



# Arsenic and Rio

D. J. Marley

# *Arsenic and Rio*

*By*

*DJ Manly*

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## Chapter 1

As Marshall stood looking out the window at Havendale House, he wondered what was more miserable, him or the weather.

As the wind moaned around him, he rubbed his hands together for a minute and tried to feel something beside numbness. The only sensation that assaulted him was loss as the rain slashed against the pane glass window.

He knew all about these places. Only damaged goods were sent here, refuge from the streets, “troubled youth”. Losers, living together in cleverly disguised buildings, which were weaved into the fabric of a typical middle class neighbourhood.

But no one was really fooled.

The director of Havendale House was a psychologist by the name of Frank Barter. He had been standing outside last night when the two police officers had deposited Marshall at the front door. Barter was a tired looking middle-aged man who spoke very slowly, as if everyone had problems understanding the English language.

Having hastily introduced himself and scribbled his name on the clipboard, one of the cops shoved at him and he ushered Marshall to his room. Before leaving, he said, “It’s late now. Get some sleep and we’ll talk tomorrow, Marshall.”

His roommate was a younger kid named Gaston Turgeon, a chubby redhead with a big mouth. He talked nonstop from the moment Marshall walked into the room. He was one of those mixed French and English kids who didn’t speak either language well.

Gaston announced to him that he was fourteen and loved heavy metal and pot. Then he proceeded to list his favourite groups and

detail the reasons why he felt so inspired by their songs. After talking for almost twenty minutes without receiving so much as a nod of acknowledgement, Marshall finally looked at him and said, "Haven't you noticed I haven't said a fucking word since you began blabbering?"

"Yeah..." Gaston laughed, "Hey, why not? Can't you talk?"

"Figure it out, genius." He replied softly, giving him a meaningful glare. He then turned on his side and closed his eyes.

Gaston stopped talking.

\* \* \* \*

In the morning, rather than follow the others down to the dining room, Marshall stayed in his room looking out the window. It was still raining and somehow that made him feel less alone. When a young woman suddenly walked into his room, he knew she was some kind of counsellor. They all had that same expression on their faces, some combination of compassion and apprehension.

"Marshall?" She smiled. "I'm Susan. Welcome to Havendale House."

Marshall met her eyes and then looked at the floor. "You can't keep me here. I'm almost eighteen."

"You have been mandated by the courts to be here, Marshall. There is nothing we can do about that, but we can do something about the future." Her voice was soothing and optimistic.

He had heard that tone before like a well-rehearsed script.

"Bet you say that to all the boys," Marshall smirked, his voice mocking.

"Ah, you have a sense of humour," she grinned. "You must be hungry. Why don't you come down for some breakfast? Frank will want to see you later, go over the house rules and set up counselling sessions."

"I'm not hungry, thanks." Marshall turned his back.

"Suit yourself."

A few hours later, the one called Susan came back to his room. Marshall lay on the bed, his battered overstuffed duffel bag under his feet. "Marshall," she said, "it's lunch time. Won't you come and have a sandwich or something?"

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Marshall sat up and looked at her. "I told you, I'm not hungry."

"Frank wants to see you at one o'clock. Go see Gracie at the front desk and she'll show you where Frank's office is, okay?"

He shrugged. "Whatever."

"In the meantime, why don't you have a look around? It's a pretty nice house. We have five residents here, ranging from the ages of fourteen to eighteen."

"It's not a house," Marshall told her, meeting her eyes, "it's a prison."

She sighed. "Anyway, feel free to move around."

"Can I feel free to move around outside the door, too?" He quipped.

"You don't have that privilege yet. That's up to Frank. He will discuss it with you later."

"I'm sure he will," Marshall responded without expression.

\* \* \* \*

Susan watched him as he got up and went over to the window again. He was a handsome boy, quite beautiful really, with shoulder length dark curly hair and soft sherry brown eyes. He was far too thin and it made him look delicate. In spite of his Italian heritage, he was quite pale. She would remind Frank to make an appointment for a physical next week to determine if he was healthy. She knew, given his background, that HIV was a possibility.

He was uncooperative, but so were many of the boys when they first arrived. It usually took some time for them to adjust to life in the group home. What disturbed her most about Marshall is that he seemed so sad, disconnected really. There was something missing in his eyes. She hated to admit but usually when they came in that way, it was already too late.

\* \* \* \*

By the time Marshall left his room, it was well after one o'clock. He had fallen asleep, then figured he might as well go and hear what this Frank guy had to say. He wandered the carpeted hallway where three

other bedrooms and a bathroom were located. There were two other rooms that said *Private* on the doors.

He ended up in a big dining room where two women were cleaning off one long table and a smaller one near a picture window that was nicely decorated and clean. Beside the kitchen door was a flight of stairs leading into a basement. At the bottom of the stairs was a large recreation room where two boys played ping-pong. The boys barely glanced at him. Marshall left and headed back upstairs to the dining room. He had taken the wrong direction.

The kitchen workers, two women with skin as black as ebony, gave him curious looks when he reappeared. They didn't speak to him. He made his way past the bedrooms again, then turned the corner. A desk was situated next to the front door. Behind it sat a rather homely woman with gray hair. She was talking on the phone as he approached.

She immediately put down the receiver when she saw him and issued him a forced smile. "There you are. We have been hunting all over for you. Marshall Calletti, right?" She massaged the back of her neck for a moment. "Frank is waiting for you."

"Sorry, I got lost."

She eyed him, pressed a button and opened the door beside her. She picked up the phone again and said, "We found him. He's here. Go in. It's the door on your left. He's waiting," she urged.

The man named Frank Barter opened his door just as Marshall was about to turn the handle. He was not much to look at, balding and short, a pudgy little man with thick-rimmed glasses and rings of sweat under the arms of his peach coloured shirt. "We were waiting for you, Marshall. Please, come in and sit down." He directed him to a chair.

"Who are 'we'?" Marshall asked, looking around.

"Just an expression. No one, just you and me."

Marshall looked around him. The office was small, not much bigger than a broom closet. A pile of file folders rested on the floor, some on his desk and others jammed together on a shelf fixed to the wall. There was no window and right above them, an old ceiling fan clunked away. An expensive looking computer sat on his desk as well as a jug of ice water. On the wall was a picture of a redheaded woman and three boys, ranging from about the age of twelve to sixteen.

Frank poured some water into a glass and asked Marshall if he

wanted some.

“No thanks,” Marshall looked down at his hands. This office was bizarre. It made him feel claustrophobic.

Frank opened a file and began thumbing through it, then closed it and looked at him. “Susan says you don’t want to eat.”

“Not hungry. Am I breaking some kind of a law or something?” He met his eyes.

“Not yet, but you will have to eat eventually.”

“Guess so...sometime,” Marshall replied with a shrug.

Frank reached over and lifted the receiver of the phone. He pressed a button and said, “Gracie, hold my calls.” He hung up without waiting for her to answer. “I’d like to talk about your file.”

Marshall sighed. “Whatever. You have the power.” He picked at the material of the chair. “Do I have a choice?”

\* \* \* \*

Frank Barter studied him for a minute. He was a good-looking kid and the evaluation by the police psychologist intrigued him. He certainly seemed to fit the profile, but he planned to be more careful this time. Last time, it had been a disaster.

“Let’s talk about you first, Marshall... You have quite a history here, arrested several times for prostitution, petty theft and vandalism. You appear to have slipped through the system, released into the custody of a twenty-nine year old man posing as your uncle, an Art Anderson. Yet you never spent more than a night locked up. You were always bailed out. Can you tell me about that, Marshall?”

\* \* \* \*

“You tell me. You have the file,” Marshall replied dryly.

“He was your pimp, wasn’t he?”

“He took care of me.”

“But he made money from your sexual activities, lived off you?”

“We took care of each other.” Marshall bit his lip.

“Mr., ah...Anderson died of a heroin overdose. Is that right?”

He nodded and looked away.



"You were there with him, called the ambulance?"

"Yeah, but ambulances don't come too quickly in that part of the city. They figure one less scum to worry about."

"You sound bitter."

"He was my friend."

"Strange choice for a friend, a guy who lives off the sexual activities of a kid and buys heroin with the earnings," Frank replied simply.

"How long were you associated with Mr. Anderson, Marshall?"

"He took me in when I was twelve."

"And what about your parents?"

"You know about my parents. It's in the file."

"I'd rather hear it from you." Frank leaned forward.

Marshall sighed, "Okay, my father was a drunk and died of alcohol poisoning when I was ten. My mother is nuts and in a hospital somewhere for the criminally insane. She tried to stab me with a butcher knife."

"You saw a psychologist when the police arrested you, two weeks after Mr. Anderson's death. Am I right?"

"Jesus, are you stupid or do you just enjoy playing the same song over and over?" Marshall threw up his hands. "Yes, I saw a fucking shrink and he was weirder than you are. And I wasn't arrested!"

"Watch the language, Marshall. Calm down. Take a breath."

"Yeah, right. Take a breath."

"You were taken into custody then. You were not arrested at that time, but it was clear you were selling your body on the streets and taking drugs. No charges were filed, but you were deemed a troubled youth in need of protection."

"I was not doing drugs," Marshall scowled. "I smoked a bit of weed, that's all. The hard stuff, I never touch. I'm not that stupid."

"I see. It's interesting how you've been able to slip through the cracks all this time, Marshall."

"Because I was allowed to slip through the cracks. The system is so clogged up, they have no time to go looking for more," he replied with a shrug. "Lot of fucked up people out there."

"How long have you been on your own?"

"Since they took my mother away to the crazy house, just before my twelfth birthday."

"You ran away from the foster home they placed you in after your mother was institutionalized."

"You win a thousand points," Marshall said.

"Were you mistreated there or was it because you didn't bother giving it a chance?" Frank Barter lifted an eyebrow.

"Look," Marshall bit his lip, "let me tell you something about life. Life sucks and there are very few people who really give a damn about anyone except themselves and when they're nice to you...well, they want something. That's just the way it is. Art...well, he might have profited from what I did but, he never abused me and our relationship was mutual. You know what I mean? We suited each other."

Barter nodded. "Yes, I know what you mean. Ever think about seeing your mother?"

"Why in hell would I want to see her?" Marshall sneered. "She tried to kill me."

"You understand she's sick."

"Yeah, her and ten thousand other people," Marshall shrugged.

"All right, Marshall, let's leave it for today. Next time, I would appreciate it if you showed up on time."

"When can I get out of here?"

"You were court mandated here for treatment, Marshall. The length of time is determined by..." Frank began, looking at his file again.

"I know about that shit, I mean outside this place?" Marshall threw up his hands. "Am I to be a prisoner here?"

"When I think you are ready, I will grant you a pass. First, you will start eating. I will have a doctor check you out to make sure you are healthy. Did you practice safe sex out there, Marshall?"

Marshall rolled his eyes. "Yes, yes, yes. I know about AIDS."

"Have you been tested?"

"No, 'cause I feel fine."

"Says you completed grade eight on your file, but I will arrange for you to take the educational assessment test this week to determine what level you are really at."

"Looks like I'm going to be a busy little beaver, doesn't it?" Marshall sneered.

"Seems so," Frank rose out of his chair. "Ask Gracie for a list of

the house rules and the time schedule. If you have any questions, don't hesitate. Any questions so far?"

Marshall stood. "None. But I might as well tell you, you're wasting your time on me, not to mention taxpayers' money."

"Why would you say that?" Frank leaned

"I'm a loser. I was born one and will probably die one. Go save some other kid from a life of deviant."

Frank fell silent and Marshall left the office.

## Chapter 2

Hal Makin heard the phone ringing from his fire escape but he didn't bother to answer it. His apartment was rather stuffy without a lot of air circulation and he had spent most of the afternoon outside. After the rain had finally stopped, the heat came back with a vengeance. It was strange weather for this time of year.

He knew he should really move out of this place. It was a hole. He could afford a lot better, but then Frank wouldn't like it if he got too flashy with the money. It pissed him off that he had all this money he couldn't spend.

Finally, he climbed back inside his window, and when the phone rang again, he picked it up. "Yeah, yeah, hello, it's me. Better be good," he said, throwing himself into a lazy boy.

"Jesus Christ, where in hell have you been all day?" Frank demanded hotly.

"Nowhere, taking it easy. Damn hot in this place. What's got your balls in such a dither?"

"Watch the language, Hal. We need to talk."

"I'm not one of your boys anymore, Frank. I'll use what ever fucking language I please. Talk about what?"

"It's good news. I think I found our boy."

Hal sighed. "That's what you said last time and the kid couldn't keep his mouth shut."

"Let's not talk over the phone, Hal. And that was your fault, not mine. You couldn't control him."

"Listen you..." Hal began.

Frank cut him off. "Past history. We got to meet."

Hal sighed deeply. "Where?"

“The usual place at ten tonight.”

“What are you going to tell the old lady this time?”

“What I always tell her, there’s a crisis at Havendale.”

“Shit, she must think the kids you got there are a bunch of psycho’s,” Hal remarked snidely.

“Don’t worry about it, all right Hal? Let me handle my wife. You just be there on time. Don’t keep me waiting.”

“Yes, boss,” Hal gave a mock salute in the air and hung up.

## Chapter 3

Frank sat alone in his office thinking about seeing Hal tonight. He dreaded it. He always felt as if he should shower after being with him.

Hal, one of the original residents of Havendale House after its construction almost nine years ago in the mid nineties, had been fourteen years old when he'd first arrived. He had been taken into police custody after trying to burn his house down, with his parents in it. A social worker had followed him prior to the incident because his performance in school was very poor. In fact, he'd been failing every major subject and had grown abusive to his teachers. The social worker had come to the conclusion that he had a problem with authority. His parents had been described as "concerned" yet, later on, had been deemed to be part of the problem. Hal had contended they had been abusive to him, both sexually and physically.

Hal's file read like a case study, all very nice and neat, but Frank thought bits of information had been glossed over. These minor details interested Frank. Most glaring was his I.Q. level. For a kid who was failing in school, he had scored exceptionally high on the intelligence test administered by the school board. The test placed him in the category of genius.

About two weeks after his arrival at Havendale House, Frank noticed that Hal had clearly become the most popular boy. The other boys were drawn to him like flies. They gave him their possessions, their desserts, money, cigarettes and even granted him sexual favours on demand. Unusual, considering very little about Hal could be considered attractive, physical or otherwise.

He was tall and gaunt and his face was pocked marked. His hair

was a dull shade of dirty blond, kind of yellow in places, and his eyes were small and piercing.

And it certainly wasn't his personality that drew them either. He was not exactly what anyone would call a lovable character. In fact, he was cold and almost completely devoid of emotion. He was often verbally abusive and even violent. Yet still they came back for more. Frank was in awe of him.

Hal Makin's psychiatric evaluation had been sorely lacking. He had succeeded in fooling two mental health care professionals and a social worker. He had convinced them that he was depressed, that his parents were abusive and that he had a learning disability. None of which was true.

What was true, however, was Hal's uncanny ability to read people. He studied people like books and knew exactly what strings to pull to make them do whatever he wanted. He found the weakness, then manipulated that weakness. He had no guilt and no remorse for anything he did. He also had no use for or fear of authority. The rules didn't apply to Hal. When someone was of no more use to him, he simply turned them off like a radio and tuned in to another station. Hal Makin was not just misunderstood, he was a full blown sociopath.

The more Frank got to know Hal, the more he disliked him. But he acknowledged Hal Makin had a skill, a skill that could be exploited for his own gain. He didn't have to like him.

He continued thinking about Hal as he drove down Saint Catherine's Street at ten that night, trying to prepare himself for their eventual meeting. As he drew closer to downtown, he noticed the hordes of people crowding the streets. Friday night in downtown meant the bars would be packed and finding parking would be a challenge. After several attempts to park in various lots, he finally found one with a vacancy on Saint Urban.

Frank could feel winter coming on and he pulled his tailored wool coat tighter around him as he walked toward the crowded bar on Prince Arthur. The bar was one of those places with several levels, packed with people. As he walked inside, a blast of music attacked him. He hoped Hal wasn't going to be late.

He went up to the top floor, not bothering to signal the waiter. Getting a drink in these places took forever and he was never sure if

they'd bring back his change. After taking off his glasses and wiping them on his sleeve, he spotted Hal in a two-seater by the window, not more than a few feet away. He was chatting up some bottle blonde with a tight leather dress and long red fingernails. It was oldies night and Madonna's *Like a Virgin* played overhead.

When Hal saw Frank, he said something to the girl and she hastily got up and walked away.

As he began to strut over to him, Frank noted Hal was still a repulsive looking man. He couldn't help but think when looks were handed out, somehow they had passed Hal by. The emotions seemed to have been forgotten as well.

He wore a blue leather coat and jeans. In his glass was what looked like gin or maybe vodka. The leather coat was tacky, but it looked brand new and expensive! He had spent money. Frank hoped he'd paid cash and had been discrete.

"Hey, Pops. How ya doing?" Hal slapped him on the back, laughing that sinister laugh.

Frank looked around him. "Don't call me that." It had been over a year since he'd seen him face to face. Just looking at him made him cringe.

"Ah...touchy, touchy. So what's this all about? You didn't suddenly miss me, did ya?" Hal growled, taking a sip of his drink.

Frank sighed, and stood up so they could be at eye level. "No. Nice jacket. Where'd you get it?"

"Oh relax, Pops, I bought it at some wholesale place, probably hot." He laughed.

"Great," Frank sneered. "Anyway, I warned you about the spending."

"When do I get to reap the benefits of my reward then? Hell, I'm living in a rat-infested hole Frank, while you're living in a five bedroom house in Westmount." His eyes looked stormy.

Frank swallowed. He had to be firm with Hal. "The time will come when the heat will be off. Right now, we need to resume our business dealings."

"Is that what we are calling it now?" He lifted an eyebrow and pushed back his greasy, collar-length hair. "What happened, Frank," he asked when he didn't reply, "gambling debts again, or does Mama



want a diamond ring?"

"It doesn't matter why," Frank leaned forward and lowered his voice. "I think I found the perfect associate, but it would mean coming back to Havendale for awhile." Frank cleared his throat.

Hal lit a cigarette. "What do you mean, coming back to Havendale?" He squinted through his cigarette smoke.

Frank coughed. "I could hire you on to do some maintenance. The guy we have now doesn't show up on time. I can justify firing him. It would look all right on the books."

"Well, Frankie old boy, if you think I'm going to scrub toilets, then think again," he snapped. "I don't need to work and if you'd let me spend some of my money...then..." his mouth hardened.

"The money again," Frank rolled his eyes and sighed. "Relax, Hal. I told you, the police could be watching you...especially after your boy went blabbing about things, then disappeared. I don't want them getting suspicious with you spending tons of money."

"You can't blame me for Raymond. You chose him. Didn't know he'd turn chicken on me. I did what I had to do," Hal sneered.

"You were supposed to keep him under control, Hal. You lost your temper. There might have been other ways. Extortion is one thing, murder is another."

Hal laughed. "What a pussy you are, Frank. Anyway," he scoffed, taking a long drag off his cigarette, "water under the bridge."

Frank shivered. "Very funny," he replied. "It better stay under the bridge, too."

"Whatever you say Frank," he raised an eyebrow, "but I'm not cleaning toilets."

"It would just be for awhile until you could get the kid on your side. He's perfect for this."

"How perfect?"

"Well, he's great looking, smart, articulate and he's got the experience, if you know what I mean."

"So, what else?" Hal stubbed out his cigarette and looked around. The music pumped out some old disco tune.

"His evaluation says he doesn't trust anyone, suffers from low self-esteem and is in great need of love. He doesn't feel he's worthy of love due to his childhood. He had an intense relationship with a pimp who

died on him and—”

Hal made a motion as if playing a violin. “How sad,” he mocked. “Thank God I only caught half of that. How old?”

“Seventeen, practically eighteen. If it works, I can give him weekend passes in the beginning and sign his release in six months time.”

He nodded. “Gracie is going to flip.” Hal howled with laughter. “The old bird still there?”

“Yes, she is and you just keep your nose clean. The sooner you get the kid under your wing, the sooner we can start making money. Don’t do anything to make it difficult for me to justify keeping you around. There is only so much I can bluff.”

“Don’t worry, Frank,” he patted his back, “I’ll be the perfect little janitor, except I’m not cleaning no toilets.”

Frank nodded, wringing his hands together. He came closer to Hal... “Come by next Tuesday afternoon. I’ll let the guy go this week, Monday morning.” He paused. “Hal, how long do you think it will take before we can be up and running again?”

“You seem nervous, Frank,” he smiled, “creditors must be clawing at the door. Just let me handle it. You do your thing and let me do mine. When he’s ready, I’ll tell you. I’ll take him on a test run first, then let you know.”

Frank felt guilty on the way home, like he always did after seeing Hal, but when the money came rolling in, the guilt would pass. After all, in a way, he was helping this kid. They all made money, more money than the kid could make on the street. And Marshall had said it himself, he was a loser. Might as well be a loser with money. So what if a few wealthy men lost a little money? They knew the risk. And if things had to be taken care of, Hal would do it without a second thought. He didn’t have to know the details. That was the agreement.

After he paid off the casino this time, he’d stop gambling... Maybe then, he’d never have to see Hal again. Or maybe they could just do it once in awhile for pocket change, a nice vacation or a new car for his wife.

As he drove, he thought about the casino. It would be busy tonight. But he’d better go home. It was late. Or maybe he’d stop by, but for just one game. A little fun couldn’t hurt. He felt lucky...a little twenty-

one. Maybe he could win back the money he had spent from the kid's college fund. He swore he'd put it back in the bank if he won tonight and would never touch it again. On that thought, he turned the car around and headed for the casino.

## Chapter 4

Marshall stepped out of the shower early Monday morning and stood looking at his reflection in the mirror. It was barely six a.m.. The other boys were still sleeping. He hated his reflection, yet he was drawn to it somehow. He always thought if he studied himself long enough, the real image would finally emerge, some ugly hideous twisted thing he would instantly recognize.

Yes, he'd been told often he was beautiful, but it was always as a prelude to sex. No one ever said it without wanting something in return. But who cared? When it came right down to it, in the dark, sex was just sex. It didn't really matter who it was as long as they were willing to pay for it.

So he had made money out there in the streets. Art had known people, prominent people, and they had money to spend on sex and drugs. They did all right, except when Art overdid it on the heroin. His habit got pretty expensive. But even when things were tight, he never saw a night on the streets or a day when he went hungry. Art made sure of that.

He closed his eyes. He missed Art. Art had been as much of a lost cause as he was, but they had understood each other. It was easy to tolerate someone when you knew neither one of you would probably make it past thirty.

Marshall dried himself with the towel and went back to his room.

Gaston sat up in bed as he came in. "Hey, Mr. Stuck Up Man," he laughed. "Everyone thinks you're full of yourself, you know."

Marshall pulled on a pair of jeans, then glanced at him. "I don't give a damn what they think. They can go to hell and you along with them."

“Jerki!” Gaston shouted and ran out of the room.

A half hour later, Marshall walked into the dining room. The table was set up with cutlery and dishes along with a jug of milk and two boxes of cereal. He could smell toast.

He sat down at the very end of the table and waited. He was rather hungry and he decided if they wanted to waste money feeding him, let them.

Susan walked in shortly after and stopped to smile at him. “How are you today, Marshall? Feeling better?”

He shrugged.

“Going to eat something?”

“Looks like it.” He cast a glance at her.

“Good. After breakfast, I’m going to give you some aptitude tests to see what we can do about continuing your education. A doctor will be here tomorrow at three to give you a physical. Frank will probably want to see you today, so don’t hide anywhere,” she laughed.

“Where would I hide?” Marshall asked with a frown.

She patted his shoulder and went to sit at the table up front.

She was a pretty woman with long legs and shiny blonde hair, cut in a pageboy. She probably gave a few of the young boys a boner, at least the ones who were heterosexual. Give him a gorgeous man any day. Women did nothing for him sexually. But she was all right, a little superficial, but who wasn’t?

Two boys walked in now, a black kid with crooked teeth who was about his age and another boy, white, a little younger. They sat far away from him and barely gave him a glance. Gaston came in next, singing at the top of his lungs, “It’s a beautiful morning...la la la la...” The other two boys yelled, “Shut up!” in unison.

Gaston stuck his tongue out at them and sat midway between the boys and Marshall.

“Where is Lance, Conrad?” Gaston asked the black kid.

“He’s gone ‘till next month, back with his mother or something for a bit.”

The other kid, who Marshall knew was called Sam, quietly ate his cereal.

A heavy set woman came in from the kitchen with a tray of toast which she sat down in front of them. Her ankles looked swollen and

her forehead was damp from perspiration. The hairnet she wore on her gray hair was askew. Another woman poured coffee for Susan, then waited as Frank and Gracie came in to pour them a cup.

Frank nodded at Marshall, then said, "Hello boys."

"Frank," Conrad interjected, "I don't feel like having a session today. I want to go downtown to get a new CD."

"No downtown today, Con. We need to continue talking about that incident last week. Now eat your breakfast. Maybe on the weekend, we'll all go downtown."

Conrad sulked for a few minutes and swore under his breath. Sam laughed.

Marshall kept his head down and ate his toast. He didn't want to know any of these people. He didn't intend on being here that long.

Frank sat down at the staff table as the woman poured his coffee. He thanked her, then waited until she quietly returned to the kitchen. After taking a sip of the coffee, he said good morning to Susan.

