. What do you think of this one?" He pointed to the new Marlene Dietrich line, named

for the screen goddess.

Thomas was reading the literature. "*I am at heart a gentleman...* oh Thomas, this is it. This is my pen. She was a woman who thought she was a man and I am a man who writes as a woman."

"Done." Matt reached across the counter with his credit card.

"But it's so expensive," Thomas whispered.

"I'm only getting married once." Newly wrapped pen in hand, he whipped Thomas away, up the street to another store and Thomas gripped his hand.

"How long are we going away for?"

"Um...well, do you want me to spoil all your surprises?"

"I'm not too big on surprises, Matty. As a kid, they usually turned out to be unpleasant."

"Well..." they stopped at a crosswalk. "Our honeymoon is ten days."

"Ten days. In our house in *Black Point*?"

"Yes...and then...well, I've arranged for my parents to bring the baby to *Hawaii*. We've rented a house on the beach at *Kailua*, the most beautiful beach in all the islands. We'll have a few days with them and then Cole and Ryan will join us for another week." Thomas wasn't saying anything and as they crossed the road, Matt got nervous. "Umm...so what do you think?"

"I love the idea of being with the baby and your

parents for a few days...I already miss her. Is that crazy?"

"No," Matt laughed. "She's your niece."

"And I love that we're moving to a separate house for the family time."

"Well, of course. As you said before, *Black Point* is our place. I intend to take you back there every year. Until we can buy it. Mmm....I should enquire about that."

Thomas grinned. "Where are you taking me now?"

"Well, I was thinking, we could shop and sightsee, but we really don't have time and, since you suggested a nap...and I love your suggestions by the way, I'm thinking more of a standing nap."

"A standing nap?"

"Yes. I've never fucked you in a public restroom, but the one George Michael got arrested in is right in the middle of the park over there. I don't mind bottoming up again...and then we should go home and pack."

"Won't we get arrested?"

"No, we're not soliciting anybody. No money is exchanging hands."

"What if we get caught?"

"Part of the thrill, honey."

Thomas looked at him, looked at the long, flat building that was a notorious piece of gay iconic history and pulled Matt to him.

"I always wanted to play policeman, Matty. Next time we do this, I'm bringing handcuffs."

In the darkened restroom, Matt and Thomas alternately giggled and sighed as they fumbled at each other's pants. There were two stalls and Thomas pushed Matt into the second one, shoved him back against the locked door and as they stroked each other's hard cocks. Thomas sighed as his mouth reached for Matt's.

Somebody walked in and was peeing into the urinal now, but they didn't care. Thomas stroked the lovely ass he'd just vigorously fucked that morning and, with Matt's tongue in his mouth, he slid into him. They both moaned.

The guy at the urinal chuckled and for a second they froze.

"Have fun, boys." His voice was low, guttural. He walked out again.

Thomas fucked harder now, Matt's hands curled over the edge of the two low walls as Thomas held his ass in his hands. Matt raised his legs and Thomas skewered him, harder and faster and they both came quickly, Matt's head hitting the door.

"Yeah..." Thomas growled. "Next time, I'm cuffing you and taking you from behind."

Matt felt his cock getting hard all over again.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Matt laid naked out on the black lava rocks of *Black Point*, just outside the house. The rhythmic tap of Thomas' fingers on the keyboard of his laptop lulled him into sleep. Three days into the world's most fantastic honeymoon and they hadn't been able to tear themselves away from the beach or their bed. One stop at Foodland the day they arrived and they'd loaded up on food, champagne, even a few pair of board shorts. They were now down to three spoonfuls of coffee and a swig of milk in a carton.

The typing stopped and he opened his eyes, looking up as Thomas came down to him from the *lanai*, where he'd been working.

"You're wearing entirely too many clothes," Matt grinned.

Thomas dropped his shorts and sat beside him on the rocks. "It's hard to work when there's this hot and gorgeous merman lying out here all alone." He leaned down and kissed him.

"Mmm...you taste of the sun."

Matt held him close. "I dream about you at night and even during the day. I love you even when I'm sleeping."

Thomas rewarded him with another kiss.