"Hi, Frank. You look tired today... Hard night?"

"Insomnia. I will be fine after a few cups of Java."

Susan then proceeded to tell him she had arranged for Marshall's medical and his aptitude tests.

"Good," Frank said absently. He waited a minute, then said, "Look, I'm sorry about this, folks, but I guess I should tell you I've decided to lay off Jean-Luc."

Gracie looked up from her cup and raised an eyebrow. "Oh?"

"Well, he's always late and I don't think he does such a good job. The bathrooms could be a lot cleaner and he hasn't mowed the lawn in weeks. Just because its autumn doesn't mean—"

"What will we do?" Susan inquired, lifting a spoonful of cereal into her mouth. "With winter coming..."

"I have someone already. He was doing this kind of work for awhile, but the place closed down and he lost his job," Frank cleared his throat... "He has excellent references. Actually, he used to be a Havendale resident years ago. He's one of our success stories." Frank gave them a huge smile.

Gracie, who had been with Havendale since its opening, leaned forward and asked, "Who is it?" He knew that she had liked some of the boys who had come through here, others she'd called spawns of

the devil.

Frank hesitated. He knew Gracie would not be pleased. "Hal. You remember Hal?" He looked down at his lap.

"Not Hal Makin!" She cried, knocking her coffee cup over with her hand. Luckily, it was empty.

"Yes, Gracie, Hal Makin."

"Who's Hal Makin?" Susan inquired innocently.

"Before your time," Gracie replied curtly. "Should I tell her Frank, or should you?" Gracie glared at him.

Before Frank could respond, Gracie continued, "I never knew what you saw in that boy. You took him under your wing like he was some kind of a prize. He was the weirdest character...and mean. Personally, Frank, I was terrified of him. He should have been locked up somewhere."

"I took him under my wing, Gracie," Frank sighed, "because he was a difficult case. He's reformed now, a man. He's twenty-three years old. He's..."

"I don't care! There was something seriously wrong with him. Do you think it's wise to bring him in here with these boys around?"

"I will take full responsibility, Gracie." Frank told her. "Just make out a pay for Jean-Luc and make sure he gets his forms for unemployment. Tell him to turn in his keys today. If you have any problems, send him to me."

Gracie seemed to hardly hear. She rose from the table. "Don't expect me to have anything to do with Hal Makin, Frank! I think you are making a serious mistake. You will regret this."

Susan watched her march out of the room. Then she turned to Frank and said, "Wow, what's that about?"

"Oh, nothing really. Sometimes personalities clash, that's all. Gracie and Hal never saw eye to eye. She's just overreacting." Frank got up from the table. He paused, then looked at Susan. "Send Marshall to me after the tests are finished, will you please?"

She nodded. "Of course."

## Chapter 5

Gracie was not in a good mood, and Hal showed up earlier than expected. He arrived at nine o'clock sharp on Tuesday morning. It had been a long time since he'd set foot in Havendale House and she couldn't say she'd missed him.

Gracie watched him through the camera. He rang the bell and waited, making a face and waving frantically. "Hi Gracie...hello...hello..." he laughed hysterically and pushed the intercom over and over, making weird faces at her.

Gracie scowled and opened the door.

"Gracie...my love...my darling!" He cried out, bounding up to the counter.

She was glad a locked door stood between them. She was not in a good mood and seeing Hal didn't help at all. She had just finished giving Jean-Luc his walking papers and he had been quite disappointed. Sure, he wasn't the best janitor in the world, but he was all right. At least he was pleasant to be around. She had liked him.

"Hal Makin," she gave him an icy look. "I swear I thought I'd never have to look at your face again when you walked out of here almost nine years ago."

"See, dreams do come true," he smiled.

Gracie buzzed Frank. "Hal Makin is here," she managed, although the words stuck in her throat.

"Send him in," Frank replied briskly.

Gracie buzzed the door open and Hal walked in, looking around. He moved closer to her. Gracie moved back against the wall.

He smiled at her, that crazy smile of his. "My Gracie, you have become a nervous person. There is medication for that now, you



know.”

She remained by the wall, putting the chair between them. “Frank...is...ah...waiting,” she stammered.

“Yes,” he nodded.

Frank came out of his office. He saw Gracie in the corner, then gave Hal a dirty look. “I’m waiting, Hal.”

Hal nodded, then smiling again at Gracie, he said, “See you later...alligator.”

\* \* \* \*

Frank walked into his office with Hal behind him. “Close the door,” he barked, adjusting his glasses.

Hal closed it, then put his finger to his lips. “Shush.”

“I told you to behave, goddamn it! Gracie is not happy about you being here. Leave her alone. She’s a good receptionist and I don’t want to lose her.”

“Yeah, yeah. I was having some fun, is all,” he said looking around, “this office...what a hole. Once a hole, always a hole. Some holes are nicer than others.” He sat in Frank’s chair and grinned at him.

“Shut up, will you?” Frank sighed. “Okay, I’m going to show you the ropes. I have a list of your duties. Try to do them well or you’ll make me out a liar. Gracie will look for any excuse to...”

“I know, I know. Relax. I’ll spick and span everything, even the toilets. You’ll be able to see your face in the inside of the toilet bowl. Now show me his file so I know what I’m dealing with.” He tilted his head toward the files along the wall.

“It’s there in front of you on the desk.” Frank sighed, sitting in the other chair, rubbing the back of his neck.

After ten minutes of reading the file, Hal threw it aside.

Frank waited, watching him. “Well, what do you think?”

“He’s good-looking enough. He has the experience sexually. I can probably convince him I’m his anchor in the storm, but he’s smarter than Raymond.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“Good, if it’s channelled properly, bad if it’s not.”

“Speak fucking English!” Frank demanded hotly.

"Language, language," Hal mocked. "What I mean is, probably he wouldn't brag about his success stories like Raymond did, but he might not want to go along with the game."

"You can tell all that by his file?" Frank blinked.

Hal nodded. "Yeah, and unlike Raymond, I'm going to have to keep my hands off him, if I'm to make him believe I care. This one separates sex from love. Actually, love doesn't exist and sex is a means to an end. It's the antithesis to love."

"How do you know that?"

Hal picked up the file. "Did you read the transcript from his interview with the police psychologist?"

"Yes."

"Well, you need to read it more carefully," Hal said. "Ok, well let me read you what the psychologist wrote about their meeting. *'I asked Marshall about prostitution. It was obvious he had been prostituting himself and buying heroin for Mr. Anderson. He appeared to be very upset about the death of Mr. Anderson. I asked him, "Did you love Mr. Anderson?" And he said, "There is no such thing as love. We cared about each other."*

*"Was Mr. Anderson disturbed by your sleeping with other men for money?"*

*"No," he answered, "why should he be?"*

*"Were you sleeping with Mr. Anderson, too?"*

*"No, Mr. Anderson was not using me for sex. He really did care."*

*"So then for you, sex and love are two different things?"*

*"Sex is just animal instinct, lust. Love is a tool for poets."*

Frank listened, nodding. "You're right. Having sex with him would be a mistake."

"Unfortunately, yes," Hal shook his head.

"But Raymond..."

"Raymond had a problem with love, too, but it wasn't the same. Sex was love to him. Marshall separates them, Raymond blurred them together." Hal got up and crossed his arms. "Ok, give me the keys to the janitor's room and I'll get started."

Frank reached behind his desk and gave him a set of keys.

"Don't bother telling me what's what, I will figure it out." He winked at him and left the office.

## *DJ Manly*

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Frank sat down at his desk. Spending time with Hal was like being on a very fast ride. It always left you feeling sick and dizzy afterward.

## Chapter 6

Cold winds came in early December, just before the Christmas holidays. The ground was covered with snow. Marshall sat all alone looking out the window. He jumped a little when Hal came in and said, “Pretty gloomy out there, isn’t it?”

Marshall watched Hal mop around the table. It was that janitor guy, Hal something or other.

“I used to do a lot of that when I was here,” he said.

Marshall turned around and looked at him again. “You were here...at Havendale?”

“You seem surprised.”

“When were you here?” Marshall asked, leaving the window and coming to sit on the edge of the bed.

“About nine years back. I was younger than you when I came in.”

“What did you do?”

“Do?” He echoed, leaning on his mop. “Nothing really, except figure out some stuff.”

“Like what kind of stuff?” Marshall narrowed his eyes.

“Long story. You wouldn’t be interested,” Hal laughed, then reaching into his pocket, he tossed Marshall a chocolate bar. “Here, got to go. See ya, kid.”

After Hal left the room, Marshall opened his math book and began to read the next chapter. He found he was quite good in math. English was another thing. He was sick of reading stupid stories about happy families and happy endings. He put the book aside after awhile and wondered about that Hal guy. He had been in here, too, had survived it. Now he was out working and on his own. The guy intrigued him.

Marshall came down the hallway just before supper and found Hal sitting on the edge of his bed. He appeared to be crying. When he saw Marshall, he got up hastily. "Oh God, Marshall, I'm so embarrassed," he said, wiping at his cheek.

"Why? What's wrong? What are you doing here?" Marshall asked him, not sure why this man was here on his bed, crying.

"I came in to clean your room and I got really emotional. It's this stupid season, Christmas..." He stopped and shook his head. "I never had much of a Christmas as a kid. My parents...were abusive and..." He choked and turned away.

Marshall reached out hesitantly and put a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry man, I understand. I feel like shit at Christmas, too. My Dad was always drunk and my mom was...unstable, so it was pretty nuts. It's okay to cry, man. You're lucky you still can."

Hal turned around and smiled. He grabbed him and hugged him, which surprised Marshall. "Thank you for saying that. You know, Marshall, you can't trust anyone. People have never really cared about me. They just used me and threw me away. For the first time, I felt like someone really cared."

"I know what you mean, Hal," Marshall nodded. "If you want to talk sometime, well, I'm here. Doesn't look like I'm going anywhere."

Hal nodded. "Wouldn't it be nice to have a special friend, someone you could tell anything to, someone who wouldn't expect nothing from you except maybe a shoulder now and then?"

Marshall nodded. "Yeah, it would."

"Maybe we could be that for one another, Marshall."

Marshall swallowed and nodded. "Are you all right now, Hal?"

"Yeah, and thanks. I feel as if...well it's silly...but as if my life has just taken a turn for the better."

Marshall gave him a faint smile.

Hal squeezed his forearm before leaving the room.

As the weeks turned winter into spring, Marshall spent hours and hours talking with Hal. For the first time since Art had died, he felt cared for, secure. Hal never asked for sex although Marshall kept expecting him to. They joked about being horny sometimes. It was a

friendship, nothing more.

“It’s you and me together against the world, kid,” Hal put his arm around him one evening as they sat sharing a cigarette on the veranda. “No one can ever hurt us again as long as we have each other.”

Marshall smiled at him.

“We have to make a pact, okay?”

Marshall nodded. “Okay.”

“That no matter what, we will always keep our promises to each other and we will never let each other down, no matter the consequences.”

“Yeah, all right, Hal. It’s a deal,” Marshall said, and Hal leaned over and ruffled his hair.

## Chapter 7

Hal hadn't broached the subject of doing a job yet. He had to find the right time. The perfect opportunity came one night in early May. Frank began to issue Marshall weekend passes and Hal took him to restaurants and movies. On the weekends, he would sleep on his sofa. He appeared to be happy again.

"I think Frank might sign my walking papers soon, Hal, but you know I have no idea what to do," Marshall said out of the blue. "I don't think I can go back to the streets. I've been too long away and now I look back, it wasn't that great."

Hal sipped his Coke and nodded. "It's dangerous and it doesn't pay well. You want to do something that will make real money. We could do something...together...you and me," he mused, putting down his Coke can.

"I'd like that, Hal. Like what? Start our own business?" Marshall came to sit beside him on the sofa.

Hal stroked his hair. "Yeah, maybe. When you were on the streets, I bet you serviced a lot of closet queens. You know...married guys or public figures."

"Married guys, tons," Marshall agreed. "Not too many public figures, not that I recognized from the papers or anything."

"A lot of these guys lose everything when they are exposed."

"I know. It's horrible...shouldn't be that way."

"Umm...some are willing to pay a lot to keep it a secret."

Marshall looked at him. "What are you getting at, Hal?"

"I know someone who made one-hundred thousand dollars last year and it was really easy. He invested very little time."

"How?" Marshall asked.

"Well, he was good looking, sexy like you," Hal smiled.

Marshall blushed.

"And," Hal continued, "he would target wealthy men who were in the closet and his partner would take pictures of them doing the nasty. Then they would simply offer an exchange, evidence for cash."

Marshall was quiet for a long time, then he said, "Sounds wrong, Hal. Sounds like a really horrible thing to—"

Hal's face reddened. "Are you an idiot, Marshall? Has anyone ever given you a break in life? No!" He stood up and paced around the living room.

Marshall folded his arms across his chest and sunk into the corner of the sofa. "I don't like it when you go into these rages, Hal."

"These men don't care about you. If they take the bait, use you to help them hide their dirty little secrets, then are dishonest with everyone, why do they deserve to be treated fairly? I think you want to go back to the streets and work in the shit!"

Marshall shook his head. "No, Hal, honest I don't. I just didn't see it that way, really." Marshall got up and walked over to Hal. "Do you think we could do this?"

"Sure."

"We'd have to be careful. I mean, it is against the law."

"Marshall, listen to me. It's foolproof. How you going to get caught? These guys will never go to the police because they'd have to reveal themselves, right?"

"Right."

"And if we only go after rich guys, what is a few grand to someone who is loaded? You can do this in good conscience. These guys will do something on their income taxes and not even miss it. Trust me, Marshall, I know the world. These guys have creative tax attorneys."

"I guess."

"Look, why don't we try it once and if you feel uneasy about it, we will find something else," Hal shrugged. "I don't want you to do anything you aren't comfortable with, even if I think it's a perfect plan and I'm disappointed."

"We could try it once."

Hal hugged him enthusiastically, "Listen, sweetie, you could seduce the Pope himself. You're professional and it's a heck of a lot better



than working the streets, right? I could buy you some great clothes... You'd go to fancy parties, get to know some high and mighty big shots, drink champagne and eat caviar. What else could you want? And at the end of the day, you and I would be rolling in money. We wouldn't have to do this shit forever. A couple of big scores and we're on easy street."

"How do we know who to..."

"Let me worry about that part. You just have to do the seducing. I will handle everything else."

"Sound's simple."

"That's because it is simple. Let's say we try it next weekend."

Marshall hesitated for a moment, then nodded slowly.

## Chapter 8

Marshall came back to Havendale House on Monday morning with his head full of ideas. They could be rich, he and Hal, buy a house, live anywhere they wanted. They could take vacations, travel. He was so excited about all of it, he didn't hear Gracie when she spoke to him.

"Marshall, did you hear me?"

He stopped and looked at her. "Sorry, Gracie, what did you say?" He gave her a brilliant smile.

"Marshall," she said, "I've seen a remarkable change in you since you've come here. You seem happy. I'd be careful of that Hal guy if I were you. I don't think he—"

Marshall stiffened. "He's good to me, Gracie. He's my good friend. He really cares about me."

"He's a first class manipulator and dangerous," she said. "I know him, Marshall, please —"

"Don't worry, Gracie," he said. "Hal is a little rough around the edges, but he is good deep down."

Hal walked in suddenly. "Frank here, Gracie?" he asked, giving her that sadistic smile of his. He raised a hand to Marshall.

Marshall winked at him and went off to his room.

## Chapter 9

The months went by and soon it was fall again. Marshall was very good at the job. It was as if it was tailored made for him. Every target fell like lead for him and every target so far had paid up. There had been no problems, except for one, which Hal planned to remedy this very night.

Every time a job was over Marshall would spend days fretting about it and it just about drove Hal nuts. Yelling at him wasn't helping. Marshall would stop it for awhile, then do the same thing after the next one. He'd say, "What if I run into this person on the street? What if one time they don't pay? How many years in jail would I get if I got caught? This guy was nice, he liked me, but I think I really hurt him. It's not right, Hal, it's just not right."

One night, Hal heard Marshall crying out in his sleep. He had had enough now. He couldn't afford to lose this one. He walked in and without saying a word, he pulled Marshall out of bed.

Marshall gasped. "Hal..." he began, but Hal raised his fists and began to punch him hard in the gut. Marshall doubled over and fell on the bed. Hal pulled him up by the hair, then pushed him to the floor. He began to kick him hard in the ribs repeatedly as Marshall screamed at him to stop. He dragged him up to his feet. Marshall moaned in pain, tears running down his face. Twice Hal kicked him in the groin until Marshall finally lost consciousness.

Satisfied, Hal left the room, leaving Marshall lying on the floor. He had been careful not to leave any marks on his face. It wouldn't do to damage the goods too much.

When Marshall came out of the room the next day, Hal looked up at him from his coffee cup.

“Why, Hal?” he asked, walking stiffly over to the table. “Why’d you do that to me?”

“Marshall,” he sighed, giving him a soft smile, “I did it for your own good. I can’t let you throw all this away, screw up your life just because you aren’t thinking straight. I don’t want you to have nightmares any more, sweet boy. I have to take care of you.”

Tears ran down Marshall’s face.

“You have to remember our pact. We are here always for each other, no backing down. We have to take care of each other, Marshall.”

Marshall nodded, wincing in pain.

“Remember, I did this for your own good. Look, you take some aspirin. You’ll be fine. Rest today and tonight I’ll take you out to that restaurant you like.”

“Thanks, Hal,” he whispered through the pain.

## Chapter 10

Frank finally gave Hal the go ahead to spend money. Hal bought Marshall new clothes and they moved into a luxury condo. Marshall was enthralled with his new home and fancy clothes. The complaining stopped, at least out loud.

It wasn't having sex with the marks that Marshall minded so much, although most of the men were older or just plain old. It was the blackmail part that clawed at him. He always had to prepare himself for the moment he finally revealed what he wanted from them. He always braced himself for the worst. Sometimes they reacted with violence, sometimes pure rage seized them. But the worst was the ones who cried when he told them they'd have to pay or be exposed. He felt like shit for days afterward, even after Hal had beaten him. He just kept it to himself, too terrified to let Hal see. He tried to remember what Hal had told him about "taking it in stride". He had said they didn't really care about him. They were just using him. He knew he was right, but his guilt hung over him like a shroud.

One night, as they sat eating shrimp at a classy seafood restaurant in downtown Montreal, Marshall found the courage to tell Hal that he believed some of these men actually cared for him. "I think some of these men actually fall in love with me. They believe I care and then..."

Hal glared at him impatiently. "Goddamn it, Marshall. Listen to me. If I've told you this once, I've told you a thousand times, these men could never love you really, you're used goods. In fact," he raised his voice and gave Marshall a sinister smile, "no decent man will ever love you, Marshall, because you're a whore."

Marshall flushed with embarrassment as several of the other

patrons glanced over at them.

"A whore, Marshall," he repeated, lowering his voice now as Marshall sat shock-still, looking into his lap. "That's why we have to stick together. Toughen up. Stop taking this stuff personally! I can't believe you would choose the feelings of strangers over me."

"I'm not doing that," Marshall mumbled. Tears stung his eyes. Hal had always said he would tell him the truth no matter how much it hurt. He knew no decent man would ever love him. The only one who cared was Hal because they had come up the same way. Hal didn't judge him.

"Yes, you are," Hal insisted. "You know I love you. You know I'll take care of you, Marshall. No one else knows you the way I do. No one else will love you. I'm looking out for our future."

"I know that," he stammered.

"You told me yourself sex and love are different. Have I ever laid a hand on you, Marshall?"

"No."

"It's because I love you. You know that, don't you?" He met his eyes.

"Yes, Hal," Marshall sighed. "I know."

Yes, Hal thought, he knew it. He knew it until the next time. There was always a next time when he would have to make sure Marshall didn't forget his place. They had made a fortune doing this, even with the large cut Frank took... He couldn't risk losing him.

That time came again a few weeks later while they sat together in front of the television. Marshall said out of the blue, "Hal, it's wrong. It's wrong to play with people the way we do. Don't you ever feel as if..."

Hal jumped out of his chair. Marshall swallowed some air as Hal pulled him to his feet and laid his hands on his shoulders.

Marshall tensed. He remembered the beating Hal had given him, even if it had been almost a year ago.

Hal looked deeply into his eyes. "Marshall, listen to me, do you think you're any less of a whore because you don't work off the street? You still let anyone give it to you up the ass and in the end, you're paid, right? You don't love these men. You feel nothing. You think just because you're a well paid slut, it makes you any less of one?"

Please...give me a break! You have no right to think you're too good to do what you do. You're worthless. Fucking is the only thing you can do right. So, get out of my sight before I decide you're too much of a slut, even for me."

Marshall moped in his room for hours. Hal was right. He was nothing. What other way could he make a living? Hal was all he had. The only alternative was being alone and he couldn't stand the thought of being by himself.

He came out of his room and begged Hal to forgive him. "Please Hal. You said it was only the two of us together. I'll be better. I won't say that stuff anymore."

Hal said nothing. Marshall would wait. He would wait for the silence to be over.

## Chapter 11

A mysterious voice on the phone told him, he had twenty-four hours. Desperate, Frank took the remaining money from the last share Hal had given him and went back to the casino.

He lost it all.

As he stumbled out of the casino in the middle of the night, weak from exhaustion and defeat, he chastised himself for not having the guts to kill himself. At least he could deprive these people of the satisfaction.

They were waiting for him at his house. As soon as he stepped out of the car in his garage, a man folded his fingers tightly over his forearm and placed a gun at his head. He could feel the hard, cold steel against his temple. This was it.

"Please," he pleaded, sweat beading on his forehead. "Just give me a few more days and—"

"No more time, Frank," the voice said. "You've had ample time to get the money. And we've recently learned about the nice little operation you have going on the side. You pick the target while Makin and that kid carry out the con. Brilliant."

The money he siphoned from Hal didn't even scratch the surface. "I'll try to get the money somehow," he stammered. "Just give me—"

"You've already done that, Frank," the voice said calmly. "Your savings are gone. Your credit cards are maxed. You don't even have the money to pay your son's tuition at the university this term."

Frank started to cry. "Don't do it here," he muttered miserably, "not where the wife and kids can find me."

"Actually, this is your lucky day. I'm not here to kill you. We've found a better use for you. We want you to do us a favour."



"Really?" he croaked, the tears mingling with relieved laughter. "Anything, God, what is it?"

"We have a friend, a man in Columbia who has been looking to buy this property. Unfortunately, he's been informed he will never acquire the property even though he's offered to pay three times the value for it."

Frank took a breath. "I'm listening," he said.

"The man who has just inherited the property, a coffee plantation in Brazil, is a fag. He's alone, no living family except for the grandmother and uncle who live with him on the property. It's lonely out there for a queer boy. There are no fancy clubs to go dancing. He's a cultured man from Rome, living among a bunch of filthy peasants. Are you following me, Frank?"

"Yes," Frank breathed.

"Good. We understand an operation like this takes time. Your boy has to be able to gain this man's trust, to make him want to sign over the plantation to him... in the event of his death."

A shiver ran down Frank's spine. He nodded, swallowing hard.

"Now this is what we expect you to do," he breathed, finally lowering the gun to his side.

Frank bit down on his lip and listened as the emotionless voice washed over him in the stillness of the darkened garage.

The next day, Frank went into his office and began researching things on the Internet. He called in a few favours and made a plan. It was his only chance. If they got what they wanted, his debt would be forgiven. More than this, there would be enough left over to set Hal and him up quite nicely.

Tonight, he would meet Hal at the bar again. He had been given a second chance and no way in hell would he allow anyone to blow it.

## Chapter 12

Marshall pulled on his pants and went into the bathroom. He heard the bed creak and suddenly Timothy Ryan was standing behind him. He put his arms around him and kissed his neck, smiling at him.

"You're beautiful, you know that?" he whispered, moving away and turning on the shower.

"Wait on the shower, Tim. I need to talk to you," Marshall told him, nervously brushing his hair. He took a breath as he felt the bristles of the hairbrush scrape his scalp.

Tim was a nice man, kind and gentle, around forty-five and a prominent official in the Roman Catholic Church. He had hidden his sexuality for years because he was committed to the work of God. He didn't agree with the celibacy laws, but had no hope they would change. Tim was from a prominent family and, although he didn't have a lot of money, he could easily acquire it. At least that's what Hal told him.

Tim went to sit on the bed. Marshall came out of the bathroom and walked over to him. Tim reached out for Marshall.

Marshall took a step backward and shook his head. "Listen, Tim," he began, avoiding his eyes, "I know how important the church is to you. You wouldn't want anyone to find out you have been having sex with me in this hotel for weeks, would you?"

Tim's face fell. He blinked back tears. "You're not...blackmailing me, are you? I mean, I thought you really..." He stopped, unable to go on.

Marshall picked up his jacket, reached in his pocket and threw him a key. Again, he didn't look at him. "This key fits a locker at the

bus terminal. Put fifty thousand dollars in cash in the locker by noon tomorrow. If it's not there, I'll be going to the papers."

"You have no proof."

"Believe me, I do. I don't work alone," Marshall answered, pointing to the envelope he left on the table containing the pictures of them together. He walked to the door.

Tim Ryan was crying softly. "I can't believe...I thought you cared. I..."

Marshall took a breath. "Noon tomorrow, Tim, and I have the negatives."

He hurriedly opened the door, took one last look at Tim, then yanked open the door. He literally ran down the street. He tried to think of anything but the sound of Tim's sobbing. He just wanted to get home.

The house was empty when he walked in. He stripped off his clothes and got into the shower. When he came out, Hal was there, sitting in the living room.

"Home, already? How'd it go with the old geezer?" Hal demanded.

"He wasn't that old, Hal. I gave him the key and left the pictures. I'm sure the money will be there tomorrow when you go," Marshall said hastily.

"Good job. Have a drink to celebrate."

"No thanks," Marshall sighed, sitting down at the table. "I'm fine. Hal?"

"Yep." Hal poured himself a drink.

"Who picks the marks?"

"Why do you ask?" He took a gulp of his gin.

"Just wondered. How did you know about Tim's family having money?" Marshall rubbed his hair with a towel and pulled his robe around him.

Hal ran his eyes over him. "I have my contacts. That's not for you to worry about."

Marshall nodded solemnly. "I think I need a break."

"Something big is on the horizon, so the break will have to wait."

"Another old man?" Marshall closed his eyes, sighing. "Can't you find me a young man with money?"

He laughed. "I have to go out tonight, so just relax and lay back all

right?"

"All right," Marshall replied. "Hal, when are we going to be able to stop doing this shit?"

"Soon," Hal said, "I promise."

\* \* \* \*

After Hal had gone, Marshall turned on the television and curled up on the sofa. On the screen, a young man sat on a barstool talking to another man about something. Marshall had tuned in halfway through the movie so it wasn't making much sense. What interested him were the actors, both young and handsome. He couldn't help but wonder what making love with a young attractive man would feel like. It probably wouldn't make a bit of difference and he was stupid to waste time on such an idea. After all, having sex had very little to do with desire. Sex was mechanical and automatic. When he was with the "mark" as Hal called them, it felt as if he put a car into drive, accelerated, then slowed down again, and put it into park until the next trip. Even when he was moving toward climax, his thoughts centred around that final moment when he would tell them the truth, his mind screaming, "How could you be so stupid? I'm not worth ruining your life for. Are you so pathetic you would risk everything for intimacy that contains no genuine feeling?"

But they were pathetic, as pathetic as him, so desperate for love, they would do anything.

Tears stung his eyes, blurring the scene on the television. Thank God, they had never had to actually carry through the threat of ruining these men. They had all paid the money, no matter how angry they were. Marshall knew Hal wouldn't hesitate to do whatever he had to if these men didn't pay.

He sighed, thinking if these men really knew him from the beginning, they wouldn't want him. Hal was right about that. None of these men could ever really love him. They just wanted to use his body. Who would be able to love someone who was capable of the things he'd done? Thank God for Hal. Hal didn't judge him. He took care of him, just like Art had done. And as long as Hal needed him, he'd never be alone.

## Chapter 13

When Hal walked up to Frank at the bar, he looked as giddy as a child. He reached out and touched Hal's arm lightly. "Come on, let's go for a ride," he suggested.

"Must be good if you're going to let me ride in your car," Hal muttered, with a twisted smile. He followed him out onto the busy Montreal street. They walked a few blocks to the parking lot and Frank turned the alarm off on his brand new Cadillac.

They said nothing, until they were inside the car. Frank rolled out of the parking lot and onto St. Urban Street.

"So why all the cloak and dagger shit? What's up?" Hal reached over and pushed in the cigarette lighter.

"Don't even think of smoking in my car. We'll go somewhere where you can smoke," he said, taking off his glasses and squinting at him.

Hal rolled his eyes and looked out the window.

They ended up in a quiet park in Westmount, not far from Frank's house.

Hal sat on a bench and lit a cigarette. "So, spill it."

"You're leaving the country,"

"I'm leaving the country?" He stuck a thumb into his chest. "And why am I leaving the county?" Hal narrowed his eyes.

"I've secured fake passports and work visas for you and Marshall. You're going to South America."

"South America?" Hal hooted in disbelief.

"That's right." Frank stood and looked out over the park.

"Why South America?"

"Because if this works out, we will be millionaires and you can

finally unload that kid.”

“That would be nice,” he smiled. “He is quite a pain in the ass, always moaning about shit. You seem to be suggesting we could retire.”

“That’s exactly what I’m suggesting.”

“Tell me more,” Hal sat back and waited.

Frank hesitated. He wasn’t sure how much he really wanted Hal to know. “Well, I heard about this opportunity from someone.”

“Sounds mysterious. Who?” Hal asked.

Frank scowled, “Never mind. Anyway, just listen. A big legal case took place recently in Italy. It hit all the papers because it was surrounded by controversy involving the inheritance of a coffee plantation in Brazil... The inheritance was strongly contested by surviving family members who still live there... Apparently, some concessions were made. The plantation is one of the largest exporters of coffee in the region and someone, an individual let’s say, is willing to pay almost anything for this plantation. However, the present owner refuses to sell.”

“You’ve lost me.” Hal shook his head. “Are you suggesting our new mark is the owner of a coffee plantation in Brazil?”

“Yes.”

Hal seemed disinterested. He lit another cigarette. He was about to say something else when Frank began to speak again.

“I’ve done some research on the owner, Hal. This guy is loaded. He is a queer... I mean, a gay man.”

“Frank, Montreal is full of gay men,” Hal let out a puff of smoke. It hovered in the crisp night air for a moment before disappearing.

“Hal, listen,” Frank clenched his teeth. “This is not negotiable. This is the opportunity of a life time. The buyer is standing by. He will pay three times what that land is worth.” Frank met his eyes. “Land that the family refuses to sell.”

“You said that already,” Hal sighed. “I still don’t understand how Marshall and I fit into all this.”

“Not only would you be rich,” Frank ignored Hal’s comment as he waved his hands in the air. “You’d be out of the country and home free.”

“I have a feeling the prospective buyer isn’t interested in coffee

beans,” Hal mused, squinting up at him.

“What he does with the property after he buys it, is his business,” Frank muttered. “Did you hear what I said about us being rich?”

“I heard.” He stood up, throwing down the half smoked cigarette and crushing it into the ground with the heel of his boot. “I just don’t think you’re telling me all of it. Who wants you to do this, Frank, and for what reason?”

“What in hell is it to you?” Frank sputtered.

“What is it to me?” Hal gave him a menacing grin. “It’s just me who has to put his ass on the line. I’m not going off to some strange fucking country without more information. I want guarantees, Frank.”

“Okay, already.” Frank snapped. “It’s my way out of a little problem...but it’s good for both us, Hal.”

Hal laughed. “Ah, I see, a little debt problem perhaps?”

Frank didn’t answer. He waited with bated breath until Hal spoke again.

“Fine,” Hal said suddenly, causing Frank to look up. “I’ll do it but, Frank, from now on, I’ll be calling the shots.”

Frank sucked in some air. What could he say? He nodded silently.

“So,” Hal folded his arms across his chest, “first of all, how much money can I expect to be walking out of this job with?”

Frank swallowed, “A million, each.”

Hal nodded with a smile. “I like the sound of that. Tell me what you had in mind.”

“You are two university students from Montreal backpacking through the mountains,” Frank let the enthusiasm creep back into his voice. “You’ve just taken a break from the university and you pick up jobs as you go. You run out of money in Sao Paulo, so you apply to work on the coffee plantation.”

“What if they’re not hiring?”

“They’re always hiring. Coffee beans are picked year round. That won’t be a problem. If you do have any problems, I will give you the name of someone who will make sure it happens. The plantation owner’s name is Angelo Farelli, although the plantation is still known by the family name, Hernandez. I did try to find out more information about him and the family, but I turned up a blank.”

“Spanish?”

"Portuguese is more likely," Frank clicked his tongue. "Don't you know anything about the history of South America?"

"Yeah, right. It's my favourite bedtime reading after *Excellent Adventures in Chemistry*. Okay, so tell me more about the mark."

"He's rich and he's gay." Frank pulled his coat tighter around him. "I would suggest you brush up on your Portuguese."

"He's an Italian? Which follows he'd speak Italian, right?"

"I have no idea what language he speaks. He's European, so most likely he speaks several."

"So screw the Portuguese," Hal snorted.

"Hal," Frank snapped, already impatient. "I told you, the main language spoken in South America is Portuguese. You might need to ask directions sometime."

"Okay, point taken."

"Marshall will have to convince this man to sign over the property," Frank stressed. "When the time comes, I can get any documents you require. I have people standing by in Sao Paulo ready to fulfil any role you may need."

"That's all well and good, Frank, but if there is an inheritance involved, it follows that there will also have to be a little...accident?" Hal raised an eyebrow.

He was standing too close to him. Frank took a step backward. "That's your department. I don't want to know anything about that."

"Umm...fine, but what if we get all the way out there and Marshall isn't able to get this guys attention?"

Frank gave Hal a look of disbelief. "Your boy can seduce anyone. You told me that yourself."

"He's my boy now?" Hal chuckled.

"Besides," Frank said, pretending he didn't hear Hal's snide remark, "this man lives out in the middle of nowhere. Who in the hell is he supposed to have sex with? I know he was alone when he took over the plantation."

"It's a risk," Hal replied dryly.

Frank ran a hand through his hair. "Yes, but one we have to take."

"One you have no choice but to take," Hal threw at him.

"It's a good deal all around, Hal," Frank's voice sounding pleading even to himself. "We have a buyer waiting in the wings." He paused for



a minute as Hal pondered what he had said. "Don't you think so?"

"Stop begging, Frank," Hal patted his shoulder. "I have already decided to do it."

Frank smiled tightly. "Good. And after this," he added, "we can dissolve our association."

"Aw, and I thought you liked me," Hal cooed. When Frank didn't respond, he said, "Since I do all the cleaning up, and take all the risks while you sit back here and play with your computer, I expect to get my money as soon as it's over."

Frank nodded. "Don't worry. You'll get your money."

Hal nodded, a faint smile creeping across his face. "This will take a fair bit of time. How much time do we have?"

"I wasn't given a specific time frame, but I know they want the property in the hands of the buyer by next summer at the latest. But the sooner it's done the better for everyone concerned."

"Of course," Hal nodded.

Hal watched Frank dig into the pocket of his coat for something. He lowered his voice, warning, "Oh, by the way Frank, Marshall can't know what has to be done in the end. He won't go for it if I tell him."

Frank shrugged. "He's been your puppet so far. Tell him what you need to."

"And after it's done?"

Frank drew in some breath. "We split our share of the money three ways or...two..." he eyed him cautiously. "That is entirely up to you."

Hal pursed his lips. "Well you know what they say...two's company..."

Frank felt a chill run up his spine as he handed Hal a brown envelope. "Everything you need is in here, including some names of contact people if you have any initial problems. Call me on my cell phone if it's an emergency. Do not call me here at Havendale under any circumstances. After you arrive in Sao Paulo, you'll have to ask directions to the plantation. It's somewhere near a place called Santa Branca, about one hundred and twenty kilometres north east of the city."

"Where is that?"

"I have no idea."

"It's not next door, is it?" Hal took the envelope.

"The money from the tickets and the traveller's checks will come out of your cut," Frank added hastily.

Hal shook his head. "Wrong."

Frank met his eyes. He bit his lip. "I'll cover the expenses."

"Damn right you will," Hal's voice clipped.

Giving him a brief nod, Frank turned on one heel and disappeared down the darkened street.

## Chapter 14

When Hal got home, he took the passports and work visas out of the envelope and looked at the pictures. These pictures were taken at the mall a few months back when Marshall was still at Havendale House. The passport names were Marshall Munduso and Hal Green. How original. There were also other documents with the same information printed on them, medical cards and social insurance numbers. It must have cost a pretty penny for these babies. Hal would love to have the contacts Frank had, but Frank wasn't stupid enough to reveal his sources. Hal suspected his contacts were once residents of the group home. That place was a haven for criminals.

Frank had always been associated with some pretty shady people. Sometimes that association had served him well, but this time his head was on the chopping block. It meant only one thing to Hal... He no longer had to take his shit.

Hal removed the last items from the envelope and checked the two open-ended airline tickets to Rio with a transfer to Sao Paulo, destination Guarulhos International Airport. He threw them aside and crawled into his bed. This job wasn't like the others. It was one thing to blackmail someone into giving you money, and quite another thing to get yourself into someone's will. It was no small task, even for a pro like Marshall. He knew Marshall could probably get the guy into bed, but could he manage to make himself the most important person in his life?

This one made him nervous. Flying off to a strange country to meet someone he knew next to nothing about could be dangerous.

He turned over onto his stomach and closed his eyes. He had to concentrate on what they had going for them, before thinking about all

the things that seemed impossible. Every job was workable if it was done properly. First of all, Frank had mentioned a dispute over the property. That meant the mark was isolated from his family. He wasn't going to leave anything to them. Secondly, he was gay, which made him assume he had no children. But there was no guarantee of that either. And there might be a boyfriend.

Hal sighed deeply.

His mind exhausted, Hal told himself to take it one step at a time. That's what he'd always done. First, he'd get them on the plane to Brazil... Then, he'd make sure they got hired on at the coffee plantation. After that, he would be in a better position to plan his next move. He would have to make sure to keep a tight rein on Marshall this time. If he fucked up, he'd kill him.

## Chapter 15

Marshall had another nightmare. He woke up bathed in sweat. The devil was coming after him again. "Your soul is mine!" he growled. He couldn't tell Hal about it because Hal would be angry with him.

He sat up and pushed his damp curly hair off his forehead and thought about some of the men he'd been intimate with. Some of them weren't bad guys. They were decent. He wondered sometimes if hooking on the street wasn't more honest in some ways, than pretending to care about someone, then sticking a knife in their backs. At least with prostitution, there was no pretence involved.

He was restless so he got up, washed his face and looked at the clock. It was almost noon.

He had better wake Hal so he could go pick up the money at the terminal.

When he came into his room, the bed was empty. Hal had already left to get the money. Sometimes he thought Hal never slept.

Marshall paced, made coffee, but didn't drink any. The money better be there in the locker or Hal would hit the roof. Several times, he went to look out the window, but he didn't see him.

At two thirty, the door opened and Hal appeared, carrying a lot of bags.

"Finally," Marshall breathed, jumping up from the sofa. "Where were you? Did you get the money?"

"Yeah, yeah, don't worry. The money was there. All went well. I went shopping."

"Shopping for what?" He asked absently, finally feeling as if he could breathe again. At least that job was over.

"Backpacks and shit students lug around." Hal tossed the bags onto the sofa.

"Why?" Marshall crinkled up his nose, poking into the bags.

Hal sighed. "You're still in your robe. Go get dressed and we'll talk."

Marshall nodded and went to his room to put on his pants. Were they going backpacking? He came back into the living room in his jeans and an old navy tee-shirt, still in his bare feet. "So, what's up with the backpacks?"

"Ever been to South America?"

"South America? No. Hal, are we going?" Marshall was excited. "Oh, Hal," he said, jumping up and down, "finally, a vacation." He went to hug him, but Hal put up his hands.

"Not so fast. It's not a vacation. It's work, hard work, maybe the most difficult job we've ever done, but if we pull it off, we can retire."

Marshall's eyes widened. "Retire, really? You mean it? We won't have to do this stuff anymore?"

"I mean it. We'll be rich and we can live anywhere in the world."

"Just you and me?" Marshall grinned.

"Just you and me," Hal repeated flatly.

"So, what's the job?"

"It's in Sao Paulo. Well, not really, but somewhere around there... a coffee plantation owner. Get me a drink and I'll tell you more about it."

"Coffee plantation?" Marshall scowled. "And where in hell is San Paulino?"

Hal sighed. "Sao Paulo and yes, it's a coffee plantation. You may actually have to bend your back a bit."

Marshall was not enthusiastic. He listened to what Hal was saying about this job, then he shook his head firmly. "I don't know if I can do this, Hal."

Hal sat up straight and looked him in the eye. "What do you mean you don't know if you can do this?"

Marshall backed up a bit, nervous. "Hal, how am I going to get some old fart on a coffee plantation to leave me everything he has? This isn't anything like the other jobs. I've got to make the old goat love me enough to...and in how long a time...less than a year? Then in

between I have to slave away on a goddamned coffee plantation. What do you do on a coffee plantation anyway?"

"How in fuck should I know?" Hal snapped, slicing into Marshall's rambling. "Do I look like Juan Valdez or something? We'll find out when we get there. And why this piss ass attitude? The other night you were bragging how you could seduce any man, even a straight one. Now you say you can't do it?"

"But he has to die!" Marshall protested, standing up, shaking his head. "Hal, blackmail is one thing, murder is another."

Hal sighed. "Don't get excited. I didn't say we'd kill him. There are ways around that."

"What ways?" Marshall narrowed his eyes. "There are no ways! I may not know much, Hal, but I know someone has to die before you inherit their shit."

"Leave that to me. What you have to realize is the old fart is isolated in a new country. He's probably lonely as hell. He's living with bitchy relatives who don't like him. You just have to scratch his itch and then leave the rest to me. I'm still trying to figure stuff out. We will play it by ear. Are we a good team or not?"

"We are a good team, Hal, but damn it...I don't like this one. I have to do more than scratch his itch. I have to make this old guy fall madly in love with me. He has to love me enough to give me all he's got! Men don't love me, Hal. You told me that and..."

"Marshall, goddamn it," Hal snapped. "You're hysterical. Listen to yourself." He came over and placed his hands on his shoulders. Hal cleared his throat and looked into his eyes. "Don't you want to retire, lead a quiet life with me somewhere, and never have to work again? Don't you trust me?"

"Yes, Hal, I trust you," Marshall sighed, calming somewhat. "But..."

Hal dug his hand into his pocket and produced a joint. "Look, you need to relax. Come sit over here with me and we'll smoke this together."

Marshall sat beside Hal on the sofa. He watched as Hal lit the joint and inhaled deeply. Squinting his eyes, he handed Marshall the cigarette. Marshall closed his eyes, took a drag and let the smoke into his lungs. He held it for a few minutes, then exhaled. He let his head

loll back on the sofa.

After a few more puffs, Hal whispered playfully in his ear. "Who is the whore extraordinaire?"

Marshall laughed a little, his body feeling relaxed.

"Who is the sexiest, best looking guy I know? Who is the best lay this side of anywhere?" Hal nudged him.

Marshall opened his eyes and grinned. "You got me. I'll do it. When do we leave?"

Hal put out the joint and stood up. "Hopefully, by the end of next week. I have the tickets and our passports ready. I also have working visas, good for a year. How's your Portuguese?"

"Portuguese?" Marshall sat up. "You've got to be kidding. I can't even handle Italian, and my name is Calletti."

"Munduso, remember."

"Yeah, ok. Whatever."

"Not whatever. You better remember it. Brush up on your Italian, too. This guy was in Rome, so at least you can communicate some with him."

"He doesn't speak English?" Marshall gasped.

"I don't know. I know nothing about him except what I told you."

Marshall shook his head, pulling his shoulder-length curly black hair into a ponytail. "What if this doesn't work?"

"It's going to work!" Hal snapped. "Just do as I say and it will work. It's a lot of money. No one is expecting we can pull this off in a day. We have to be careful. We don't know what we're dealing with yet. If we spook him, we're finished."

"He's probably got Alzheimer's and will have a cardiac arrest the minute I take his pants off," Marshall giggled. "I'm so sick of doing old men. It seems old age and lots of money always go together. Aren't I fortunate? Anyway, if we pull this off, Hal, it's the last old man I'm ever sleeping with."

"All I know is, I'm going to have some real money before I become one of those old men. So remember Marshall, you're going to do exactly what I tell you to do, right? This is too important to fuck up." He gave him a menacing look. "Tell me now. Commit yourself completely or walk out that door and I will take someone else."

"Someone else?" Marshall jumped off the sofa. "Where are you



going to find someone as good as me? I'm the only one who can carry this off, Hal. I can do it. I can make this guy fall desperately in love with me and give me the shirt off his back. You know I can."

"That's my boy, that's how I like to hear you talk... Silently, he lamented the fact that Marshall would ramble on in what Hal referred to as "stone speak" for hours.

"Don't worry, Hal. I won't let you down. I'll do what you say. Then, when it's over, we will be able to go anywhere we want and I won't have to do this stuff anymore?"

"I guarantee you, Marshall," Hal smiled smugly, "when this one is over, you'll never have to do this again."

## Chapter 16

They arrived at the Guarulhos international Airport in Sao Paulo at seven thirty in the morning Brazil time, one hour later than it was back home. Marshall was disappointed when he didn't get to see much of Rio. They landed, waited an hour, then took off again.

Marshall sat next to the window, his eyes widening as he saw the rivers and forests come into view below. High mountain peaks jutted into the sky and everything was green.

He mentioned it to Hal who mumbled to himself as he studied the Portuguese dictionary he had positioned on his lap. Marshall uttered a small gasp as the huge metropolis of Sao Paulo suddenly appeared through a murky haze of gray sky.

It was good to be distracted by the view. He had been stressed all the way from Montreal, his mind conjuring up all kinds of reasons why he shouldn't be on this plane. His legs felt like lead when he had boarded the second plane. Hal had literally pushed him down the aisle to their seats.

It was one thing to scam men in his own country, but these people didn't even speak English. He knew nothing about coffee, except that he needed to drink it in the morning in order to open his eyes.

He was so afraid to let Hal down. Hal seemed so excited, saying over and over how this one would be the last. But in spite of the fact that this was supposed to be the job to end all jobs, every instinct in his body was screaming at him to turn around and go home. The whole thing didn't make any sense to him. Why did they have to come all the way out here to do this? Why couldn't they find someone in their own country? And how could he inherit someone's property unless they were...dead? This worried him a lot and every time he began to

question Hal about it, he became angry and accused him of not trusting him.

He wanted to go home, but was afraid to tell Hal. He was afraid of what Hal would do to him if he tried to back out.

That one time Hal had pulled him out of bed and had beat him still played in the back of his mind. He remembered how angry Hal had been and, although it hadn't happened again, he knew he didn't need to give him a reason.

Hal didn't mean to be cruel. He was looking out for him, looking out for them both, trying to give them a future. He had to remind himself to remember that. But he also knew Hal was capable of violence.

They got off the plane in the industrial suburbs of Guarulhos and took a bus into Sao Paulo. The traffic was horrible and what was supposed to take forty-five minutes took over two hours. Marshall was terrified the bus driver would have an accident. He held onto the back of the seat and tried to relax while people around him babbled in some foreign language.

Hal asked the driver to let them off on St. Paulista Avenue, pointing to it on his street map. The driver turned the corner and stopped the bus. He smiled and opened the door. "Bom Dia..."

Hal nodded at him, motioning to Marshall to follow.

While it was winter back home, it was the beginning of spring in Sao Paulo. It was a comfortable sixty degrees. Marshall positioned his knapsack on his back and followed Hal through the crowded streets filled with people, heavy traffic and pollution. Montreal looked like a village in comparison. He had no idea where they were going and he felt lost among the hordes of people who brushed passed him.

Paulista Avenue was a busy street. All around them were huge skyscrapers and flashing billboard signs in Portuguese. Marshall heard a host of difference languages being spoken. Voices blended together in an international symphony as he kept walking. He heard Chinese, Italian, French and German, and other languages he couldn't identify.

There were restaurants offering cuisine from all over the world as well. He couldn't help but stop and gawk which prompted Hal to turn around and snap at him to hurry up. Everywhere they were surrounded by lemon trees and strange looking birds.

Yet what really fascinated him were the huge mansions.

"Will you come on?" Hal snapped for the third time, looking at him over his shoulder.

"Where are we going?" Marshall whined, trying to concentrate on what Hal was saying.

Hal sighed. "Look, I'm fucking tired. The last thing I need is your bullshit. We are trying to find out how to get to Santa Branca. There is supposed to be a tourist information booth here, but I can't find it. Let's go into this restaurant and ask someone. It's almost noon anyway, and I'm starved."

Marshall nodded. "Me, too." He quickly followed him.

The restaurant was pleasant and clean with lots of tropical plants. A few people sat around drinking beer. Hal took a seat in a padded booth in front of a big picture window and began to search his phrase book.

Marshall slipped in on the opposite side and looked at the people pouring by the window. "Wow," he murmured, "this is a huge city. There are so many people. I've never seen this many people in one place before."

Hal motioned to the waiter.

He came over and smiled. "Bom dia," he said. "I'm Francesco." He was a short little man with a bald head and bright smile.

Hal squinted at his phrase book. "Bom dia," he said awkwardly.

"Por favor, senior," Hal muttered, "tratalha...Hernandez... coffee...ah...como..."

The man smiled. "You are American?"

"Oh thank God, you speak English," Hal laughed. "No, Canadian actually. My friend and I are here visiting, but also for work."

"Ah...sim."

"We have jobs waiting on a coffee plantation. Do you know the Hernandez Coffee Plantation? In Santa Branca?"

"Sim, I know. Everyone knows this place, but not in Santa Branca."

"Well, near there?" Hal squinted.

He nodded. "Sim...you will need to travel at least one hour up the mountain. It is in the Brazilian Highlands."

Marshall sighed. "Sounds isolated."

He smiled. "Sim."

"How can we get there. Is there a bus?" Hal asked.

"I can ask my cousin, Armando. He works for the Hernandez family, bringing coffee to Port Santos. He could take you."

"Perfect. We'll talk about payment when we get up there."

The man shook his head. "Is not necessary if he must go there. Let me call him. Can I get you something?"

"What's the usual?" Hal laughed.