"Why do I feel like you're buttering me up?"
Matt grinned.

"Aren't I allowed to show appreciation for my muse?"

"Absolutely."

"But since you mentioned it...we should shop."

"I was kinda thinking that."

"Can we order food online here?"

Matt grinned. "We can try, but how about we go and buy more fabulous stuff and come back and explore one another again?"

"We don't have to go too far, do we?"

Matt sat up now and Thomas scooted between his legs.

"Nope. Not far." Matt kissed Thomas' hair. "Say, do you think the world is still in one piece? You think Cole and Ryan are behaving?"

"I don't care,"

"Nope. Neither do I. Oh, baby...look!" He pointed across the horizon. Humpback Whales were breaching in the distance, their voices reaching Matt and Thomas. The two men were still, watching the profound moment.

"Wow..." Thomas breathed finally and turned

around for another kiss. This one left them both breathless.

"Can we hold off on food shopping until later?" Matt pleaded.

"Hey, you're the one who wanted to go shopping, not me," he shrugged.

"Well, I don't want to anymore." Matt shook his head. He disengaged himself from Thomas, and got to his feet, reaching down and pulling Thomas up with him. God, he still couldn't believe sometimes how in love he was. When Thomas stood there looking at him like that, it was like seeing the sunset for the first time. There were no words, no words at all. And if he could have literally crawled inside of his skin at that moment, he would have. He swallowed something that tasted like fear, although there was nothing to fear, except if Thomas ever decided to take the sun away.

"What?" Thomas cocked his head, all that dark hair, now sun kissed, falling into his lean face. "Are you all right?"

Matt laughed half-heartedly. "Why? Do I seem sick?"

"No, but...you kind of faded out on me there for a second." He reached out and touched his cheek.

"No, it's just that I actually felt your soul."

Thomas smiled awkwardly, flushing a little. He

met his gaze. "My soul?"

Matt shook his head. "Forget it. Let's go inside." He marched off across the sandy beach, holding his hand, Thomas trailing behind him.

When they got to the front door, Matt dragged Thomas to him, shutting the door with the other hand. He kissed him hard, with a determination impossible to misinterpret.

"Um, very convenient, you being naked," Thomas muttered, laughing as Matt pushed him against the wall.

"You, too," Matt breathed, running his hands over Thomas' chest. "Allows me to have my way with you." Suddenly he broke away from him. "Come on, in the bathroom."

"Bathroom?" Thomas laughed. "Why the bathroom?"

"Stop being so curious," Matt chastised him, dragging him by the arm down the hallway. "Now, wait here."

"No, no," Thomas protested. "Where are you going?"

"I'm coming back," Matt called out, racing into the bedroom and rummaging through his suitcase. "A-ha," he called out when he located the small bag, which was still stapled at the top.

Thomas raised an eyebrow when Matt appeared again, ripping open the bag with his teeth.

"What in the world is that?"

"Ta da!" He sang out, dangling a pair of padded handcuffs in the air.

"You got to be kidding," Thomas howled with laughter.

"Don't laugh, boy," Matt gave him an intense look. "Who's going to be whose bitch now? Get over in front of the shower bar and get your hands up."

Thomas smirked. "Oh, strange man, who is kind of cute, don't hurt me," he mocked in a faint little voice.

Matt, who was doing his best to be serious, paused as he lifted one of Thomas' arms to the bar, and started to laugh, sobering right away and clicking the cuff together. "Shut up, boy, or you'll make this worse for yourself." He scowled at him.

Thomas' lips quivered. "Oh please, Mr., I'm just a little virgin boy who doesn't know what to do."

That did it. Matt howled. "Stop it," he protested, trying to fasten the second cuff to the bar. "You're not playing fair."

"I'm sorry, baby," he said softly. "Am I ruining your fantasy?"

Matt stood back. He ran his gaze over him, licked his lips. Goddamn, if he wasn't beautiful. "Oh no," he whispered. What a sight he was, standing there, his chest heaving slightly, his cock totally erect, all those smooth, hard muscles. He

couldn't have imagined anything more erotic than this in his deepest, most depraved imagination. And he was his. It was almost tempting to want to keep him like this forever, imprisoned here in *Black Point*, naked, ready. But of course, only a mad man would do such a thing, although he'd never thought he could understand the motives. Now he did.