"Fries, cold beer and tequila."

"Sound's good. Bring us some."

He nodded and walked away.

Marshall remained silent. He thought he'd better not say anything. Hal didn't seem to be in the mood to chat.

After eating fries, drinking beer and tequila, the waiter came over and told them his cousin would be happy to drive them up the mountain, but they would have to wait until tomorrow. He would meet them at the restaurant.

Later, he recommended a hotel nearby in the Jardin district and even gave them a ride to the hotel in his Toyota. Marshall couldn't believe how friendly and helpful the locals were.

The hotel was beautiful and the staff went out of their way to accommodate them. The desk clerk spoke English and handed them all kinds of travel brochures. Hal tried to explain to Marshall the currency and the exchange rate. As it turned out the Canadian dollar was worth more than the South American Reals so they were getting good value.

Everywhere beautiful palm trees gave them shade and the smell of jasmine floated in the air. Marshall wanted to go out but Hal told him to rest. They had to meet the man called Armando tomorrow morning at six o'clock. They had no time to sightsee.

After ordering room service and eating delicious chicken, rice and fresh fruit, Marshall lay on the bed studying the brochures. "Hey, Hal," Marshall said as he emerged from the shower, "those mansions we saw when we got off the bus used to belong to old coffee barons. Isn't that neat?"

"Really," Hal yawned.

"There is some stuff here about the mountains. There are cattle ranches up there, too, and orchards. There are a lot of rivers. Did you

know that Sao Paulo has a population of seventeen million people and that it was founded in 1555?"

"Yeah, wonderful...go to sleep," Hal interrupted. "We'll see it all soon enough."

"That guy at the restaurant was really nice to get his cousin to take us. Guess it was luck we walked in there, right, Hal?"

Hal had turned off his light. "Yeah, Marshall. Goodnight, Marshall."

But Marshall couldn't sleep. He was too nervous about tomorrow. He was in a strange country and going into a situation he knew nothing about. He wished Hal would talk to him, but Hal was already snoring.

Marshall got out of bed and looked out the window. The skyline at night was incredible, so many tall buildings all jammed together and traffic, lots and lots of traffic. Sao Paulo was a city that didn't sleep.

He sighed and lay back down. What was he doing here? In a lifetime he would have never imagined coming to this place. It was almost four in the morning before he finally closed his eyes. He dreamed of the Amazon and huge gorillas eating bananas off the trees. He walked down dusty roads, high on a huge mountain and he was thirsty, so thirsty. Finally, at the end of the road was a well and he began to drink and drink until he could drink no more.

## Chapter 17

Hal woke him at five in the morning. They showered, packed up their duffel bags and checked out of the hotel. They were surprised to see Francesco's car outside. He waved. "Bom Dia... Want a ride?"

They gratefully climbed in, all packed into the front seat, their backpacks thrown in back. "We were going to call a cab," Marshall said. "Thank you...or wait...obrigado."

"Ah...denanda, your pronunciation is good," he patted Marshall's arm and drove into traffic.

"I'm Italian. I guess the words are similar, but my Italian is rusty."

"Sim, the languages are similar. Will not take you long to learn. Many Italians here, my friend... second place in world beside Italy for Italians."

"Where did you learn your English?" Marshall asked.

"At school. I like this language."

"Do you know about working at coffee plantations, Francesco?"

"Better to ask Armando. Before he do transport, he picked the beans. He could tell you that. I only drink the coffee," he laughed.

They arrived at the restaurant a half hour later and waited as Francesco opened up. Marshall and Hal brought in their bags. They had coffee, then the door opened. A tall man with black curly hair stood there all dressed in white and held a huge straw hat in his hands. His skin had the texture of leather and was really dark.

"Armando. Bom dia," Francesco walked over and gave him a huge hug. He glanced at Marshall and Hal and quickly introduced them.

Armando nodded at them. "Ready? I must go," he said in English.

Hal and Marshall thanked Francesco and left with Armando in his

truck.

As soon as they began to climb the mountain, it started to sprinkle rain.

Armando said little for the first while. Marshall sat near the window in the front and looked at the scenery. They climbed higher and higher, passing cattle and crops. The farther they climbed, the thicker the forest became. The roads were narrow and a little muddy.

Then Marshall saw a sign which said Santa Branca. But Armando bypassed it and kept going.

"Hey, there was Santa Branca," Marshall pointed to the left.

Armando glanced at him. "The Hernandez Plantation is higher up in the mountains, a few miles yet."

Marshall nodded. "Oh."

"Relax," Hal leaned over from the backseat to place a hand on Marshall's shoulder.

"So you want work on Plantation, eh?" Armando laughed, showing his yellow teeth.

Marshall nodded. "Yes. What's it like?"

"Hard work. You have some experience?"

"None," Marshall replied.

"The farm manager...he teach you. They know you are coming?"

"No," Hal interjected. "Will there be a problem?"

He shrugged. "Nao Sei. I leave you at front gate...you ring and someone come. This is beginning of the plantation." He pointed out his window.

Marshall's and Hal's eyes widened. Trees lined both sides of the road. They seemed to go on for miles. In the distance, there on the left, was a series of buildings. Farther in the distance, was what looked like berries spread out on concrete with men raking them back and forth.

"What is that over there?" Marshall asked.

"The factory and the bunkhouses where workers live, the ones who do not live on mountain already."

"What about those men? What are they doing?" Hal wondered if he would be doing this shit, and he wanted to know what he was getting into.

"Drying the beans...they must rake them so they don't get moist. Those are the coffee trees. There are almost a million on the



Hernandez estate. It is one of the biggest coffee farms in Brazil.”

“Wow,” Hal exclaimed.

They drove on a few more miles before Armando pulled to a stop. “If you walk just around the corner, you come to front gate of main house. There is button and speaker. Someone will attend to you. I will be here until suppertime. If you need to get back, I take you.”

They took out their bags. “Thanks, Armando,” Hal nodded, “but we will be staying.”

He nodded, and drove off.

Marshall waved at him, his heart sinking a little as he disappeared down the road. He put down his bag and looked around. All around him were trees and fresh air. He could smell flowers, fruit and coffee.

“It’s incredible,” Marshall muttered. “I’ve never seen anything like it in my life.”

“Think of how much it’s worth,” Hal grinned. “Come on, let’s go.”

Marshall picked up his bag and followed Hal around the corner of the road. They stopped in front of a high cast iron fence with a camera and an intercom mounted to the left of them. There in the distance was a house, a long white bungalow made out of stucco with black framed windows and surrounded with trees. Marshall could smell the scent of lemons. On the left hand side was a barn and a corral. Two horses grazed behind a makeshift fence, one white and the other brown. An old green pickup truck was parked directly in front of the house.

Hal put down his bag and pushed the button.

“Shouldn’t we wait?” Marshall asked nervously.

“Wait for what?” Hal snapped. “Smarten up, Marshall. You want to sleep out here tonight?”

“No.”

A gruff voice abruptly burst through the speaker, “Como?”

Hal tried to say the word work in Portuguese, but they kept hearing, “Como?”

“He’s getting angry, Hal. He doesn’t understand,” Marshall told him.

“Do you speak English?” Hal demanded.

“What you want? Americano? We no have tour today.”

“Tour? No, we don’t want a tour. Want to work...work...”

“Wait...” But the speaker crackled, then died.

"I don't think this is such a good idea, Hal," Marshall wiped the sweat off his forehead. "He seemed pissed off."

"Well, you will have to make sure he gets over being pissed off, won't you?" Hal leered at him. "You might as well meet the man now."

Marshall bit his lip. In the distance, they saw the door to the house open. A man walked out and got into the truck. Within minutes he was barreling toward them. He screeched the truck to a halt in front of the gate, and crawled out.

The man was not tall. His face was badly wrinkled from the sun, his eyes two slits as he stared at them. He was stooped some. He looked to be in his late fifties, maybe older.

He peered at them through the gate. "Work? Why you come here to work?" He barked at them.

Marshall smiled at him, his voice shaking. "We are students...we have visas to work in Brazil and we heard you needed people."

He came closer and studied him. "You have experience working on coffee farm?"

Marshall was about to say no, but Hal brushed him aside, "Yes...yes we worked in Columbia on a coffee plantation."

He crossed his arms. "Wait, I call the manager and he check your papers. If you have papers, you can work. If you live here, you have less money...he tell you." With that he turned his back and got back into the truck. He backed up at break neck speed, all the way to the house.

Marshall stood unable to move and terrified. He wanted to turn around and run as far away as possible. He wanted to tell Hal he had no intention of going near that man, let alone letting him touch him. He didn't give a damn how much money was at stake.

## Chapter 18

They sat down on the side of the road and waited. The sun was hot, but there was still a slight breeze. Almost an hour later, they saw one of those all terrain vehicles coming up the road.

Marshall and Hal got to their feet as the man got out, a good-looking man in his forties with a nice smile. "You the Americans?"

"Canadians," Hal corrected, holding out his hand.

They shook hands. "My name is Cruz Sampaio. The boss tells me you are looking for work."

Hal nodded. "Yes, we are."

"Well, there's always work to be done. The pay is not high."

"We need money," Hal shrugged.

"You know anything about coffee harvesting?"

"Some," Hal lied.

Cruz smiled. "Well, hop in. You will be staying here, I take it? You don't have lodgings on the mountain?"

"No."

"No problem, we'll fix you up. I'm sorry I took so long to get here. I was in the middle of something," he commented, driving over bumpy roads.

They went back the way they came and then turned off onto a road covered in dense trees.

"You speak excellent English, Cruz," Hal said.

"Spent some time in America when I was younger."

"It shows."

"First time to Brazil?" he asked.

Hal said yes, explaining they were students picking up jobs here and there, so they could see the world.

Marshall remained silent, distracted by the people working in the fields. They trimmed the trees and put coffee beans in big bags. The truck swerved onto another road and they stopped in front of a series of buildings, all on one floor made of white stucco.

"This is the office," he said, getting out. "Bring your bags. The bunkhouses are there in behind, over in the distance is the processing plant," he pointed.

"Wow," Marshall said, speaking for the first time since he had gotten into the truck. Fields of trees all about six feet tall for as far as the eye could see stood in the fields. "How come the trees are all the same height? Is that as high as they grow?"

"No. They grow much taller, but they are trimmed at that height because it makes them easier to harvest."

They walked into the office a small room with a desk, a chair and a file cabinet. Cruz offered them water which they gratefully drank out of small paper cups.

He looked over their papers and nodded. "You are responsible for your own food. Someone is always going into Santa Branca and will give you a lift. You can buy food there. There are several refrigerators in the bunkhouse and a stove. Many cook outside. Label your food so there is no confusion. Pay is in South American currency. One hundred Reals a week, which works out roughly to sixty dollars Canadian, that's after board is calculated. The pay is every two weeks. You will come here to collect it. Working hours are from six in the morning to eleven and then two until four, six days a week, your day off will be posted. The main house is off limits unless you are otherwise told. Any questions so far?"

They were in shock. They didn't know what to say.

"I know the pay is much less than what you are used to," he said.

Hal grinned. "It's fine. It's not like there's a shopping mall out here or anything where we can spend our money."

"No," he said, laughing as he handed them back their papers. "Could you fill out these forms please by the evening, just information about who we contact if you get hurt and things like that."

Marshall took the forms out of his hand. "Sure, no problem."

"I'll take you to the bunkhouse and show you where you will sleep. There are sheets and pillows in the cupboard and a place to put your

laundry. That is done for you once a week. Put it in a bag with your name on it before Friday and it will be back by Monday.”

He showed them inside a long building. There were rows upon rows of bunks. He told them that the showers were outside in back. “I’ll give you sheets and a pillow,” he muttered, opening up a small cupboard that stood just inside the door. He handed them each a set of faded yellow sheets that felt like sandpaper and a well worn pillow.

Marshall wrinkled his nose. The pillow smelled odd.

When they stepped back outside, he pointed to an identical building across from them. “That is the women’s bunkhouse. It is forbidden to enter the women’s bunkhouse. We’ve had problems.”

“Makes sense,” Marshall agreed.

“Fine, settle in and tomorrow morning, I’ll explain your duties. There is a bulletin board outside my office. Check it often. Your day off will be posted. Any questions, ask me or the others. Rules are simple, do your job, no fighting, no drugs or alcohol on the premises. You go to town for that. Lights out at ten, no noise. Sleep is important here.”

They both nodded, and thanked him.

After they got settled, they went outside and sat around. They were tired and overwhelmed. Hal was deep in thought, wondering how Marshall was going to get to the main house so he could meet that man again.

“That Farelli fellow,” Marshall sighed, “isn’t going to be easy to get to know.”

Hal nodded. “I know. We will do it. Just have to put some thought into it.”

Cruz came by a few minutes later and asked them if they had settled in.

Marshall stood up. “I have those papers for you.”

“Good, bring them by the office in ten minutes.”

Marshall said he would. He liked Cruz. He was nice. He wished it was him that he had to seduce, not that old grumpy guy at the house.

A half hour later, Marshall brought the papers to Cruz. Hal was talking to some of the other workers, asking questions he thought might be useful to them.

“Thanks, Marshall,” he said, running his eyes over them. “Seems in order.”

Marshall walked out and Cruz walked out after him.

"That Farelli guy isn't too friendly, is he?" Marshall mentioned casually to Cruz as he stood looking out at the fields.

"I didn't know you had met Senior Farelli," he said, adjusting his wide brimmed hat.

Marshall looked at him. "Wasn't that Mr. Farelli who called for you to pick us up at the fence?"

As if on cue that old truck was coming toward them down the road. "Him there...that's him," Marshall motioned toward the truck before Cruz had the opportunity to respond.

"That's not Senior Farelli," Cruz laughed, shaking his head. "That's Senior Hernandez."

Hal came to stand with them.

Cruz lifted a hand. "Bom Tarde, Ricardo," he said.

Marshall and Hal looked at each other curiously as the man got out of the truck and walked toward them.

"That," Cruz said, pointing off in the distance to a figure in white, astride a black horse, "is Angelo Farelli." The horse with its rider galloped down the road, clouds of dust flying up around them. As a result, they could see very little as horse and rider disappeared around the bend.

Ricardo Hernandez paused, looked off in the distance and snarled. He said something under his breath and went into the office.

"He doesn't appear to like him too much," Hal laughed, after Ricardo Hernandez disappeared inside the office.

Cruz shrugged.

"Who is he exactly, this guy who met us at the gate?" Hal asked. "I wouldn't want to piss him off. We thought he was the boss."

Cruz nodded. "He used to be the boss when the old man was alive, his father got too old to run the place. I worked under him. He still runs things but Angelo—Senior Farelli—has the final say now."

"So he is Farelli's uncle?" Marshall speculated.

"Senior Farelli's great uncle actually, the old man's brother."

"Ah," Marshall replied. "I see. This place belonged to Senior Farelli's grandfather?"

He nodded. "Yes. Well, Ricardo will be waiting for me. Enjoy your evening. I will show you what you need to know early tomorrow

morning.”

“Do you stay here, Cruz?” Marshall asked.

“Very rarely, unless something happens. My wife wouldn’t like it,” he laughed and disappeared inside.

Hal and Marshall walked around later, looking at the buildings and talking with the peasants. Some of them could speak English and Marshall and Hal tried looking up words in Portuguese. There was a lot of laughter. Some of the workers shared their supper with them and they were offered rides by at least seven people to go to town tomorrow so they could buy food. The people seemed to be happy people and extremely generous even though it was obvious they didn’t have much.

When they were alone, Hal said, “Jesus, these people are going to be a pain in the ass, always smiling and offering you things. They make me sick.”

Marshall looked down at his feet and said nothing. Hal had acted like he was having a good time. He thought he liked these people.

“Well, at least that angry old man is not Farelli,” Marshall mentioned, sitting on the grass under a tree.

“Yeah, well that leaves another problem. You still need to meet Farelli and to do that, you will probably have to go to the house. If Ricardo is the one who oversees the place that means Farelli probably doesn’t even come down here much.”

“Did you ask Cruz about that?” Marshall inquired, picking at the grass. Shit, he just wanted to get this over with.

“No. I didn’t want to ask too many questions. He would wonder why I wanted to know all this stuff. Anyway, we better hit the hay if we are going to get up at five in the morning.”

Marshall agreed, and they went into the bunkhouse.

## Chapter 19

The morning came fast and Marshall didn't sleep much. He was anxiously wondering what kind of work he would be doing the next day. He had never done any manual labour and he knew nothing about coffee harvesting.

They were given food by some of the other workers who lived in the bunkhouse. This touched Marshall enormously. They were strangers here after all.

They lined up to walk under the showers. Some of the men who seemed to be assigned to take care of the housekeeping stuff handed them towels.

One of the workers who had shared his food with them was called Miguel. He spoke choppy English but managed to make himself understood. He shook his head and laughed when he saw them. "Noa...Noa..." he said when he saw Marshall.

"What's so funny?" Marshall asked him.

"Hat," he patted his head, then said some other thing Marshall didn't understand, rubbing his arms and legs.

"Sunscreen," Cruz said, coming up behind him. "You need sunscreen and bug spray. There is some in my office. And a hat. You can buy one in town, but someone will loan you one for now."

Cruz walked through the bunkhouse and came back. "Meet me outside the office in ten minutes," he said.

Marshall smiled at Miguel when he came up to him suddenly and stuck a big floppy hat on his head. "Obrigado," Marshall smiled at him.

He laughed and patted Marshall's shoulder.

Cruz interrupted them suddenly. He motioned to them, "Come with



me.”

They walked past the factory and down a dirt road where coffee trees were planted in large consecutive rows. People were trimming them and picking the beans.

“Now,” he said, stopping in front of one of the trees, “this is a coffee tree. Some people call it a bush. A coffee tree can grow up to fifteen feet high, but we cultivate them to grow about six feet, because they are easier to harvest.”

“What’s that wonderful smell?” Marshall asked, leaning forward.

“Smells like Jasmine, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“It’s those white flowers that grow in bunches. Only a mature tree produces these white flowers and it takes on average three to four years. After the flowers blossom, the berries will come seven months or so later, depending on the amount of rain and sun. Coffee bushes need the weather to swing between rain and then sun, rain and sun. This is the best,” he said.

“What about the leaves?” Marshall asked.

“When the tree first buds, the leaves are a yellow copper colour like that,” he pointed to some leaves near by. “Then the leaves get green, the darker the green, the more mature the tree.”

“Is there a specific time of year to . . .” Hal asked.

Cruz laughed. “No. That’s the frustrating thing. Berries, or cherries as some like to call them, must be picked when they are ripe or they rot and not all berries are ripe at the same time. Take this tree here. Some berries are ready to pick, but others are not.”

“What kind of coffee do you produce here?” Hal asked curiously.

“Mostly Arabic, about ninety percent of Brazilian coffee is Arabic. Now if you come this way, I will show you what is done with the berries once they are picked. Do you see that man? He is loading the berries into a wheelbarrow. He will take them up there,” he pointed back toward the bunkhouses. In the back was a large terrazzo area.

“We use the dry method here for coffee, which means we dry them in the sun for several weeks. They must be raked regularly and covered at night to keep the moisture out.”

They followed him back toward the bunkhouses and watched the men who were raking the beans for a few minutes.

"After they are dried," he said, "they are ready for husking. There is a skin that must be taken off and then they are polished. Finally we hand sort them in relation to size and weight and get them ready to take to the port. They are exported before roasting."

"So what do we do?" Marshall asked.

"Today, I want you to work with one of the others and watch them do the picking so you will know for sure which beans to pick. Tomorrow, you will help with the raking and finally with the husking and sorting."

Marshall was put with Miguel to work, Hal with one of the other men who could communicate some in English.

Miguel drove them into town at seven to buy food and showed them some of the sights. The mountains were beautiful, quite heavenly with rivers and waterfalls. It was so green.

Santa Branca was a nice sized town with a population of 15,000 people. When they were in the grocery store, Miguel took a picture out of his wallet and showed it to him. It was of a young man. He was husky and smiling and quite handsome. "Pedro," he murmured. "Love," he laughed softly.

"Ah," Marshall nodded, smiling. "He live here?"

"No, Santa Carlos but I see next week."

Marshall grinned at him.

"All you needing ever in life," he added, walking away as he placed the picture back in his wallet.

Marshall watched Hal as he filled up the cart with food and a wave of sadness washed over him suddenly.

They got back to the bunkhouse by nine, labelled and put away their food, then fell into bed.

## Chapter 20

The second day was much harder than the first. Marshall was sore from bending and reaching. Cruz gave him some white liquid stuff in a bottle that smelled horrible, but he rubbed himself with it anyway. He told him the soreness would eventually go away.

An entire week passed and Marshall was growing used to the strange animal sounds he heard at night and the smell of jasmine, which he didn't mind at all. He liked Miguel. In fact, he liked the South Americans and he was even beginning to enjoy the work. He almost forgot what he was here for until Hal reminded him.

They were given Monday off and for the first time in six days, they slept until ten o'clock. It was Hal who woke Marshall abruptly, practically dragging him out of the bunk.

"Have you forgotten what in hell we are doing here?" He demanded, sitting on the edge of his bunk.

"What?" Marshall blinked.

Hal sighed. "You're getting into this, aren't you?" he whispered. "We're not here to work on a goddamned coffee farm, discussing stupidity with the natives!"

Marshall sat up. "Hal, take it easy. It's only been a week."

"A week...a week and you haven't even set eyes on the mark, or him on you. Have you even been thinking about how you are going to meet him? How are you going to get up to the bloody house?"

"Well, I..." Marshall began.

"That's what I thought," Hal said with disgust. "That's why you need me to do the thinking! While you've been holding hands with Miguel, I've been keeping my eyes open. I've noticed that Cruz goes up to the house every day at noon. He must eat up there. When he goes up

today, you'll be waiting for him."

"At the gate?" Marshall looked surprised.

"Hiding, stupid! When the gate opens for him, you slip in. Wait behind the trees. There are plenty of those. At one o'clock, he comes back. Then you make your move."

"What move?" Marshall was panicking now. He didn't want to go up there, especially if that uncle was there. He gave him the creeps.

Hal sighed. "Put on those tight shorts and that little tee-shirt. Fix your hair, and go up to the door. Make a pretext for wanting to see Farelli. Say you've come to complain about something."

"What if he sends me away?" Marshall asked, getting off the bunk, his heart sinking.

"Doesn't matter what he does. He will see you and then hopefully he will want to see you again. Get it?" Hal gritted his teeth.

Marshall nodded with a sigh.

"Now you're a good actor, start acting. We don't have that long to do this. We have to make the most of every minute. And don't get too involved with the locals."

Marshall went to shower, then ate something. He dressed up in a pair of very tight and very short denim shorts with a red t-shirt.

Hal studied him when he was ready. "Turn around."

Marshall did as he asked. "Oh yeah, that gives you a great ass. If that doesn't make him notice, I don't know what will. Make sure you show him a lot of that... Now it's past ten, get going. It will take a half hour or so to walk there and don't let anyone see you."

"It's quite a walk," Marshall complained.

"Good, it will give you time to think about what you will say and don't blow it!" Hal gave him a push toward the door.

"How do you know he is even there, this Farelli?"

"I don't. Let's hope so."

Marshall began walking along the dirt road. He stood aside in the shade of the palm trees when a vehicle would pass, then he continued on. It was so beautiful here. He couldn't believe it. There was the ocean and so many rivers. He would love to see the Amazon. Miguel had talked about it to him. He had also told him about Rio. They had a wonderful carnival there, bigger than in New Orleans.

The breezes blew strong today. There were clouds overhead. It felt

like it was going to rain. Miguel told him it could rain for days when it started.

Finally, he arrived at the gate, careful not to get into view of the camera. He sat down at the side of the road under a tree where he could see anyone approaching either way.

The house was quite plain looking but large and there were those horses, three today, a black one stood alongside two brown ones. A man polished saddles on the stoop, and the scent of flowers were everywhere. The truck that Ricardo drove was parked at the side. Otherwise, it was quiet.

Suddenly he heard a vehicle. He checked his watch. It was noon. He faded back into the shade of the tree.

Cruz stopped his truck, leaned over and pressed the buzzer and was immediately admitted. As soon as he drove in, Marshall slipped in behind and crouched down beside another tree inside the property. Thank God he didn't see any dogs.

Cruz stopped his truck, got out and walked into the house.

About forty-five minutes later, he emerged from the house again, speaking loudly to someone. He got in the vehicle and drove past him to the gate. The gate opened to let him pass, then closed again behind him.

Marshall waited. Damn. He needed to think. He had to have a reason to see the boss. He could say the wages were too low. That's it. He could suggest he would lead a strike on the part of the workers. They needed better living conditions as well. It didn't really matter what nonsense he made up. He wasn't counting on words to capture the guy's attention anyway.

Standing up and brushing himself off, he walked toward the house. Just as he approached, the man with the saddles emerged from the barn.

Marshall froze, trying to smile.

He gave him a curious look, nodded uncertainly, then said, "Bom dia."

"Bom Dia," he repeated nervously.

The man went back into the barn.

Marshall breathed a sigh of relief, continuing to make his way to the door of the house. He hesitated a second before he knocked.

Almost immediately, his worst fears materialized in front of him... Ricardo Hernandez stood there, peering at him through the screen.

"What you doing here? You are no allowed here!"

Marshall swallowed, mustering all his courage. "Por favor, Eu gostaria de falar come Senior Farelli."

He knew the pronunciation was poor and Ricardo Hernandez looked at him as if he were speaking Greek. "I have no idea what you said. Say it in Americano!"

"I need to speak with Senior Farelli."

He shook his head. "Noa. He not here. Now go!"

Without really thinking about it, Marshall suddenly clutched his head... He let his eyes loll up in his head. "I feel sick," he muttered. "It's the sun. Must sit..." he trailed off, going to his knees and falling on his side.

He heard someone swear. Marshall kept his eyes closed as Ricardo Hernandez came out onto the porch and called out to the man in the barn. A few minutes later, he felt himself being lifted and brought inside.

## Chapter 21

They put him down on a sofa and drifted away. He could hear them talking outside. He was completely alone. The only sound he could hear was the consistent hum of the air conditioning. It felt good.

Well, at least he was inside the house. Now where was this Farrelli guy? He opened his eyes and cautiously sat up. He looked around him, his eyes settling on a painting hanging on the wall directly in front of him. He couldn't look away. The man in the painting was so beautiful, it made his heart pound.

Marshall stood, moving closer to it. He had always loved art, had even drawn a little when he was a boy. This was definitely a real painting, done in oil. He squinted, trying to read the signature on the bottom.

The man in the painting was standing beside a beautiful black horse. In the background were blue skies and mountains. He was dressed in a white shirt with billowing sleeves. The neck was loosely laced and slightly open. The shirt was tucked into tight black pants and riding boots.

The first thing that stuck him about the painting was the man's eyes. He had these huge black eyes, the colour of coal and jet-black hair, so black it gleamed blue in the sunlight. And his face, the plains of his face were remarkable, the square jaw, high cheekbones and generous mouth were compelling. Obviously someone had painted their fantasy. Surely this wasn't a portrait of a real man. He looked Portuguese in some ways but not entirely. It was hard to tell what his heritage was. His skin was painted a bronze gold. He wasn't quite as dark as the Portuguese natives who were descended from black slaves. He did have the mouth however, with the bottom lip being slightly

fuller than the top. Otherwise, he looked Italian.

He had a magnificent torso, so toned and muscular. He looked quite athletic. Tall, broad shouldered, slim hiped.

"So, you appreciate art?" A voice said suddenly in English from behind him, causing him to jump. It was a deep, smooth masculine voice with just a hint of an accent.

Marshall turned around to see the man in the portrait standing in front of him. He looked at him, then back at the portrait on the wall.

"I assure you, it's me," he laughed slightly. "You are not seeing double. It was painted here actually, just outside the house. A gift from a local artist. You like it?"

"It's...ah beautiful...you're beautiful...the...well the picture is..." Marshall faltered. He felt himself blush.

He waved that away and walked across the room. For a man well over six feet, he had a very graceful walk, seeming to glide rather than to actually move his feet. He went to the side bar to pour a glass of water. He took a step toward him and handed him the glass.

Marshall thanked him and took time to actually look around him. They stood in a simple room with a Navaho carpet, two red velvet sofas and a bar. The walls were painted in a pale pastel peach colour, with light mauve trim around the windows.

"I'm told you fainted on my porch," he announced suddenly.

Marshall finished drinking the water, letting his eyes run over him. He wore a black silk shirt and a pair of tan cotton pants. He had on those same black riding boots he wore in the painting.

"Yes...I...must have been in the sun too long."

"And you have recovered?"

"Yes. I am fine. Thanks."

"Good. I'm Senior Farelli by the way. I was told I am the reason you came here, to speak to me?"

Marshall handed him the glass. Angelo placed it on the bar, then invited Marshall to sit on the sofa. Marshall sat down, but Angelo Farelli stayed standing, leaning against the doorframe. He kept a cautious distance between them.

"Yes. I...well...it's about...ah...wages," Marshall blurted, not sure of how to say this. Angelo Farelli was nothing like he'd expected.

Angelo raised a dark eyebrow. "Wages?"



His black hair was long enough to be tied back and thick. Marshall couldn't help but admire it. He had beautiful hair. The sunlight streaming through the window played up the silky gleam of it.

"Yes," Marshall tore his eyes away from his hair. "I believe they are too low and the living conditions in the bunkhouses are...well...could be improved." Marshall placed his hands together nervously.

"I see," he mused. "And by the way, who are you exactly?"

"I'm Marshall, Marshall ah...Munduso. I work for you, Senior Farelli."

"I see. You're the Canadian. There are two of you, am I right?"

"Yes. The other one is Hal, Hal Green. We are the Canadians."

"And how long have you been in my employment?"

"A week," he stammered.

"A week, I see," he smiled.

"I think if things don't improve, I will encourage the men to strike." Marshall met his eyes.

He seemed more amused than anything. "What would you have me do, to avert this strike?"

"Serve meals at the bunkhouse. Raise the wages. Put in indoor plumping. Improve the roads and..."

He started to laugh.

Marshall stood up. "Are you making fun of me?"

"No, not at all. Mr. Munduso."

"Marshall, please," he said.

"Marshall. I respect your attempt at trying to improve things, but I am afraid you do not have all the facts. The cost of living is much lower here and although the wages are not high, they are sufficient. If I make the bunkhouses into luxury condos, the farm would go bankrupt. Vietnam is producing very cheap coffee and the market is soft. We employ many people and the wages are higher than at other places."

"And if we strike?" Marshall threatened, narrowing his eyes.

"Half the men here come and go regularly. Those standing with you today would be gone tomorrow. Are you planning on working here for the rest of your life, Marshall?"

"No, I'm not."

"Well, neither are most of the others. Some are students from the university, others will move on to something else when the market

slacks. Now, if that's all, I think..." He began, prepared to dismiss him.

He had to do something. This was going to be over too soon and he didn't really feel as if he had made any progress at all. He went back to the sofa and pushed the cushion on the floor suddenly. Slowly he turned around, bent over and picked it up. He made sure he had a good view. He looked behind him and smiled. "Oops," he said and turned to face him. He replaced the cushion. "I'm so clumsy."

Angelo Farelli ran his eyes over him. He gave him a curious look. "Is that what you work in, Marshall?" He lifted a dark eyebrow.

"So, you noticed," Marshall moved closer, smiling.

"You made sure I noticed," he met his eyes. "I would, however, suggest that those shorts might prove to be a little uncomfortable at the end of the day."

"They are my going out shorts," Marshall gave him his sexiest smile. "I don't work in these."

"I see, and you dressed up just to come and see me?" he asked without any expression in his voice.

"You never know what can happen, or who you might run into," Marshall gave him a meaningful look.

"Umm...that's true," he mused, his face hardening some. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have work to do."

Marshall studied his face. "You know what they say...all work and no play..."

He blinked at him. "Your point is?"

Marshall smiled. "Think about it."

"I'll do that. I will think about it. Good day, Marshall. You may let yourself out," he said, and walked out of the room.

Marshall followed, then left by the front door. The gate was open for him when he arrived at the end of the road. He took a look back, but Angelo Farelli was no where to be seen. That hadn't gone well. In fact, it had been real lame.

## Chapter 22

Marshall walked back to the bunkhouse as if in a dream. There was no question Angelo Farelli was the most beautiful man he had ever laid eyes on, and young for a change, no more than twenty-six or twenty-seven maybe. He closed his eyes for a second and imagined kissing that mouth, that beautiful, soft, sensuous mouth. He gave himself a mental slap and opened his eyes.

Angelo Farelli didn't seem very impressed by his little scheme. And in spite of his usual bravado that he could seduce anyone, he wasn't sure about him. As a result, he wasn't sure what to tell Hal.

He took his time getting back. When he saw Miguel raking the beans, he stopped to talk with him. He knew he was putting off his encounter with Hal. He was still trying to work out what he was going to tell him.

It was almost supper time and the sky looked dark. Miguel mentioned that Cruz had told them to knock off early.

Marshall jumped at the opportunity. "Miguel, let's go somewhere, you and I."

"Sim," he smiled. "Where?"

"I don't know. You know these mountains. Show me the sights."

He laughed. "Speak slowly...sights?"

"View?"

He laughed. "It will rain. We cannot."

"Then can we take a ride in your truck?" Marshall looked around nervously. "Have you seen Hal?"

He shook his head. "No. Why?" Miguel put down his rake and walked toward him. He took off his hat and wiped his brow, then put up his hand in the air. "Rain."

Marshall looked around and saw Hal in the distance. "Come on, let's go. Let's go for a ride, Miguel," he said, running for his truck. After a second of hesitation, Miguel ran after him and jumped in the driver's seat.

Hal came running toward them, calling his name.

"Go, Go!" Marshall urged and Miguel started the truck and hit the gas.

Marshall turned around and looked at Hal who had stopped running and was shaking his fist in the air. Marshall sighed and fell silent.

"Why you run? He is your friend, no?" Miguel asked, driving over the dirt roads like he could do it with his eyes closed.

"Long story, Miguel. Let's just drive around, okay?" He just wanted to forget about Hal for now, forget about everything.

It had rained very little, but Miguel claimed it was a warning. There was a lot more to come.

An hour later, he and Miguel sat on a rock overlooking a beautiful river. "What is that river called?" Marshall asked him.

"Tiete," he said.

"It's so beautiful here. Peaceful," Marshall commented. "I could get lost here, not care about anything. At night I can hear all kinds of strange animal sounds, but it doesn't scare me like I thought it would. Are there monkeys here?"

"Mostly in the Amazon. There are big cats and many birds. Snakes of course," he laughed.

"I know about the snakes," Marshall rolled his eyes. "I found one outside the bunkhouse the other day."

In the distance he could hear the sound of cattle and sheep. The birds sang loudly in the trees.

"Tell me about Pedro," Marshall nudged him playfully.

Miguel looked at Marshall and said simply, "He is my life."

"What is it like to be in love?" Marshall asked.

"Wonderful, like nothing else. You will know in future," he laughed.

Marshall shook his head. "Not me."

Miguel met his eyes. "You make me sad. Why you say this? There is one true love for every person. Maybe people not find this person.

Could be here," he laughed, poking him.

"Here? I doubt it," Marshall laughed.

It grew dark and Miguel suggested they get back. With a heavy heart, Marshall climbed into the truck.

## Chapter 23

Hal paced the floor in the bunkhouse and smoked a dozen cigarettes. What in hell was going on with Marshall anyway? Was he losing control of him already? That damn peasant, Miguel! Marshall seemed far more interested in hanging out with him than in the job at hand. He couldn't afford to lose Marshall. He wouldn't lose him. He was not going to fuck with him, especially not this time. It was too important.

Finally, after Miguel said goodnight and went off to his bed, Marshall walked into the bunkhouse.

Hal gave Marshall a murderous look. "It's almost ten o'clock. Where in hell have you been?"

Marshall folded his arms across his chest. "I went for a ride!"

"I'll show you a ride," Hal growled, taking his arm and dragging him outside. "Come with me. We need to talk."

Hal pulled him out behind the bunkhouse and forced him up against a tree. "How dare you go off and not tell me where you were. You were supposed to come right back from the house and give me a report," he hissed. "Instead, you took off with that gorilla Miguel. You had better get your priorities straight, you little son of a bitch or I'll have to straighten them out for you. Now what happened with Farelli?"

"Nothing..." Marshall said nervously, avoiding his eyes. "I talked to him, that's all."

"And his reaction to you? Is he going to see you again?"

"I don't...know..." Marshall groaned a little as Hal put more pressure on his chest with his arm.

"Well, he better want to, or I'm holding you personally responsible. How dare you go off and...you little bastard," he said and punched

him hard in the ribs.

“Hal, don’t. I will do better, I promise...I...” Marshall pleaded.

Hal hit him again in the same place, knocking the wind out of him. “Don’t Hal...stop!” Marshall cried out.

Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a deep voice said calmly, “I would advise you to do as he asks.”

Marshall recognized the voice immediately. The English was perfect, the voice deep and crisp.

Hal let Marshall go. He turned around, appearing to be surprised at the interruption.

“Who in the...” He began, but Marshall put a hand on his arm.

“Hal, this is Senior Farelli,” he cautioned with his eyes.

“Oh,” Hal laughed, “Senior Farelli, forgive me. I didn’t...”

Angelo came toward them into the moonlight. He wore a long black leather jacket over a pair of navy pants. His hair hung loose over his shoulders. With the moonlight shining down on him, he looked quite surreal. In the distance, they could hear the snort of a horse.

Hal didn’t say anything, so Marshall seized the opportunity to get back into Hal’s good favour.

He took a step forward just as Angelo said, “Exactly what’s going on here?”

Marshall trembled suddenly, although he wasn’t quite sure why. He met his eyes as Hal tried to say something. “We were just...well it’s not what it appears, sir...it’s...”

“I think what my friend Hal means to say, senior,” Marshall managed, “is that we were just fooling around. It was all in fun.”

The expression on Angelo’s face changed from concern to disbelief. “I see,” he said. “It didn’t sound like much fun to me, but then what’s considered fun to some is considered something else to others.”

“Yeah...” Hal laughed, slapping Marshall on the back, “just fooling around.”

Angelo regarded Hal for a moment. “Umm,” he commented dryly, “well it’s late and I would suggest you go inside. It can be dangerous out here at night.”

Marshall and Hal fell silent.

He turned to leave, then paused and said over his shoulder. “I do

not allow fighting on my land. Since it appears I have misinterpreted the situation, I will assume no infraction took place. Good night."

Hal placed a hand over his heart and took a breath. "What in hell was he doing down here?"

"I don't know," Marshall replied. He didn't add he had been damn glad he had been down here.

Hal seemed calm now, relieved. Although he didn't thank him for his lie, it certainly distracted him from violence for the time being.

"That could have been bad," Hal cleared his throat as they walked toward the bunkhouse. "So that's the great and mighty lord of the plantation," he mused.

"That's him," Marshall replied.

"Well, don't complain about old men this time. I would do him in a second."

"He's very attractive," Marshall muttered.

"You must have made some kind of impression. He cared enough to protect you," Hal scratched his forehead. "Damn bugs," he complained.

"He was enforcing his rules. That's all," Marshall said in reply. "There is no fighting, drinking and drugs. Remember what Cruz said? He would have done it for anyone."

"Umm...so he's a bit of a hero...which means he's a fool," Hal scoffed. "All the better for us."

Marshall resented his comment. He didn't think Angelo Farelli was the least bit of a fool.

They went to bed, Marshall tossing a bit due to the pain in his side. He knew he had better pay attention to what they were here for, but he felt different out in this wild and untamed place. He felt as if he had been freed from prison and he didn't want to go back. He was sure Hal was sorry for hitting him. He was just stressed out about the job. It wasn't like the other ones. This one was the big score and they couldn't mess up. As soon as this was over, as soon as they got the cash, they'd be out of here and Hal would be happy.

He closed his eyes. He saw Angelo Farelli standing in the forest under the moonlight. He was watching him with those beautiful dark eyes. "Marshall," he whispered. "Come here."

Marshall found himself drawing nearer to him. He followed him



through the woods to a stream. He reached out as if to touch him, then vanished, as if he never was there.

\* \* \* \*

The dream disturbed him greatly. He was in no mood for Hal's chatter in the morning, but Hal seemed excited about something as if he were high. "Come outside, I have the most marvellous idea. I think this is the greatest idea I've ever had, Marshall."

Marshall sighed and followed him. He had an idea too, he wanted to go home. "What is it, Hal?"

"Tell me what you observed about Farelli last night?"

"He wasn't happy," Marshall shrugged.

"He doesn't like me. Did you sense that?" Hal grinned.

"I don't know," Marshall murmured, not sure where he was going with this.

"It came to me in my sleep. Farelli likes to play hero. He has a macho side which happens to be very useful to us at this time."

"I don't get it," Marshall shook his head.

"That's why I'm the brains of this operation and you're the ass," he sneered. "Think about this, Marshall... What if he was to think that I was your ex lover? Let's say we have agreed to remain friends while we are travelling but I'm unpredictable and prone to violence. You are scared of me."

Marshall wanted to say that he was unpredictable and prone to violence, but instead he said, "Continue. I'm listening."

"What if you told him you were scared last night? Maybe he would give you a job up at the house where you could get away from me. Or, you could ask him if you could stay with him at the house on some nights, when you are really afraid of my temper."

Marshall gave him a look of disbelief. "Come on, Hal. He's not going to let me stay with him at the house! Why should he? He could just fire you."

"He won't fire me, if you tell him not to. You are a good liar, Marshall. Make out that you don't want me to lose my job, but you are in need of his protection. I think it's perfect. You must appeal to his weaknesses. I saw his weakness last night. He likes to play hero."

Marshall shook his head. "I think you have the guy all wrong. I don't think he was playing hero, Hal. I think he was protecting his property. I even have my doubts he's gay."

Hal grabbed his arm. "He's gay. Don't be stupid. I have it on a reliable source, just like I have it on a reliable source that he's a do-gooder."

"But he didn't react like I thought he would...the shorts...and stuff..." Marshall said, hesitantly, his eyes moving to Hal's hand on his arm.

"He has more class than that, Marshall," Hal clicked his tongue, releasing him. "This is not some horny old toad in a bar. Did you think he was going to jump you in the house?"

Marshall shook his head, taking a step back.

"I want you to start working," Hal snapped. "We are getting nowhere fast."

Marshall closed his eyes for a second. "All right...I'll try. When do I tell him all this stuff?"

"Tonight. Wait at the gate until he comes home. Tell him you're scared. Play little distressed boy in need of a big strong shoulder. You'll be in his bed in no time."

The being in his bed part didn't sound disagreeable to him at all, but he wasn't keen on playing the scared little boy. He wasn't so sure this man would fall for that kind of an act. But he had to trust Hal. He knew Hal had an uncanny ability to read people. Everything he had said about the marks back home had been true. And he had promised Hal to see this through to the end.

"I'll try it," Marshall heard himself saying. "But if it doesn't work, can we..."

"Try something else," Hal met his eyes.

Marshall fell silent.

"Go take a shower," Hal told him and walked away.

## Chapter 24

Marshall spent all day picking coffee beans and, although rain had been threatening for the last little while, there had not been much more than a sprinkle.

At eight that evening, Marshall made the long walk down the road to the main house. It grew dark even before he got half way. All around him were strange noises and he could have sworn he saw glowing eyes in the bushes.

He felt uneasy. He was worried about what would happen if he didn't get to see Angelo Farelli tonight. Maybe he wasn't even at the house. If he wasn't there, he'd be stuck out here in the pitch black all night, too frightened to walk back to the bunkhouse, too frightened of how Hal would react.

He walked faster. The sounds of the night seemed to be amplified. His heart pounded and he started to run. He didn't even hear the sound of the car until it was right up on top of him. Brakes screeched. Marshall put his arm up over his face as he turned around, blinded by headlights.

Angelo Farelli swore in Italian, getting out of Ricardo's old truck. He was dressed in a royal blue short sleeved shirt and a pair of stone washed jeans. Brown desert boots replaced his usual riding boots.

"Are you insane?" Angelo demanded in Portuguese, turning off his car lights.

Marshall was truly scared. He didn't have to fake that part. He'd been walking at a fast pace, becoming more and more terrified of being out here alone in the dark.

Angelo came closer, suddenly recognizing him. "Munduso?"

Marshall nodded, swallowing. "I didn't hear the truck...I..."

"What in hell is wrong with you?" He demanded in English. "I could have run you over."

"I'm scared. I was running to get away from Hal. I was coming to see you." His chest heaved. "I didn't know where else to go." His breathing was coming in fast and hard.

Angelo narrowed his eyes. "And so it was nonsense you fed me last night. He was beating up on you."

Marshall nodded. "He's angry again tonight. Can I stay with you?"

He lifted an eyebrow. "Stay with me?"

"Yes, in the house. I was thinking maybe if I stayed away from him a little, he'd...maybe there's a job for me at the house?"

Angelo pushed some hair off his forehead and let out some air. "We really don't need anyone at the house, but I can take care of the problem for you."

"How?" Marshall asked.

"I will fire him," he said simply.

"No!" Marshall shook his head as Angelo turned around. He grabbed his arm.

Angelo looked at him in surprise. Marshall released him and lowered his voice. "I would prefer if you don't do that."

"Why not?" He demanded. "I thought you said that..."

"I did. It's just that I feel responsible for this...I can't go into it. I..."

"Well, you sure as hell better go into it!" Angelo snapped. He looked annoyed.

"I...not here. Is there somewhere we can talk?" Marshall asked softly.

Angelo hesitated. "Well...get in," he indicated the truck. "I will take you back to the house, but then we're going to settle this thing, understood?"

"Yes, sir," he replied and got into the passenger's side.

The ride was short. It was no more than five minutes before they were inside the gate.

It was a pleasant night, warm with a cool breeze. They walked onto the veranda and Angelo invited Marshall to sit in one of the wicker chairs. "I'll bring some lemonade and we'll talk about this," he said, going into the house.

Marshall closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. Hal would be proud of him.

A few minutes later he returned with the lemonade. He handed him a glass filled with ice and took a seat on the step below him with his. He glanced up at him. "I'm listening."

He looked like he needed a shave. He had one of those five o'clock shadows that made him look very male and very sexy. He was intoxicating to look at. His voice was so smooth and so deep that it was hypnotic. The scent of jasmine was heavy in the air tonight. Maybe he could blame that for his sudden intoxication.

"I really didn't want to burden you with all this...but..." Marshall began.

"But you did want to burden me, because you are here now telling me about it, aren't you?" He looked up at him again and took a long sip of the lemonade.

Marshall smiled, wondering if this man was even aware of the effect he was having on him. "Touché," he said. "You're right. I guess I needed someone to talk to."

"The only thing I can do, you do not want me to do. If this man treats you badly, why do you remain with him? Are you lovers?"

Marshall was surprised at the question. Angelo, however, appeared to be quite unfazed by it.

"That's a very personal thing to ask me. You're not shy about these things?"

"Shy about..." He shook his head, putting down his glass. "I don't understand."

"Sex, talking like that about sex...asking me...especially gay sex," Marshall blushed some. It was the oddest thing, but discussing sex with this man made him feel shy.

"Why should I be embarrassed of human nature? I apologize if I am out of line. I am trying to understand, that's all." He moved the glass around in his hand. The ice clinked against the sides, echoing in the still night air.

"Well, to answer your question, no, we are not lovers...well, yes we are, kind of," Marshall managed.

"Can't be both, Marshall, and kind of doesn't exist. You either are lovers or you're not."

"We were, but then I decided it was over. But we were here in a strange country and I didn't want to leave him on his own so we made an agreement." Marshall had blurted that out almost automatically. It scared him a little that he was becoming such a good liar.

"I'm not sure I understand." He shook his dark head and put down his half empty glass. "The only thing I do understand is that you no longer want to be his lover. I take it he still wants to be yours?"

Marshall nodded. "Yes."

"Why not just leave him since he refuses to abide by your agreement? He's not a child," Angelo said without hesitation.

"I couldn't be that cruel, leave him alone. We came here together."

Angelo narrowed his eyes. "Sounds like you still feel something for him as well."

"Yes, but not love," Marshall interjected briskly.

"Just let me give you some advice for the future. Don't ever expect to remain friends with someone you have been intimate with. There are too many emotions in the way."

"You sound as if you're talking from experience," Marshall smiled slightly, looking into his eyes.

He broke the eye contact and stood up. The question was ignored. "So after all this, what is it you expect me to do about it, since you refuse to let me fire him?"

"Let me stay here with you tonight," Marshall stood up and moved closer to him.

The crickets sang in the grass and the moon shone full above them. Angelo sighed. "If it wasn't so late, I'd drive you back but I'm too tired. Okay, just for the night. Tomorrow you will have to find a way to resolve your problems, Marshall."

## Chapter 25

Angelo led Marshall inside and down a narrow hallway. “My grandmother and uncle are sleeping, so try to walk quietly,” he told him as they rounded the corner. He opened the door to a large room.

“Is this your bedroom?” Marshall asked him, his eyes opening wide.

“Yes, please close the door,” he said.

He hadn’t expected this so soon. He wasn’t sure how to react. The room had a king sized bed and an adjoining bathroom with a shower. On the floor were hand woven rugs. The furniture was wicker with cushions that were beautifully dyed. There was a closet on one side and a sliding door that led to a veranda at the back of the house. Beside the bed was a night table with a lamp and a phone. A laptop computer lay on the bottom shelf of the night table.

Angelo Farelli was in the bathroom, the water running. “Turn on the lamp,” he said. “I’ll be right out.”

Marshall’s hand trembled as he switched on the lamp. He could hardly believe he was in this man’s bedroom. On the wall above the bed was another painting, this one of a beautiful woman with the same eyes as his.

Marshall gasped. She had long beautiful black hair.

“My mother,” he said as he came out of the bathroom.

Marshall turned around. He was without his shirt, his hair loose, wiping his face on a towel. He had a beautiful chest, well-toned and muscular like his arms and shoulders. The stomach was flat, the waist narrow. God, he took his breath away.

“She’s beautiful,” Marshall managed, coming back to present. He

turned away to diffuse the tension. "I bet she was a great mother."

"I wouldn't know," he replied a little harshly. "I never knew her. She died when I was two."

"I'm sorry," Marshall said, gazing at him again.

"Don't be. You don't miss what you never had."

Marshall looked at him. "I don't know if that's true. I mean, I never had decent parents, but I longed for them. My father drank and my mother was...well, not quite there. I always wanted to be...loved." He wasn't quite sure why he had said that.