"Matt, you're gone again," Thomas told him.

He grabbed Thomas' face between his hands, kissed his mouth hard. Thomas' mouth opened to his, moaned a little as Matt let his hand trail down over his chest and lightly fondle his cock. "Your body is mine," Matt whispered against his mouth. "Say it," he urged.

"I'm yours," he replied.

"Your body, your cock, your ass, this mouth, every inch of you."

"Yes," he breathed.

Matt wrapped his hand around his cock, and squeezed, then he began to stroke it, jerking it up and down, all the while his tongue moved around one of his nipples.

Thomas' breathing came in gasps.

"I'm going to fuck you," he told Thomas, his forehead now pressed against Thomas' chest. It was amazing. Thomas was completely at his mercy, and yet, it was he that felt helpless.

"Um, yes, fuck me," Thomas invited.

"I didn't ask permission," Matt replied, stepping into the bathtub behind him.

Thomas turned his head and glanced at him, but he didn't comment.

Matt knelt in the tub and opened Thomas to him. He laved his opening while both hands moved over his hard, muscled thighs and massaged his balls, played roughly with a lively cock that was on the verge of expressing itself in the most provocative way.

"Matt, Christ," Thomas growled.

Matt stood. He yanked Thomas into him and impaled him on his cock.

The sudden impact of Matt slicing in Thomas' ass drove Thomas' cock into spasm. Matt clutched it possessively, feeling the come running through his fingers, trying hard to contain it, as his own cock proceeded with its own agenda, delving in and out of Thomas' beautiful ass. Ecstasy. He came hard inside of him, his face buried against one of Thomas' strong shoulders. He knew at that moment that he could never live without him, without this. His body shuddered.

Thomas' head came back, seeking Matt's mouth. They kissed tenderly, murmuring their pleasure. Matt wrapped his arms around Thomas, held him and closed his eyes as he rested his head against Thomas' back.

"You know, I have to say this. For a rapist,

you're awfully pretty."

Matt raised his head. He smiled. He couldn't quite bring himself to laugh though. That fear crept back suddenly. He tightened his hold on Thomas. Once they left *Black Point*, they would be headed into un-chartered waters. There were some major changes coming around the corner. They had weathered the Cole thing, but even that wasn't over. Thomas had let it drop for some reason. He hadn't asked him to tell him everything. Matt was grateful to him for that on one hand, but a part of him still felt he should tell him everything, afraid that one day, it would come back to bite him in the ass. But for now, as long as everything went all right between Cole and his brother, it would remain in the past. Maybe that's where it belonged after all.

God, he had so much to lose, more than he'd ever believed possible. Right now, all he wanted was to keep Thomas here, like this, hooked to the stupid shower rod where no one could touch them.

"Matt? Are you all right?" Matt kissed his shoulder tenderly, but he didn't move, didn't speak.

"Are you going to let me go now?"

"Not just yet," Matt whispered. "Oh please, Thomas, not just yet."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

A. J. Llewellyn lives in California, but dreams of living in Hawaii. Frequent trips to all the islands, bags of Kona coffee in his fridge and a healthy collection of Hawaiian records keep this writer refueled. A. J. loves male/male erotica, has a passion for all animals (especially the dog, the cat and the turtle). A. J. believes that love is a song best sung out loud.

A. J.'s website is located at:

<http://www.ajllewellyn.com>

A. J. can be reached at this email:

AJ@AJLlewellyn.com

Visit his myspace page at:

www.myspace.com/ajllewellyn

I write not only for my own pleasure, but for the pleasure of my readers. I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't written and told stories. When I'm not writing, I'm dreaming about writing, doing something wild and adventurous, or trying to make the world a better and more open minded place to live in. I adore beautiful men, and I know I'm not alone in this! Eroticism between consenting adults, in all its many forms is the icing on the cake of life!

D. J.'s website is located at:

<http://www.djmanly.com/>