Angelo gave him a soft smile. "Well, I was lucky. I had a great father so maybe that's why I didn't miss her."

"What did your mother die of?" Marshall asked.

"A broken heart," he replied softly and went back into the bathroom.

Marshall turned to look at her portrait again. How sad, he thought, to die of a broken heart. He didn't know what he really meant, but his words left him feeling quite melancholy.

"Go ahead and use the bathroom," he said, coming out with a white terry robe on. "There are towels there and I left you some pyjamas. Take your pick. For some reason, people kept buying them for me as gifts for many years and yet, I never wear them." He smiled.

God. What a smile.

Marshall smiled back. He created this weird craving in him. He felt like he wanted to go up and stroke his cheek and touch his hair. It was this odd feeling of tenderness. "What do you normally sleep in?" Marshall asked him.

"Nothing," he replied, "but tonight in your honour, I shall christen some pyjama bottoms."

Marshall blushed and went into the bathroom to wash up. He wanted to say, "don't do that on my account," but somehow he couldn't manage it. He still felt shy. He choose some pyjamas that were too large but comfortable and came back out into the room. He didn't know why he felt like this in front of him. It was ridiculous. He had seen so many naked men in his life and thought nothing of it, yet he was grateful in the knowledge that under the sheets this man was not nude.

"It's a big bed," Angelo commented, sitting on the edge. "We shall



never have to meet in it. I'm sorry I can't offer you a room of your own. The two spares are being used by the servants."

"That's fine. I'm sure my virtue is perfectly safe. I'm not worried," Marshall told him softly, meeting his eyes.

Angelo looked up, his eyes widened a little. One half of his mouth lifted slightly. "I don't know how to take that exactly. Should I be insulted?"

Marshall laughed. "No."

"Good," he replied. "I would say I'm not worried about my virtue either, but then I haven't been concerned about that for quite some time."

Marshall held back the urge to laugh. He got into bed and Angelo turned out the light with a swiftly said goodnight. Marshall started laughing about ten minutes later. By that time, Angelo was sound asleep.

The night was warm and Marshall had difficulty sleeping. He lay in one place, scarcely daring to move although the man in bed with him seemed an ocean away. He listened to his breathing in sleep, a deep steady rhythmic sound that was relaxing. Marshall marvelled at this man's trust. He was taking a risk, letting a complete stranger into his bed.

In the morning when he opened his eyes, there was a note left for him. It was written in perfect English. It said:

*"Marshall, I trust you slept well. Please feel free to help yourself to breakfast. People are aware of your presence. I hope your problem is resolved soon. Yours, A. Farelli."*

Marshall washed, got dressed and slipped out the back door. He didn't feel comfortable eating breakfast in his house, not if he had to meet up with that Dracula uncle of his. He ran almost all the way back to the plantation, knowing he was late for work.

## Chapter 26

He was in the sorting house today, which was good, out of the sun. It hadn't rained yet, and the talk centred on the possibility. Marshall began to hum along with the radio. The songs were mostly in English and the one they played often was called, *Hero*. He began to sing... *"Will you cry when I cry? Will you laugh when I laugh? Will you die for me tonight? Will you be my hero baby? Will you wash away the tears? Will you be my hero baby, die in my arms tonight."*

"Sounds like you know all the words," one of the others commented with amusement.

"I like this song," he told him.

The man nodded with a wide grin and went back to weighing the beans.

Later that evening, Hal asked him how it had gone with the mark. "You slept with him, right?" He demanded.

Marshall nodded. "Actually, I did sleep with him, but we just slept."

He gawked at him. "What? Wait a minute. You just slept?"

"That's right. We slept," Marshall smiled at him.

"What in fuck are you smiling about? Why didn't you seduce him?"

"The timing was wrong. We talked."

"Talked?"

"Talked Hal, talked. He told me to work out my problems with you or he was going to fire us both. So there," Marshall threw him a haughty look.

"What about a house job?"

"There aren't any house jobs," Marshall replied. "There appears to be two servants which I'm sure are more than enough."

Hal nodded. "I see. That can change. I'll take care of it. Now get

your butt back up there.”

“Tonight? And say what? He’s not going to let me stay there again tonight, Hal.”

“Yes, he will. Tell him you want to talk. Tell him you feel comfortable talking to him. Tell him you are suicidal, anything. Believe me, I know his type, he has too much heart to turn you away if you put on a good show. Not to mention that he’s horny like any other guy.”

Marshall hesitated. “But Hal...” he began.

Go on!” Hal urged.

Marshall sighed. “It’s dark, Hal and...”

“Go!”

Marshall walked along the road again in the dark, certain he was going to meet his doom on this damned road. Somehow he made it to the gate, but of course he couldn’t be sure Angelo was even in the house.

He waited and a few minutes after he arrived, he saw the man who was there when he first came to the house, the man who worked with the horses. He was coming out of the barn and Marshall called to him.

“Senior...Senior?”

The man peered at him and waved.

“Eu gostaria de falar come Senior Farelli...” he called out. He had no idea if that’s how you said you wanted to speak to someone, but it was close enough to make the man nod and run up to the front door.

A minute later, he saw Angelo come outside with the man, who was now pointing down the road to the gate.

Angelo immediately came walking down the road. He had on black pants tonight with a white shirt which he wore, open at the collar. As he drew nearer, the expression on his face didn’t look exactly pleased.

“Marshall, what in the world...” he demanded.

On impulse, Marshall rushed into his arms, pretending to cry. “Help me...talk to me...I need to talk to you.”

Angelo put him gently away from him and searched his face. “What is it now, Marshall?”

“I just need to talk. I’ve really messed up my life. Please, come for a walk with me?” He looked up at Angelo with pleading eyes.

“It’s not safe to walk around here at night. Come on, we’ll talk out on the back terrace.

"Where is your grandmother?" Marshall asked as they approached the house. Angelo walked around the path and to the back, Marshall at his heels.

"In bed. She gets up very early. My uncle is on a business trip in Sao Paulo."

"Ah, I see."

Angelo took a seat on the terrace in a huge overstuffed patio chair. He indicated the other chair and waited until Marshall sat down before he spoke. "Marshall, I think you need to distance yourself from this Hal character. I don't know what I can do for you. Do you want me to talk to him?"

"No. Wouldn't do any good, Angelo. I really think the best thing would be if I could work in a separate place where we can't see each other. Maybe if he thought I had...another lover or..."

Angelo lifted his head and looked at him. "You don't mean me, do you?"

"Well, I don't mean you would actually have to...I mean even if he thought it."

"Absolutely not!" He said, standing up.

This had been the wrong move. It had ended up insulting him. Marshall lowered his head and pretended to cry. "It's quite unbearable. I've had such a horrible life and now this. I don't know..." his voice broke, "how much more I can take."

Angelo was about to say something, when suddenly a chilling scream sliced through the night.

## Chapter 27

Marshall followed him as Angelo went running inside the house. A young girl stood clutching her housecoat and hysterically crying. He saw Angelo draw her to his shoulder and try and comfort her. “What is it?” He asked her softly in Portuguese. “What is the matter, Marta?”

She pointed to the window on the other side of the house.

“Can you stay with her for a moment?” Angelo asked Marshall.

Marshall nodded and tried to calm her down by patting her hand and wiping her tears. Just then an elderly woman appeared. She spoke sharply to Marta, asking her what was wrong.

She asked him something in Portuguese, but he didn’t understand. He assumed she wanted to know who he was.

“Meu nome e, Marshall. Worker...worker...” He pointed to himself.

She scoffed at him and walked to the open window. She placed a hand over her mouth.

Marshall walked over to the window to look. There in the distance, he saw Angelo standing by a tree. A man’s swinging body was suspended from one of its branches. Angelo hacked at the rope with something.

Marshall gasped. *My God*. It looked like the man who had been grooming the horses.

The old lady whispered something under her breath and made the sign of the cross.

Marshall turned away from the window just as Angelo came back inside the house. He was talking rapidly in Portuguese on his cell phone.

The grandmother spoke fast and loud to her grandson, who waved her away in dismissal and walked into the other room.

Marshall wasn't quite sure what to do, so he simply stood stiffly in the corner and waited. After a few minutes, Angelo came back in the room. He held his phone in the palm of his hand and said something to his grandmother in a stern tone. Marshall understood just enough to hear him say something about Cruz coming to help him.

The old lady gave him a hard look, tossed her head and marched out of the room. A second later, the door slammed. Angelo walked over to the servant girl who seemed to be in a state of shock. He spoke gently to her, sitting her at the table. Then he walked over to the sink, filled a kettle with water and put it on the stove to boil.

Marshall watched him with fascination as he made tea for the shaken servant girl and spoke to her so gently.

Angelo sat down at the table across from her. He took her hand. Looking her in the eye, he spoke softly to her, stroking her hair. She nodded. He took a tissue from the box on the cupboard and wiped the tears off her cheeks.

When the water boiled, he poured her tea and handed it to her, patting her hand.

Angelo suddenly came to stand beside him. "Can you stay with her?" He asked him. "I have to go with Cruz when he gets here."

"Of course," Marshall said.

"My grandmother is not helpful in these situations."

"How come?"

He sighed. "She is superstitious and very Catholic. She keeps talking about Hell of all things." He made a face.

"Angelo," Marshall shivered. "Who was he?"

"His name was Carlos Gutters. He was our outdoor handy man and groom. He did a little of everything. He lost his wife a long time ago. He and Marta have worked for this family for many years. Marta is his daughter."

"Oh, my God," Marshall swallowed. "That's why she is so upset."

"Yes, and remember that among these people suicide is a bad omen. She is completely devastated that her father would do this. I can't ask my grandmother to sit with her. She is too old world and would just make things worse. That's why I sent her off," he explained.

"Don't worry, Angelo. I will stay with her for as long as you need me."

"I may need you for longer than you think. I will need someone to take over Carlos' job now. Can you do it, even temporarily?"

Marshall froze for a minute. Finally, he managed to say, "Of course, if you show me what to do." The words left a sour taste in his mouth.

Angelo nodded absently as he turned his head toward the window. A vehicle was coming up the road. He immediately went outside to meet Cruz.

Alone with the daughter of the man who had been hanging from the tree outside, the horrible truth began to grab hold of him. For a minute, as he sat trying to comfort the man's distraught daughter, he could scarcely breathe. He knew the man hadn't committed suicide.

He suddenly felt sick as he reached over to clutch the young woman's hand. She squeezed his hand tightly as she sobbed. He mumbled unintelligible words of comfort. He was cold, desperately cold.

Outside, Angelo and Cruz carried the dead man to the front of the house and placed his body in the back of Cruz' all terrain vehicle.

A few minutes later, Angelo came back in, Cruz behind him. They both looked rather pale.

Angelo came over and sat beside Marta again. He spoke softly to her. She nodded, got up and disappeared.

"We're going to take the body into Sao Paulo tonight, and then drop Marta at her uncle's house," he told him. "While she's getting ready, I will take you to get your things and then bring you back here before I leave."

Marshall nodded numbly. "What do I do tomorrow?"

"Nothing. I will be back before sun up and, after I rest, I will tell you what your job will entail. Sleep in my bed tonight. Tomorrow I will have Carlos' room made up for you."

Marshall stood up. "I'm ready."

"Good," he nodded and looked at Cruz. "Have a coffee, Cruz. I will be back soon."

Cruz nodded at him and went to the boil some water as Marta rose from to table.

Marshall followed Angelo to the car.

## Chapter 28

Angelo said little as he drove. He seemed deep in thought. His knuckles strained white on the steering wheel.

Marshall looked out the window and sighed. "Everyone keeps talking about rain, but there isn't any."

"Umm...it will come and it will stay forever," he commented. "I can feel it in the air."

He pulled the car to a stop in front of the bunkhouse. "You want me to come in with you in case Hal causes you any grief?"

"No. I will handle it. I won't be long," Marshall got out of the car and hurried into the bunkhouse.

Hal wasn't sleeping. He was standing by the window smoking a cigarette. He didn't turn around. "Coming for your things?" He tossed at him.

"Yes," Marshall began to stuff his things into his backpack. "There was a...a..." he stopped, "How did you know I'd be coming for my things?"

Hal turned around, ignoring the question.

"How did you get onto the property, Hal? How?" Marshall demanded in an angry whisper. "Please, God, don't tell me you had anything to do with..." He couldn't go on. Tears sprang to his eyes

"What are you talking about?"

"That poor man," Marshall shook his head, putting his clothes down and coming closer to him. "You didn't have to..." His voice broke, a single tear fell onto his cheek.

Hal took his arm roughly and pulled him into the corner. "It got you the job, right?"

Marshall nodded, his throat filled with dried tears.



"It also brought you and Farelli closer. There's nothing like a shared tragedy to bond a relationship. We are on our way. Don't fuck it up with a bit of sentiment for someone you didn't even know. You want to succeed, don't you?"

"Yes, but...I..." Marshall began, shaking his head.

"Are we or are we not making progress?"

"We are...I guess..."

"Is it not me who is driving this ahead, keeping us on track?"

Marshall nodded.

"Then trust me. Just do your stuff and don't trouble your head with what I have to do. Now, hurry up, your future lover is getting impatient," Hal muttered, releasing Marshall's arm.

Marshall picked up his bag and headed to the door.

"And Marshall," he said, his whispered voice sounding quite chilling in the quiet bunkhouse, "just because you will be out of my sight now, don't think I'm not watching you."

Marshall opened the door and walked outside, lifting his bag over one shoulder. Angelo got out and put his bag in the trunk.

He gave Marshall a curious glance in the car. "How are you doing?"

Marshall couldn't speak.

They drove back to the house.

Cruz came outside as soon as he heard the vehicle. He carried a battered old suitcase. Marta followed him. They got into Cruz's truck.

Angelo gave Marshall his bag. "Get some sleep," he said. "I'm sorry we didn't finish our talk. I promise we will."

Marshall shook his head. "Don't worry. I understand. Angelo," he paused, looking at the ground, "I do have one question. Ah...does your grandmother know that..."

"Yes, she knows," Angelo gave him a faint smile. "Although she acts like she is the boss around here, this is my house, Marshall, not hers. I won't guarantee you she isn't going to throw darts at you with her eyes, but she knows if I give you permission to be here, she has to put up with it. Just rest. We will talk tomorrow. I have to go. Cruz and Marta are waiting."

"Angelo," he blurted suddenly, reaching out to grab his arm.

Angelo narrowed his dark eyes. "What is it, Marshall?"

"I..." he began, then shook his head solemnly. "Nothing. Have a good trip," he muttered.

Angelo nodded, then walked over to the vehicle and climbed in the passenger's seat beside Marta.

Marshall watched them drive away into the night. He sighed as he brought his bag into the house and closed the door. There was complete silence. He walked quietly down the hall and into his room. He felt protected somehow, in the sanctuary of Angelo's room.

Although he was exhausted, sleep did not come until after three in the morning. He kept thinking about the man hanging in the tree. He knew that if he had never come here, he'd still be alive.

## Chapter 29

If he had been awake when Angelo finally came to bed, he would have seen the sun rise in the brilliant blue sky.

When he did finally open his eyes at around eight that morning, he moved his face to the right of him to see Angelo Farelli peacefully sleeping beside him. There appeared to be a lot of distance between them, but actually if he stretched out his arm full length, he could touch him with his fingertips.

As he watched him, it occurred to him that something about this place had allowed this man to put this amount of trust in a total stranger. He couldn't imagine someone back home letting a total stranger sleep in their bed. Maybe it was due to the sheer vastness of the landscape or the feeling of isolation from the rest of the world. Whatever it was, it was truly awesome.

Marshall watched his chest rise and fall with smooth regularity and thought about last night. He had been impressed by how gentle and sweet he was to Marta. It was obvious he was experiencing a great amount of stress, yet he took the time to talk to her and make her tea.

The sunlight streamed in through the window, with a streak of it falling across Angelo's chest. It made his skin look bronze. Suddenly, Marshall had the sudden urge to be closer to him, to feel the heat of his body, to listen to his soft rhythmic breathing. Hal had referred to him as his "future lover" last night. To even contemplate this idea was titillating.

He inched closer to Angelo, just close enough to absorb him with his senses. He studied him, his hair, his face, the hills and valleys of his torso and arms, the smooth surface of his skin. He swallowed the sudden taste of desire in his mouth. Slowly, he reached his hand over

and lifted the blanket off his body to reveal navy sport briefs. As he held the edge of the blanket in his fingertips, his eyes were drawn to the swell of his more than generously endowed sex. His eyes lingered a few seconds. He let the blanket fall back into place. He closed his eyes, surprised at how desire ripped at him. He couldn't push this. He had to let it take its course. If he screwed this up in any way, Hal would go crazy. But he wanted him.

Unable to resist, he moved his hand to Angelo's shoulder. If he caressed him very softly, he wouldn't know. If he woke up, he could make up some excuse.

As his hand gently caressed his shoulder, then his chest, he bent his head and placed his lips over one of his taunt brown nipples. He let his tongue slowly taste it. Was this desire? He wasn't sure, but he knew something was different about this, something that made him feel quite weak. He could lose control this time. He knew it, as sure as he knew his own name. This one wasn't like the others.

Marshall reluctantly drew his mouth away from his chest and moved his hand down to his stomach. Gently, he inched his fingers under the blanket again, where he brushed them lightly across the bulge in his underwear. He wet his lips with his tongue, telling himself to be careful. He closed his eyes, imagining being able to taste it.

Then he felt a hand cover his. Marshall took a breath as the hand squeezed his, then lifted it up from underneath the blanket.

Marshall watched the progression of their hands as Angelo raised it to his lips, his eyes on him.

Marshall blushed. No one had ever kissed his hand before.

"I'm...ah...sorry," Marshall managed. "If I was out of line, I'm sorry. I..."

Angelo released his hand and propped himself up on his elbow.

Marshall sat up straight, looking down at his lap.

"What exactly are you sorry about?" He asked softly, reaching one finger to turn Marshall's face toward him.

"You know what I was trying to..."

"I'm flattered," he said softly.

"Then you didn't mind that I..." Marshall began. "Then why did you stop me?"

"I stopped you because I don't want you to think you have to pay

me in some way for being here.”

Marshall opened his mouth, then closed it.

“Today, I will make sure you have your own room... I want you to know, the only thing I expect from you is that you do your job and...maybe your friendship. It’s lonely out here for me. My friends are all in Rome and aside from Cruz, I have no one to talk to.”

Marshall smiled. Tears came to his eyes, but he blinked them away. “I...wasn’t trying to...I mean...” How could he explain what feelings came over him as he watched him lying there? He didn’t even understand it.

Angelo smiled. “Forget it,” he said, reaching over and affectionately caressing his cheek. Then he swung his legs over the side of the bed and got up.

“Will you show me my job today?” Marshall asked, running his eyes over him as he shrugged into a beat up old terry cloth robe.

“Not today,” he shook his head, lifting his hair off his neck. “You can come with me to feed the horses, but other than that, we rest. Last night was hard on both of us. Also I promised we’d continue our conversation and I will honour that. Tomorrow, we will start bright and early and I will take you through the routine.”

Marshall nodded.

“I’m going to shower and dress and then I will leave you to do the same. When you are ready, come outside for breakfast. I’m afraid you will have to brave whatever I prepare today, given Marta’s departure.” He looked doubtful.

“I’m sure I’ll live,” Marshall laughed.

“That remains to be seen,” he said, making a comical face.

Marshall grinned as he snuggled back into the bed. He heard the water running in the bathroom. He closed his eyes, imagining rivers of water running down the length of his body. He smiled to himself, bringing his knees up and hugging them to his chest. He thought about how it felt to touch him and how much he would have loved to see him completely naked.

Yes, he was smiling, feeling so warm and secure, so comfortable in this man’s bed. It seemed like a dream, unreal, but that’s because it was.

The smile faded and he sat up in bed, running his hands through

his curly dark hair. He had to keep his head, had to remind himself periodically that there was a goal and that, once that goal was achieved, it would be over.

## Chapter 30

It was a busy day for Frank Barter at Havendale House. Two new boys were admitted, and both of them required a lot of work. When his cell phone rang, he grabbed it off his desk. It could only be Hal and it was about bloody time.

"Hal?" Frank demanded sharply into the phone.

"Hey there, Pop's," Hal replied as if he didn't have a care in the world. His voice sounded clear.

"So," Frank insisted, "what's going on?"

"Is that all you care about, Frank?" he clucked his tongue. "You don't want to know how I'm doing...if I have a suntan or..."

"Don't be an asshole. I've been waiting for you to call. Why in hell didn't you call me before this? It's been almost a month."

"I didn't have anything to tell you."

"Well, I assume you do now?"

"Yep. Our boy has made it to pre-first base."

"English, please?"

"He's working in the man's house."

"Oh? How did you manage that?"

"A vacancy came up suddenly. The guy who worked there before had a little accident."

"What kind of an accident?" Frank gripped the phone.

"He ran into a rope that tangled around his neck and hung himself in a tree. Tragic," Hal mocked.

"You are one sick bastard!" Frank told him softly.

"Did the trick," he cooed, his voice thick with sarcastic sentiment, "It created a vacancy. It also offered the two of them a meaningful shared experience, which in my mind can only draw two souls

together.” Then he laughed harshly and said, “Don’t worry, Frank, he’ll be fucking Marshall’s brains out any day now.”

Frank closed his eyes in distaste. “Hal, why in the hell do you need to be so crude all the time?”

“You know, you’re one funny guy, Frank. Anything goes with you as long as you don’t have to hear about it,” Hal laughed.

“Okay, enough said on the phone. Call me when more progress is made. You are keeping an eye on him?”

“Of course,” Hal replied. “I’ll call you when I have something else to tell you. Bye,” he said and hung up.

Frank sighed and put down the phone. He sat in his chair and rubbed his chin. It was going well. He needed to relax and stop worrying. He looked at the calendar on his desk. This had better work, or he was finished.



## Chapter 31

Marshall was dismayed to see Ricardo Hernandez sitting in the living room when he came out of Angelo's bedroom. Ricardo Hernandez gave him a cold stare as he passed by him on his way to the patio door. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Angelo sitting outside drinking coffee. He was talking in Italian on his cell phone.

Angelo looked up at him as he came outside and motioned with his hand. Marshall smiled at him, closing the door behind him.

He sat down and helped himself to coffee and fruit, listening as Angelo spoke in Italian. He understood most of what he said, except when he spoke too quickly. Italian had been the first language he learned in childhood, but he hadn't spoken it for years. He spoke much better French than Italian.

Angelo was laughing. Obviously he was speaking with someone he liked. He was saying something about the university and being crazy. Finally, he said in English, "Okay, got to go, Victor. Take care, and send me an email. Chow," he said and put down the phone. "Sorry about that," he said, glancing at Marshall.

"No problem. You miss Rome, Angelo?" Marshall asked him, reaching for a banana.

Angelo nodded. "Desperately. Don't get me wrong, Brazil is beautiful but it's not home."

Suddenly Angelo's grandmother came around the corner with a bunch of flowers in her hand. She glanced at the two men, made a sound of disapproval in her throat and went inside.

Marshall shook his head. "Your grandmother...she doesn't seem to...well, like you much. Are you close?"

Angelo laughed. "Good God, no. I think she hates me even more

than Ricardo does.”

“Doesn’t it bother you that you’re...well...how come? I mean, I guess I don’t understand it. It’s none of my business really,” Marshall muttered, taking a bite of his banana and eyeing a ripe peach.

“It’s perfectly normal that you would find us a curious bunch. Now that you will be working here, I might as well tell you the true story before you get everyone else’s version of it. This family has provided the evening gossip for generations from here to Santa Branca.”

Marshall wiped his mouth on a napkin and met his eyes. He smiled faintly. “Tell me only if you want to.”

He shrugged. “It’s no secret. I guess you realize these are my maternal relatives.”

“Yes, that woman is your mother’s mother, right?”

“Correct. This place has been in the hands of the Hernandez family for four generations. My grandfather was a pure capitalist, he valued money and power above all things except for one, my mother. My mother was his only child and he was very possessive of her.”

“So Ricardo is your great uncle, right?” Marshall asked.

“Yes, the youngest brother of my grandfather.”

“Cruz told me that. So how did your mother and father meet? He wasn’t from Brazil, was he?”

“No. Italy. My father met my mother much the same way you have met me,” he laughed. “My father was travelling around and he needed money so he got a job in the coffee fields here on the plantation.”

“Ah, so they met and fell in love here?”

“Yes, but they had to meet secretly because of my grandfather. He did not approve of her being with a poor Italian boy, a common labourer. Well, to make a long story short, she got pregnant with me and they ran off together to Rome where I was born.”

“How romantic. She must have been so in love with your father.”

Angelo nodded. “Yes, so people tell me. It was not common for a young woman to defy her father, especially one who was a tyrant with a ferocious temper. Anyway, since he was powerful and rich, my grandfather hired investigators to find his daughter and bring her back to him. One day my father came home from work and she was gone. I was left with a neighbour woman who was crying her eyes out.”

“My God. Didn’t he try to get her back?” Marshall gasped.

"My mother left him a note telling him it was over between them. She said she made a mistake and for him not to come for her, to find someone else. She missed her home and her family too much and she didn't love him anymore."

"But it was a lie, right?" Marshall insisted. "He didn't believe it?"

"After the initial hurt wore off, my father came to believe the letter was a hoax. Either she was forced to write it or she wrote it to protect my father and me from my grandfather. We'll never know."

"Did he ever come here after her?" Marshall asked.

"Yes, in fact he did, a year after she left Rome. But when he arrived, he was told she was dead. Apparently, she died just days before he arrived. She is buried in the family cemetery, not far from here."

"And your father... how did he..."

"He never loved another woman the rest of his life, although he had several girlfriends. He started racing cars and he got good at it. When I was around twelve, he was racing in the Indianapolis 500..."

"Wow," Marshall said softly, "and now?"

"He's dead, died in an accident on a racetrack in the United States when I was seventeen years old."

"I'm sorry. Were you there?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"That must have been terrible," Marshall shook his head sadly.

He laughed a little. "Stop being sorry. He was a wonderful father and I had a good childhood. I got to travel around with him to races and I learned a lot about life. We lived in the United States for three years and I learned to speak English. Anyway, to make a long story short, eventually my grandfather died and I was called to a reading of the will. As you can imagine, I had no idea what I was doing at the reading of his will. I had never even seen the man. He had left me everything, which I can tell you almost knocked me over."

"Why do you think he did that?" Marshall took a sip of coffee.

"Guilt? I have no idea. There was no one else to leave it to I guess, although I think Ricardo thought that it would be left to him. Anyway, the terms of the will obligates me to keep my grandmother here until she dies. If the place is sold, then I have to make other provisions for her. Ricardo is also to live here and continue working in a supervisor

role on the plantation until he decides to retire. Anyway, I have to also provide him with an income if I sell the place.”

“Ah...I see.”

Angelo smiled. “Now you know how pleasant my life is. I am responsible for two aging relatives who absolutely despise me. I live in this God forsaken place on a plantation that is barely staying afloat and...”

“It is?” Marshall’s eyes widened, surprised.

“With Vietnam making coffee far cheaper than we can, the amount of coffee we can export has decreased so we’ve had to lower our prices. Also we experienced a lot of frost last year. We lost some of our trees. I’m planning on selling this place anyway and going home, either to Rome or to California.”

Marshall gasped. “Selling? When?”

“Maybe in a couple of years,” he said. “I’m trying to increase our exports by opening up trade with some other countries.”

Inwardly, Marshall sighed with relief. It wouldn’t suit their plan if he were to sell the plantation right now. “Well good luck with it.” Marshall said.

“Thank you, I’m going to need it,” he replied dryly.

“Have you had offers?” Marshall asked curiously.

“The only offers I get are from Columbia drug lords. I couldn’t in good conscience sell the land to cocaine dealers, even if they are willing to give me three times the value for it.”

Marshall looked away.

Angelo studied him for a minute, then said, “What are you thinking about? You look so far away?”

Marshall gazed up at him. Angelo stood by the door. He was dressed in tan safari shorts and a red tank top this morning. He had brown sandals on his feet and his hair was tied back. Damn this guy looked beautiful in anything.

“Oh, sorry,” Marshall tore his eyes away from him, “nothing really...just what you said about your parents. It’s such a beautiful and tragic love story, like something out of a fairy tale.”

“Well maybe so, but it’s history now. If you’re finished, come with me to the stables. I need to feed the horses and I can show you how to take care of them at the same time,” Angelo said.

"I'd love to see a picture of your father sometime," Marshall commented as he got up and followed Angelo around to the front of the house.

"Sure, no problem," he shrugged. "I'll show you one later." Then, he turned to him and said, "you're not scared of horses are you, Marshall?"

"No. I don't think so. To be honest, I haven't been in contact with many horses."

"Ever rode?"

"Rode a horse? God, no," Marshall laughed.

"Well today would be as good a day as any to learn how."

Marshall swallowed and stopped in his tracks. "I don't mind feeding the horses, but I don't know if I want to ride one."

Angelo turned around and looked at him. He smiled and continued on to the barn. "You have to learn to ride, Marshall. You have to exercise the horses. I will do it for now, but then after you learn to ride, you can take over."

Marshall paled.

## Chapter 32

Angelo showed him his horses, explaining what needed to be done each day. There were three of them. The black one Angelo always rode was a male, named El Nino. Angelo told him he'd named him after the storm because he was wilful. The brown one was named Marta, because she had been the one who nursed it as a colt. It was her horse, he said. The last one was pure white and very affectionate. Her name was Neige.

After an hour or so in the stables with the horses, Marshall felt quite comfortable with them. He was able to pet them and Angelo showed him how to use the brush. He did a few strokes, even on El Nino and, although he snorted a bit, he let him continue.

His favourite horse was Neige. She would come close to him and put her head over his shoulder so he would rub her nose.

"Neige is in love with you," Angelo grinned. He had been cleaning out the stalls and Marshall noticed he had hay in his hair.

He walked over, reached up and took it out. As he did, he ran the back of his hand briefly over Angelo's cheek.

Angelo stopped raking and gave him an inquiring look.

"Dirt," Marshall lied, "you had dirt on your cheek and...I thought that..."

"Thank you," he said. He held his gaze for a second.

Marshall walked back over to the horses and spoke to them. "They are pretty big, aren't they?" He tried to picture himself getting up on the back of one of them.

Angelo was amused by his hesitation. "Don't worry, Marshall...I will show you how to get in and out of the saddle. We will go slow, just take them out for a walk after lunch."

Marshall nodded, not reassured. They finished cleaning up the barn, then Angelo made sandwiches. They ate in the back because it was cooler.

Angelo pointed up at the sky. "Look, storm clouds. We better go riding soon."

They finished their lunch. Marshall led Neige and El Nino out of the stalls.

"Neige is a gentle girl and she likes you, so no worries."

He showed Marshall how to put on the saddle and demonstrated a few times how you got up onto the horse and got down again.

"How long have you been doing this, Angelo?" Marshall couldn't help but notice how at ease he was around horses.

"My grandfather Farelli had a farm outside Venice... My father used to take me there often. When I was eight years old, I got my first horse. She was a beauty. I called her Amore for love because I adored her. After that, I was hooked."

Marshall smiled. "I don't feel so stupid now that I understand you have been doing this stuff for years."

"Come on, it's not hard. Try and mount her," he said.

Marshall put one foot in the stirrup and did as Angelo told him. When he tried to lift his other leg over the saddle, he didn't quite make it and he fell backward. Angelo reached out to steady him. He felt his hands on his waist. He could feel the heat from his body.

Angelo laughed and told him to try it again. "Bounce a little when you go up, like a springboard. You push with your other leg as soon as that foot is in the stirrup and it will propel you over."

"Sounds real good and simple the way you say it," Marshall smirked.

They laughed when Marshall went to try it again. Marshall laughed so hard he couldn't do it. Finally, on the third try, he was on.

"See?" Angelo lifted an eyebrow.

"Now, I'm really shitting my pants," Marshall told him as the horse began to move forward at Angelo's encouragement. Angelo had the reins and he led Marshall around the front yard a few times.

"Don't keep your body so rigid," Angelo told him. "And don't lean in the same direction as the horse, or you are going to fall off."

It felt as if he were balancing on the edge of a bridge. It took at

least an hour before he began to gain confidence. Angelo then made him take the reins. He showed him how to use them to stop, go and speed up.

"The speed up I can do without," Marshall laughed.

Angelo shook his head and mounted his horse.

"Hey, don't go too far away from me, Angelo," Marshall pleaded. "I've never done this before, remember. I can't do it alone.

"You are good. Follow me," he said.

They went at a slow pace and by late afternoon, Marshall was able to trot a bit with the horse. By the supper hour, he didn't want to get off. He had fallen in love with horseback riding.

They arrived back at the stables and Marshall glanced at Angelo who got off his horse. "Now I have another problem, getting off."

"Watch me," Angelo mounted and dismounted several times.

He could watch him forever. He looked incredible with his long hair blowing in the breeze.

"Take your right foot out of the stirrup," he told him, "and lift your other leg over. Then, just hop down. That's an easy way. Hold on, I'll help you," he said, coming over to stand beside the horse.

Marshall looked down into his face. He didn't feel any fear. He followed his instructions and slid down off the horse, placing his hands on Angelo's shoulders for support.

Angelo's hands planted themselves on his thighs, and slid up to his hips. As soon as his feet touched the ground, he stepped back, releasing him.

"Getting off is easier than getting on," Marshall said unnecessarily, feeling flushed. He could still feel his touch though the fabric of his jeans.

Angelo laughed, seeming unaffected by the contact. "Yes. You're right."

A clack of thunder rumbled in the sky, somewhere in the distance. "Hear that?" Marshall asked Angelo.

He nodded, "Far away, probably heading right for us."



## Chapter 33

Angelo took care of the two horses with Marshall's help, then they went inside. It was almost seven o'clock. The air was heavy and humid.

"What do you want to eat?" Angelo asked him.

Marshall shrugged. "Whatever you feel like cooking."

Senora Hernandez came into the kitchen and nodded at her grandson. She ignored Marshall.

Angelo asked her something about Carlos and a mass, but Marshall couldn't understand what she said in return. She took something out of the fridge and left the room.

"The funeral is Sunday," Angelo said, as he took pasta out of the cupboard. "She will go with Ricardo. I will probably go with Cruz. Would you like to come? I know you didn't know him but you were here when..."

Marshall swallowed. He looked down at his hands. How could he go to this man's funeral? He shook his head. "I will stay here, take care of things."

He nodded and began to fill up a large pot with some water. "Look, while I'm doing this, maybe you could go to Carlos' room and put some of his things in a box for me. I will take them to his family on Sunday."

Marshall bit his lip. "Sure," he managed, "no problem."

"Later, I will give you clean sheets and you can settle into your room. It's the first room on your left," he told him, peeling an onion.

"Thank you," Marshall said, and made his way to the little room down the hall.

He took a moment to look around, before placing the man's

meagre possessions in the small box Angelo had provided. There was a single bed, already stripped of linen, a chest of drawers and a cracked picture of the Madonna on the far wall. In the closet and in the dresser were a few articles of clothing, and some faded photographs.

Marshall didn't realize he was crying until he came back out into the kitchen. Angelo asked him why he was crying.

"I don't know," he said, wiping at his face. "Was I crying?"

"Yes," Angelo replied, stirring the pasta and regarding him with an inquisitive look in his eyes.

"That's strange," he said. "I didn't notice."

That night, when he finally went to lie down in the bed once belonging to Carlos, he couldn't sleep. No, he hadn't actually put the rope around his neck, but he was just as responsible for the man's death as Hal was, wasn't he?

He tossed around in the little bed, not blaming Carlos if he decided to haunt him. But no one came. No one needed to.

Eventually, he forced himself to think of other things. He relived his day with Angelo in his mind. A smile came without much encouragement. It had been a good day.

They had eaten the pasta Angelo had made with what he called a "quick version" of Italian meat sauce. Then they had a glass of wine outside.

Somehow he found himself telling Angelo things about his life that he had never told anyone, not even Hal. Maybe there were some things he shouldn't have told him, but it was so easy talking to him.

He closed his eyes and relived their conversation in his mind.

They had looked up at the night sky. The stars were so bright, they were almost blinding. Angelo started to tell him about the double star.

"What's that?" Marshall asked.

"There, look," Angelo said, placing a hand lightly on his shoulder to guide his gaze. "There's one," he pointed. "See, it looks like those two stars are very close together."

"Are they?" Marshall asked.

"Well, that's the thing," Angelo replied, releasing his hold on him. "They might be close together, or it could just be an optical illusion. Actually, they could be some distance apart."

Marshall considered what he'd said for a minute. "So, they're not

really close. They just look that way?"

"That's right."

"Do you know everything?"

He laughed, his eyes widening, "Everything? Shit, no. In fact, sometimes I think I don't know much of anything."

"Liar, you are just so smart." Marshall shook his head. "If I'd been able to go to school more, maybe I'd know..." Suddenly, he paused in mid-sentence. Damn, he was supposed to be a university student.

Angelo met his eyes. "How far did you really go in school, Marshall?"

"Well," he sighed, "my tests scores put me at grade ten back at Havendale House, but I never went that far. I hardly ever went to school after my father died."

"You must be bright then," he smiled at him. "There are different kinds of intelligence, Marshall, just like there are different ways to learn."

"Umm, I know what you're saying," Marshall took another swallow of his wine. "I went to the school of hard knocks," he laughed. "The prestigious school of life," he mocked.

"Hey," he cautioned. "Listen to me. I have met men out here who have never been to school. They can't write their own name, but they can predict a storm by the feel in the air, or tell if a coffee bean is good just by looking at it."

"I can tell you how long it takes to bring a man to orgasm, or the techniques of giving a good blow job. How's that for practical learning?" Marshall replied, a sliver of bitterness creeping into his voice. The wine had lowered his inhibitions.

Angelo grinned. "Some men might find that knowledge very useful."

Marshall laughed, and met his eyes. "Oh yeah?" he challenged. "What men, for example?"

He flirted with him, but then he couldn't help it. He sat directly across from him on the stoop, his knee brushing his.

Angelo's smile had grown broader, "Millions, all over the world."

Marshall threw his head back and howled with laughter. "That was coy," he sputtered. "Boy, what a dodge."

"I used to play baseball," Angelo commented without a smile,

lifting an eyebrow.

"Oh yeah? What position?" Marshall moved his face closer, searching his eyes.

"First base, of course," he smirked.

"How did I know you were going to say that?" Marshall sat back against the porch rail, laughing.

"I don't know," Angelo shook his head. "Must have something to do with my appreciation of the school you attended."

"I can't believe you just said that!" Marshall accused.

"You set yourself up for it, and you would be surprised at what I can say. Good thing you couldn't read my mind, you'd be really shocked."

"I doubt it," Marshall gave him a cocky grin. "There's not much that shocks me."

Angelo sobered for a minute, breaking the sexual tension between them. "Tell me about this place, Havendale?" Angelo folded his arms across his broad chest, and regarded him through half closed eyes.

"There was nothing special about it," Marshall told him. "These places are all the same. It was tough I guess because Al had just died."

"Al? Who is Al?"

"My friend, actually a pimp I became friends with. He died of a heroin overdose."

"I'm sorry."

"We had an arrangement. I worked to help support his habit, and he took care of me."

"And that was a good thing?" Angelo asked.

Marshall fell quiet.

"Marshall?" Angelo leaned forward and touched his hand.

Marshall looked at him. "Yes, it was good," he answered hastily. Then, hesitating he shook his head. "It wasn't good, was it? I mean he died doing heroin and I risked my ass on the streets."

"So were you really taking care of each other?"

"I think we were, but in the circumstances we lived in, let's say it was better than the alternative."

Angelo nodded. "I see."

"Some kids had pimps who beat them and left them in the streets, you know? I never saw a hungry day or was cold. I had warm clothes

and a place to sleep and...we comforted each other."

"Umm," he closed his eyes, then looked at him again. "And Hal, you met him at Havendale?"

"Yes."

"So you started university after Havendale?"

Marshall hesitated. "I guess you figured out by now that there was no University," he said. "We just decided we liked each other and wanted to travel together. And now, like I said, I realize that Hal is not for me but he's not accepting it too well."

"Why did you lie about going to the university?"

"I'm sorry I lied. I guess I'm embarrassed about my background. I didn't think we'd get hired, if you knew we had been in a place like that."

Angelo took in some air, for a minute he didn't say anything. "I'd never presume to judge you Marshall. In fact, I'd never presume to judge anyone. Just don't lie to me anymore, okay?"

"Okay," Marshall said, looking away. Suddenly he felt uneasy. Although Angelo had accepted what he had said with little judgment, he had probably said way too much. What in hell had possessed him to spill his guts. Hal had told him no decent man would love someone who had led the life he had. He'd blown it.

Angelo stood up and looked down at him. "I need to sleep, Marshall."

"Angelo," Marshall said, feeling quite desperate. "I suppose you hate me now that you know I worked the streets and..."

"I don't hate you, Marshall," he shook his head gently. "I told you I'd never presume to judge you. My grandfather did that with my father and where did it get him?"

Marshall didn't know what to say.

"Actually," he continued, "I am grateful you chose to reveal something that personal about yourself to me. It's a gift. Thank you."

Marshall's eyes widened. He didn't hate him.

"You know, Marshall," he added, "if it feels bad, the way someone is treating you, it means it probably is. I know you've had it hard and it's hard to trust. Try trusting yourself, what you feel. You deserve to be loved. All human beings deserve that. I hope you learn to let go of Hal. I think he's a toxic person. Although I don't know him, I have the

impression he's the kind of person who can ruin your life."

Marshall nodded mutely.

Angelo said goodnight and went inside.

He lay in bed thinking of those words. Trust himself. Trust what he felt. He'd said he deserved to be loved. Did he deserve love after all the horrible things he had done? Trust himself. But, how could he? If he trusted himself, he would have to betray Hal.

Hal had warned him about sentiment. He had warned him about men who would tell him lies because they wanted to fuck.

He finally fell asleep, with Hal's voice in his head. "I'm the only one you can trust, Marshall, the only one you can count on. No matter how much they say they understand you, they never can. You will always be garbage to them, always. And when they're finished using your body, they'll put you out with the trash."

## Chapter 34

The next few days came and went quickly. There was a brief rainstorm, but nothing major. Angelo showed him what was expected of him each day and Marshall had no problem getting into a routine. Besides caring for the horses, he was responsible for looking after the fruit trees and the grass. This kept him quite busy. He also was expected to do any minor repairs that might come up. Angelo did mention something about painting the barn, although he said they would do it together.

Lately he had hardly seen Angelo. He was busy every day and on Saturday afternoon, he had left with the family to attend Carlos' funeral. Marshall was alone.

It was around six in the evening when he heard a noise as he was sitting out back eating a sandwich. He looked up and saw Hal standing by the tree.

He could hear his own heart beating. "Damn, you scared me," he hissed. "What are you doing here? Someone might see you."

"No one is going to see me. They're gone, left two hours ago. Even Cruz," Hal tossed, taking a seat next to him.

Marshall gave him a guarded look.

"Living the good life I see," he mused, plucking a peach out of a bowl of fruit sitting on the table in front of him.

"I'm working hard."

"Yeah, well I'll trade you," He said, biting into the peach, juice running down his chin.

Marshall didn't answer, looking away.

"So how's it going? Not that I'm prying or anything," he sneered. "Have you gotten him into bed yet, Marshall?" He moved his face

directly in front of him, forcing Marshall's head back.

"Not yet," Marshall said nervously.

"Not yet!" He screamed. "What in Jesus are you waiting for, your honeymoon? The guy's not a priest, is he?" He threw the half-eaten peach on the ground and wiped his hands on his dirty shorts.

Marshall got up out of the chair and began pacing. "You told me not to spook him."

"I told you to go easy. I didn't say put him to sleep!"

"He's happy just being friends right now. He..."

Hal stood up, grabbing his arm. "Listen to me, we didn't come here so you could have a friend. We came here to get our hands on his money and his land. If you want a friend, get a pen pal!"

Marshall pulled his arm away, rubbing it. "I promise. It will be soon."

"Marshall, what in hell is wrong with you? Have you forgotten how to seduce a man? You used to hold the goddamned record, bragged about how fast they fell at your feet. You're either losing your touch or this guy is out of your league."

"I'm not losing my touch!" Marshall snapped, his eyes widened in anger. "I know how to turn on a guy and I know how to please him, even a man like him."

Hal lifted an eyebrow. "So, you admit he's a challenge for you?"

"I didn't say that," Marshall muttered. "But he's smart and he's not as desperate as some of the guys back home. They were in the closet and they had a hard time finding someone they could have sex with. He could have his pick."

"Who in hell do you think he has sex with out here, his grandmother?" Hal cried.

"No, of course not... but maybe he has someone in Santa Branca or in Sao Paulo. I don't know but he seems...together, you know?" Marshall met Hal's eyes.

Hal studied him. "Together? Together?" He reached over and slapped his face hard. "You better get yourself together, you stupid little fuck. If you can't do the job, tell me now and I will get someone else to do it for you."

"No!" Marshall cried. He held up his hand. His face stung. Tears coursed down his cheek. "Please don't, Hal. I will do it. I promise. I



will seduce him. I just need the right timing. It can't be tacky."

"I don't care if you seduce him in the rainforest with silver angels playing harps over your head, just do it!"

Marshall watched Hal walk off. He closed his eyes in misery. Then he opened them and ran around to the front of the house. "Hal!" He called after him just as he reached the gate.

Hal turned and looked at him. "What?"

Marshall ran down the road to join him. "Hal, let's say it happens and we...well...he falls for me. Then what? We're not going to have to hurt him, are we because I..."

Hal grabbed his shoulders roughly. "Stop asking me stupid questions. Get his signature on a piece of paper, and we'll discuss the next step."

He pressed the code to the fence and slipped through. Marshall watched him disappear around the corner.

He cried for ten minutes after Hal left because he was scared, really scared.

## Chapter 35

Angelo came home on Monday with Cruz and Marta. They all had supper together. After they had eaten, Marta and Cruz walked out on the porch. He couldn't help but notice the way they were looking at each other at the table.

Marshall helped Angelo with the dishes. The temperature had cooled off some. They were both in jeans.

As Marshall took the last wet dish from Angelo's hand, he said, "Marta looks happy to be back."

"This is her home," he replied, letting the water out of the sink.

"Where are your uncle and grandmother?"

"They flew to Rio to visit some people they know. They will be gone three weeks."

Marshall nodded. He could hear the murmured whispers outside the window and he glanced briefly in that direction.

Angelo began to put the dishes away.

"Is there something going on between Cruz and Marta?" Marshall asked in a low voice, coming closer to Angelo.

Angelo put a finger to his lips.

"That's why Marta was so happy to come back," Marshall stated, smiling.

Angelo nodded quietly.

"Isn't Cruz married?" Marshall asked.

"Yes, but it's a difficult situation."

"Oh. How long has this been going on?" Marshall inquired.

"A while, a couple of years maybe," he replied hesitantly.

"The way they were looking at each other, it was like they couldn't wait to touch," Marshall said with a sigh.

Angelo smiled. "Yes. I'm used to that."

"You're used to what?" Marshall smiled at him, "to being desired by everyone who sets eyes on you?"

Angelo laughed. "Right. Sure," he replied, his black eyes suddenly shining with humour, "every person who sees me wants me. And, I must say, it's distracting."

Marshall laughed. He moved closer to him, reaching up to push back some hair from his forehead. "You're distracting," he said softly, meeting his eyes.

Angelo's eyes widened some as Marshall pressed him against the cupboard. He placed both hands on his face. "Did you know, when I'm this close to you I can scarcely breathe?"

"No. I didn't know. That could be very hard on a person," he smiled faintly, his breathing a little more laboured than usual.

"Hard on the heart," Marshall told him softly, "but I think I can take it," he said, taking his hands away from his face, he pressed his mouth against his.

He was surprised when Angelo's arms slipped around him, pulling him closer. His lips opened some, the kiss deepened, the tip of Angelo's tongue slowly merging with his. The kiss was passionate, yet sweet. *The man can kiss.*

And then Angelo slowly released him. He stroked Marshall's hair for a second and smiled at him. "How's your heart now?" He asked him.

It beat like a drum and his pulses raced. His cock was hard as rock. "Take me to bed," he said, boldly meeting his eyes. His voice was quivering. "I want you, and if you don't take me down the hall right now, I might be forced to rip off all your clothes right here and now."

"In the kitchen?" he gave him a shaky grin.

"In the kitchen, in the bathroom, in the front yard," Marshall told him, "doesn't much matter to me. Where in hell did you learn to kiss like that?" He shook his head in wonder, tracing a finger over his chest.

"Same school you attended," he whispered, "school of life. Only, I was in the graduating class ahead of you."

Marshall laughed, about to reach up and kiss him again, when the door opened and Marta came in. Marshall moved away from him.

Angelo reached out and squeezed his hand, giving him a slow wink. Marta walked into the kitchen. Angelo spoke to her for a few minutes.

She looked at Marshall and in English, she said, "Thank you for nice thing you do the night my father... morte," she managed.

Marshall told her in broken Portuguese that she was welcome. She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek and said goodnight.

"Boa Noite," Angelo said, and Marshall echoed him.

When she disappeared into her room, Marshall walked outside on the porch. He found it hard to breathe inside. His body tingled, taunted with sexual tension, yet something at the very core of him wanted to run from Angelo.

When he felt Angelo's hand on his shoulder, he closed his eyes. "Angelo," he said, the name wafting away on the night air.

He felt his body being turned toward him. He looked into his eyes. "It's very lonely out here, Marshall. It's isolated and... sometimes..." he trailed off with a smile. "I guess I'm asking you if this is what you really want."

He trembled. Angelo's hands rested lightly on his shoulders. "I feel like a virgin," Marshall said, laughing in a way that sounded like he was crying.

Angelo gave him a curious look, removing his hands. "Why are you crying?"

He stepped away from him, wiping a stray tear off his cheek. "I'm sorry. It doesn't make sense, even to me."

How could he explain it to Angelo when he didn't understand it himself? All he knew was, at this moment, he was filled with such longing, it terrified him. Whatever these feelings were, he had never met them before. They made him feel weak, out of control. He didn't like them much.

The thought of going to his room, being naked with him, touching him, having him inside of him overwhelmed him. He couldn't do it.

As if Angelo could read his mind, he said, "Marshall, we don't have to do this. I won't be upset. Look, why don't you just take some air and then go to bed. I think I will go myself, I'm really tired after that long trip."

Marshall said nothing. He heard his footsteps retreating on the

porch. The door opened and closed.

He was breathing hard. He stretched his hand out in front of him and saw that it was shaking. What in hell was wrong with him? This is exactly what he wanted, wasn't it? This was exactly what was supposed to happen. He took a deep breath and told himself to relax.

He went for a walk around the house. The night was unusually calm and quiet. The grass was dewy and it stuck to his shoes.

Finally, he went inside the house to his room. There was no sound coming from Marta's room. She was asleep. The house was silent.

He paced the room for a few minutes. It had been almost an hour since Angelo had gone into the house. He was probably asleep by now. Marshall took off his clothes. He sat on the side of the bed and closed his eyes. A vivid memory of the kiss they shared in the kitchen came back to him.

There had been such passion in his eyes.

He threw on a pair of sweatpants. He hadn't brought a bathrobe with him. He hadn't had the room in his bag because Hal insisted they travel light.

Marshall left the room and walked down the hall passed Marta's room, and the two empty ones. He had to do this. He had to take this opportunity or Hal would find someone else to take his place. He couldn't bear that. Keep your head, Marshall, he told himself. He's just a man like any other man. Sex is sex. In the dark, it makes no difference.

He sucked in some air as he came to a stop in front of Angelo's room. He placed his hand on the doorknob. He knew if he hesitated, he'd back down. He opened the door and walked in.

He walked over to his bed, surprised to find it empty. Then he looked up and saw him sitting outside in the back.

Marshall walked through the room to the patio door.

Angelo looked up as he came outside.

"What are you doing out here?" Marshall asked him.

"Could ask you the same thing," he replied.

Marshall paused, "I was looking for you. I came to your room but..." He looked down at his feet, lost for words suddenly.

Angelo stood up. Marshall's heart pounded in his chest. But Angelo didn't touch him. Instead he reached for the door and opened it. "I'm

finding it hard to sleep. I must be overtired,” he announced.

Marshall placed a hand on his arm. “That’s not why you’re finding it hard to sleep,” Marshall replied. He pulled him around to face him. “One word from you, Angelo, and...” Marshall managed, searching his face.

Angelo pulled him up against him and kissed him, his arms crushing him against his hard body. He wore a robe and Marshall reached for the tie. He pulled on it and the robe opened.

Marshall pushed away from him, his body on fire. “Take it off,” he breathed.

Angelo let it drop to the ground.

“Jesus Christ,” Marshall whispered, letting his eyes trail over him, “you are so beautiful. Come here,” he moaned.

Angelo came to stand in front of him, silently watching him. Marshall reached out a trembling hand to touch his chest. His nipples were brown and hard and Marshall captured one between his teeth, his hand moving down to grip his hard sex with his hand.

He heard Angelo make a sound in his throat... He moved his mouth to the other nipple as he felt Angelo’s hand move inside his sweat pants, pushing them down over his hips.

One hand caressed his buttocks, squeezing them as his mouth came down on his throat. Then, he bent down and pulled the sweatpants away from Marshall’s ankles, moving his eyes up to his groin, gripping his buttocks with his hands again. He pressed his mouth against his sex.

Marshall reeled, his knees almost buckling under him.

Then he stood up and took his hand. “Come inside,” he said, his voice deep and raw with emotion.

Marshall followed him through the door. As soon as they were inside the room, Marshall pressed him against the wall. Positioning his arms over his head, he began to make love to every inch of his beautifully sculptured body.

He didn’t remember when they had moved to the bed or how they had gotten there.

“Close your eyes,” Angelo told him as they lay down together.

He did, only to feel Angelo’s lips and tongue and hands do wonderful things to his body. There wasn’t a part of him that was not

awake, not a nerve that wasn't stimulated. And it went on, wave after wave of pleasure and when Angelo was ready to take him, he looked down into his eyes and said, "This won't be like it was with the others."

"What others?" Marshall moaned, kissing his mouth, running his hands over his damp hair. "There have never been any others."

Angelo hooked his legs over his shoulders, and looked down into his eyes. He went into him. Marshall let out a cry. He arched his back and said his name over and over again, as he matched his frenzied rhythm. He was lost, lost inside a passion that felt brand new to him, a passion he was experiencing for the first time in his life.

Later, Angelo held him, kissing his forehead, his eyes...his cheeks.

They said nothing. There was nothing they needed to say. They lay close together. Within minutes, they were asleep in each other's arms. Marshall's face streaked with dried tears.

## Chapter 36

He had cried during orgasm. This was his first thought in the morning when he opened his eyes.

He could hear Angelo in the shower. He hoped he didn't realize that he had cried. He felt like a fool.

Marshall got up, and went into the bathroom to take a pee. He could see Angelo's naked body through the glass shower door, rivers of water cascading over the contours of his body.

Marshall walked over and opened the door. It was a tiny little shower stall, barely big enough for one of them, let alone both.

Angelo said nothing. He just turned around and pulled him inside with him. He reached over and closed the door.

They kissed deeply. Marshall ran his hands over his muscular shoulders and back.

"How are you this morning?" Angelo asked him softly, kissing his neck.

Marshall ran his hands over his chest. "Better now," he smiled, fondling his sex, giving it a few gentle pulls and slaps.

He was hard again, and Marshall reached up and kissed his mouth as he put his head back against the wall and closed his eyes.

"Umm," Marshall moaned. "Damn it, but you're delicious."

Angelo laughed. "You, too," he muttered, kissing his chest and squeezing his buttocks.

Marshall pressed him against the wall with his body. "I could keep you prisoner in here and you'd have to do my bidding," he grinned.

"What a horrible thought," Angelo laughed, giving him a comical face.

"You'd be my boy toy," Marshall teased him, pinching his nipples



hard.

"Ah...okay. You will get no argument from me."

"You are hot, aren't you?" Marshall licked his chest. "Horny as hell. You want me, baby?"

"That depends," he teased, his beautiful black eyes glinting dangerously. "Can you handle it again?"

"I can take all you got, big boy and more," Marshall slipped down to his knees and took his sex into his mouth.

Angelo turned off the shower and laughed. "You're going to drown down there."

He pulled him up to a standing position.

"I wouldn't mind," Marshall whispered, running his eyes over him, touching his face, which was rough with his morning beard.

Suddenly overcome with passion, he moaned, moving his mouth against Angelo's chest. "Jesus, Jesus, I never knew it could be like this. I never...I've never known anything like this. Please, baby, tell me I didn't dream it. Tell me last night was real." He looked at him, pleading. "You really made love to me, didn't you?"

Angelo pushed back his wet hair from his face. "Yes, I really made love to you," his deep voice sounding silky, his accent heightened this morning.

Marshall felt his hands move down over his body and he was on the verge of orgasm already.

"Well, do it again," Marshall groaned, gently nibbling at his shoulder.

Angelo opened the door to the shower, propelling them out onto the floor. Marshall put his arms up around his neck. They moved together across the bedroom floor sharing slow, succulent, sensuous kisses. Angelo took him down on the bed, his mouth moving across his chest and to his sex. He took it into his mouth and brought Marshall to the brink of orgasm. He reached over to the nightstand and threw Marshall a condom. The way Angelo looked at him almost made him lose it. He tore open the condom and placed it on Angelo's hard cock, his hands shaking so badly that Angelo had to finish it. Marshall rolled over onto his stomach and Angelo yanked him up to his knees. He went into him and Marshall forgot everything. He pumped out his orgasm as Angelo exploded inside of him. His heart raced as he turned around

and took Angelo down on top of him, hotly kissing his mouth, allowing his senses to fill with the feel of his hot flesh and hard muscles. He kissed his chest and his stomach, laid his head on his sex and fell asleep.

When he finally opened his eyes for the second time, Angelo was sitting on the edge of the bed putting on his shoes. He was dressed in jeans and a mauve cotton shirt. His hair was almost dry.

Marshall sat up and placed his arms around his shoulders from behind.

Angelo lay back against him for a second, and Marshall pressed his lips to his cheek.

"I love holding you. I could hold you like this all day," Marshall told him, squeezing him tight.

Angelo laughed. "I wouldn't get much done, now would I?"

"What's more important than this?" Marshall asked softly.

Angelo turned around slightly and pressed his lips gently to his. "You're right, nothing at all is more important."

"Where are you going?" Marshall asked as he got up off the bed.

"Got to see Cruz about some things. You have a lawn to mow," he gave him a stern look that culminated in a smile.

"Yes, sir," Marshall gave him a salute, jumping out of bed and standing straight.

Angelo ran his gaze over him and grinned. "You look oh so professional, soldier."

Marshall laughed. "Thank you. You keep looking at me like that and you'll never leave this room."

He gave him a mock look of horror, "Can't have that. Got to go. Eat something. Later, we'll talk."

"Not to be pushy, Senior Farelli," Marshall gave him a sheepish look, "but I was hoping for more than just talk."

"We'll see," he grinned, "maybe if you do a real good job on the lawn."

"I'll mow it down to the dirt, sir, for just one kiss."

"Don't have to go that far," Angelo protested with a laugh, as he raised his hand and left the room.

Marshall went back in for a quick shower. He found himself singing as he let the water run over him.

He got out of the shower and came back to the bed. He stood looking at it with a sigh of contentment. The mattress was crooked. The blankets and pillows were all over the place. He could see them together, their bodies, hands and mouths sliding over each other. He leaned over and laid his hand in the place where Angelo's head had been. He lifted the pillow up to his face and pressed his lips there, inhaling his scent. Then he pulled off the sheets and threw them into a pile on the floor. He would ask Marta for clean ones.

He went back to his room and dressed. He tried to make Marta understand about the linen. She finally indicated to him that she would take care of it and Marshall went outside to start the lawnmower.

He had a hard time concentrating on anything. His mind drifted back to that room and often he would stop and glance over at the window when it was within his view.

Marta came and brought him something to drink an hour later, which he was grateful for. It wasn't that sunny, but there was a heavy humidity in the air again.

After he had finished mowing the lawn, he watered the flowers, then decided to check on the horses.

At around seven that night just as Marshall was finishing up with the outdoor chores, Angelo drove up in his uncle's truck, followed by Cruz.

They both got out and talked in front of the house, laughing about something.

Marshall stopped raking the hay and paused to watch them. Of course it was Angelo he couldn't get enough of looking at. It was funny how you watched a person differently after you knew their body so intimately. Now it wasn't just the overall physical beauty of him that drew his eyes but specific places on his body that captured his attention. That tender place just below his ear, for example, that he caught a glimpse of when he turned a certain way, or the corners of his mouth that turned up slightly when he teased him. And that place just at the base of his scrotum that pulsed when you touched it with your lips or your tongue. His hands. He had the most graceful hands, hands with magical sensors that gravitated exactly to where you wanted them to go.

Marshall knew Angelo was aware of his gaze on him, although he

didn't make it obvious. Instead, he smiled rather coyly when Cruz wasn't looking at him and Marshall laughed to himself.

A delicious sexual tension tormented Marshall throughout dinner. They laughed and talked with Cruz and Marta but took the opportunity to run their gaze over each other at every opportunity.

The wine flowed and Marshall refused the second glass. He didn't want to be sleepy and he didn't want anything to dull his senses. He only wanted Marta and Cruz to leave so he could touch him. He could hardly stand the waiting. It was like he hadn't drunk anything for days and Angelo was a long cool glass of water just out of his reach.

Marta and Cruz did leave after helping to do up the dishes. They crawled into Cruz's truck and drove off.

Angelo was still putting away dishes as Marshall watched the vehicle disappear.

As soon as it was gone, Marshall came over to Angelo and turned him around to face him. He took the dishtowel out of his hand and pulled him into his arms.

Angelo kissed him deeply and Marshall undid the buttons on his shirt and ran his hands over his chest.

"Take me to bed or I'm going to make love to you here on the kitchen floor," Marshall murmured against his cheek.

"How about on the kitchen table?" He asked softly, raising both eyebrows.

"What?" Marshall laughed.

Angelo pushed Marshall backward, taking off his pants as he went. Marshall stepped out of them and kicked them away.

"What in the world..." Marshall laughed, looking behind him. "You...you can't be serious...on the table? There are dishes and..."

Angelo pulled at the tablecloth, the remaining dishes on the table crashed to the floor. "Not anymore."

Marshall was howling with laughter as he pushed him down on the table and lifted his legs over his shoulders. He crawled on top of the table with him.

"You're insane!" Marshall cried, not being able to stop laughing as Angelo gave him a growl, which sounded like a big Grizzly bear.

"You said in the kitchen baby, and when I'm hungry, what better place to satisfy my hunger than in the kitchen!"

"We're going to break the table," Marshall protested, laughing so hard tears ran down his face.

Angelo pushed against him. "I don't give a damn. It belongs to my grandmother!"

Marshall was laughing too hard, and Angelo made it worse by looking down at him with this mock serious face and saying, "Marshall, damn, will you stop wiggling? I can't even knock on the door, let alone come in for dinner."

Marshall pushed him away, hitting him playfully. "Get off me, you fool...you idiot."

Angelo leaned against the counter and gave him a faint smile. He ran his eyes over him, then reached over and took off his t-shirt.

"How come I'm naked and you're fully dressed?" Marshall demanded.

"Just worked out that way, I guess."

"Well, I intend to rectify that situation immediately," Marshall told him.

"Have to catch me first," Angelo mocked and took off running down the hall.

Marshall followed on his heels and ran into his room. He looked around but didn't see him. Then he let out a yell as he felt him grab him from behind and kick the door closed with his foot.

Marshall leaned back against him as he felt his mouth come down on the back of his neck. He lifted up his arms and placed them around his neck, arching his body to allow Angelo's hands to roam freely over him. He could feel his erection through the material of his pants.

He moaned, moving against him as one of Angelo's hands squeezed his nipple and the other fondled his testicles from behind. He ran his tongue over his lips, reaching a hand behind him to undo the zipper on Angelo's pants.

"Umm," Marshall's voice came wafting through the window. "Yes, like that. God, yes. Take off your clothes. All of them," he was saying to him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hal watched as they moved to the centre of the room. Marshall sat on

the bed watching the other man take off his clothes.

Hal was excited by the sight of him. Damn, he was a beautiful man. But it wasn't the fact that Angelo Farelli was such a gorgeous man that struck Hal. It was the look on Marshall's face as he watched him strip off his clothes. It was a look of pure naked desire. It reeked of raw need, lust at its most transparent, but with something more. Hal had seen Marshall at work before. He'd recorded him with men on video camera, but he had never seen him with an expression on his face like that.

As the man came close to the bed, Hal saw Marshall reach for him. "Umm, come here," he demanded, his breath sounding laboured. Running his hands over him, he went down on his knees in front of him.

Hal began to breathe a little hard, sexually aroused by what he saw. Then he heard the sound of a vehicle coming up the road. He turned away from the window and made his way back toward the fence. It was Cruz. He pressed the code to open the fence and even in the distance, he could hear the sounds of their lovemaking drifting toward him on the fragrant night air.

## Chapter 37

The following afternoon, Marshall began scraping the old paint off the barn. Angelo told him he would help him paint when it was primed. It was a hell of a job. He did half, then went to look after some of his other chores.

He was actually enjoying himself. The days passed quickly as he worked and he got to see Angelo, even if he often came and went. They always ate supper together and sometimes they sat on the porch just talking until it got dark. Then they went to his room and they made love. That was his favourite time. Angelo never disappointed him. He was the most tender and passionate of lovers and he had a quirky sense of humour. Marshall discovered he hadn't better dare him to do anything, because he was a devil deep down. He liked to push the limits. He certainly pushed every limit in the bedroom, because Marshall did things sexually with this man he had never done with anyone. He woke up every morning with a smile on his face and in a kind of a daze. He loved waking up beside him, seeing his face, and hearing his voice.

"You know," Marshall told him teasingly one morning, before they got out of bed, "I've noticed something about you."

"And what's that?" Angelo raised an eyebrow.

"You can't talk English for shit, unless it's after nine in the morning. Did you know that?"

Angelo glanced at him in the bed and narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"You talk like an Italian in the morning. Your accent is thick and you don't pronounce words well," Marshall told him.

Angelo reached for him. "Oh, yeah?"

Marshall laughed, struggling against him.

"Do I speak English all right in the night?" He tickled him, pulling him close.

"Stop!" Marshall sputtered. "You don't talk in the night," Marshall squealed, trying to get away.

"I don't, eh? I wonder why that is?" He growled, kissing his neck, then blowing air against his skin, creating suction so it made funny noises. "Could it be because my mouth is busy doing other things?"

"Ah, that's it." Marshall threw at him comically.

"So what you are saying is, I'm a different man in the night than in the morning?" He held him, tracing his cheek lazily with his finger.

Marshall caressed his hair. "When you look at me like that, I don't know what I'm saying any more."

He laughed. "Cop out."

"Not. I'm serious. Your eyes...I could get lost in them forever," Marshall whispered, kissing his mouth.

Their kiss deepened and they made love again, slowly, caressing each other's bodies. Angelo brought Marshall to climax with his mouth, then lay back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

Marshall gazed at him, stroking his cock. "What did your father look like? Was he as beautiful as you?" Marshall asked him.

Angelo moaned a little, his cock pulsing in Marshall's hand. His back arched suddenly and his cock overflowed in Marshall's hand. He uttered a deep, satisfied grunt.

"I want to see his picture."

He opened his eyes. "You want to see pictures now?"

Marshall grinned. "Yeah."

He sighed, rolled over and opened a drawer in the bottom of the night table. He took out a photo album and passed it to him. "There, knock yourself out," he replied.

"You sound so American when you say that. You really did spend a lot of time in the U.S., didn't you?" He said, opening the album.

"Yes. Those are all pictures from the United States. My father was given citizenship at one time."

Marshall looked at the pictures. They were mostly pictures of racetracks and cars. "Is that your dad?" Marshall asked, pointing to a smiling man in a racing uniform holding up a trophy.



Angelo raised his head, looked at it for a second, "Yes, that's him."

"Hum...handsome," Marshall smiled. "You look like him but..." he looked up at the picture of his mother on the wall, "you have your mother's eyes and hair I think...and mouth." He turned the page.

There was a teenage boy in one of the pictures. "Oh, my God," he laughed, "is that you?"

Angelo sat up and moved closer. "Yes," he said, "that's me."

"You were sweet," Marshall kissed him quick on the cheek. "How old were you then?"

"Ah...fourteen maybe."

Marshall leaned against his shoulder. "Were you sexually active?"

"Yes...if you can call it sexually active. I think I gave a blow job to one of my father's crew members."

Marshall slapped him. "Naughty boy."

Angelo laughed.

They looked at some more, Marshall asking him who people were. It was almost ten before they got into the shower.

That day, Angelo helped him paint the barn and they ended up getting more paint on them, than on the barn.

"Angelo," Marshall told him, "Painting is not a good career choice for you," he teased.

Angelo gave him a dirty look, paint streaked across his cheek. "You should talk," he said and laughed, walking up beside him and pointing to his forehead. "You have some paint there."

"Where?" Marshall demanded.

"Right there," he remarked, lifting his paintbrush and making a streak directly down the centre of Marshall's face.

Marshall gasped. "You...you...ass!" He laughed as he chased him around the barn with the paintbrush. "You are going to get it bad."

"Oh, God, I hope so," he growled.

They spent almost twenty minutes throwing paint at each other until Ricardo walked in to see what all the commotion was. He looked at them and shook his head, "Santa Maria," he said.

Marshall and Angelo stood perfectly still until he left, then erupted into laughter.

## Chapter 38

Cruz came into the barn the next day at lunch and told Marshall, Hal wanted to see him.

A sense of dread crept over him. It suddenly dawned on him he hadn't seen Hal in over two weeks.

"All right," Marshall nodded, trying to conceal his anxiousness. "Tell him I'll come down tonight."

"Sure," Cruz said as he left the barn to go into the house for lunch.

Marshall sighed. He knew the day would come when he would have to talk to Hal. He couldn't keep putting him off.

Marshall took Neige out of the barn for her exercise and rode her down to the bunkhouse. He stopped to talk to Miguel who was raking coffee beans in the hot sun.

He put the rake down and smiled at him. "Long time no see," he grinned. "How's it going up in the big man's house?"

"Fine, fine," Marshall replied. "How are you?"

Miguel took off his hat and mopped his brow. "Tired, but happy. I saw my love last weekend."

Marshall smiled at him. "Good. Look, we'll get together you and I soon, okay?"

"Promise?" He squinted up at him.

"Promise. You haven't seen Hal, have you?"

"Hal? Yes," he nodded. "He's working inside today weighing the beans."

Marshall thanked him, repeating his promise to spend some time with him soon and went to tie Neige up beside the office. He gave her some water while he waited.

When Hal came out of the building, he cast a glance at Marshall

but said nothing. He began to walk down the road. Marshall followed at his heels reluctantly.

Finally, Marshall mustered the courage to speak. "How have you been?" He asked casually.

"How are you?" He returned, without looking at him, the last word sounding twisted and bitter.

"I've made progress," Marshall tried to sound optimistic. Then he looked down at the ground and mumbled, "We're going to be lovers soon."

"Oh, really?" Hal did turn to look at him... In fact, he stopped dead in his tracks and placed both hands on Marshall's shoulders. Forcing him to look into his eyes, he said in a steady even voice, "But you've been lovers for quite some time, haven't you?"

Marshall let out some breath, "Not long, Hal."

"At least three weeks," the grip he had on his shoulders tightened.

Marshall winced.

"I know. I saw you. Why did you lie to me?"

"You were spying on us!" Marshall cried, jerking away from him. "How dare you spy on us. Did you take pictures too, like with the others?"

Hal ignored his question. "You really seem to think this is some kind of a game, don't you? You're not living in a romance novel, Marshall... I know the guys not your typical wrinkled up old geezer, but get a grip! You need more than just his ass. You need his heart if we're going to get our hands on this place. Has he told you he loves you yet?"

"No," Marshall replied hotly. "That doesn't happen overnight you know?" Then after a few minutes of hesitation, he added, "He likes me though."

"Likes you?" Hal screamed. "Liking you is not going to do it, Marshall... You better make sure he more than likes you." Hal began to pace up and down a little, glaring at him the whole time. "You are chic and swell living up there in the master's house and sucking gourmet dick. You're not breaking your ass down here in the fields, sleeping on a mattress made out of concrete, are you? Did you ever think maybe I'd like a piece of ass once in awhile? I don't run into many Angelo Farelli's in the coffee fields."

"Hal, I'm doing the best I can. It hasn't been that long. It's only November and I'm living up there, sleeping with him. Just think of what I can accomplish by April. You always tell me I'm impatient, but you're the impatient one, Hal."

"Just do it," Hal snapped, obviously not impressed by Marshall's speech. "Get him to sign over this place. He hasn't mentioned his will has he, hasn't said he's willed the place to anyone else?"

Marshall shook his head. "The subject hasn't come up."

"Well, bring it up!" He snapped. "You need your name on a will..."

"But Hal," Marshall interrupted, his chest feeling tight, "he's only in his twenties, he's not thinking about dying. How do I..."

"Be diplomatic. You have to bring it up in a way that doesn't make him suspicious. If he really loves you, he'll want to will you his estate. You have to make yourself the most important person in the world to him. He's not going to sign it over to granny, is he?"

"I don't think so...but..." Marshall began.

"He doesn't have kids, he doesn't have another lover, does he?" Hal insisted.

"No, I don't...I don't think so. He hasn't mentioned anything about kids or..." Marshall replied hesitantly.

"Christmas is coming. It's the perfect time."

"But Hal, he's only known me for..."

"Doesn't matter," Hal growled. "You make it happen."

Marshall nodded miserably.

"I've got to get back to work," Hal told him... "And don't think I'm not aware of what's going on up there," he pointed his finger at him.

"Hal, I won't do anything to hurt him. I won't..." Marshall began, folding his arms across his chest.

"I don't want to hear anymore fucking whining," Hal snapped. "Is that clear?"

Marshall sighed.

"We'll worry about that part after you get the papers signed. Just do as I tell you. And Marshall," Hal added, his voice taking on a deadly tone, "don't you ever lie to me again, or I swear, I'll kill you."

Marshall swallowed. He watched as Hal walked up the road, then on impulse, he burst out, "...if you took pictures of Angelo and me...I

want them.”

Hal turned around and tilted his head. A slow smile spread across his face. “Maybe I want to keep them,” he mused.

“What for?” Marshall demanded, kicking at the ground. “They’re of no use to you. He’s out of the closet, so we aren’t going to need them for blackmail.”

“Maybe I like looking at them,” he cooed. “Maybe they keep me company on long lonely nights.”

Marshall clicked his tongue angrily and met his eyes. “Give them to me!” He demanded. He didn’t want Hal drooling over his picture.

Hal blinked at him as if his words were gibberish. “By the way,” he laughed slightly, “I was going to applaud you on your acting. You actually seemed to be having the sex of your life, but when I thought about it more and studied the pictures, I realized something. You weren’t acting.”

The words hit Marshall like a brick in the face. He felt his entire body grow rigid. He watched silently as Hal reached into the pocket of his sweat-stained shirt and pulled out an envelope.

“Here, take a look. You might be surprised at what you see.”

Marshall yanked the envelope out of his hand. “You’re a pig, Hal!” he said, taking them out of the package.

Some of them had been taken in the bedroom, some in the kitchen, others outside near a river. All of them were explicit, and most of them showed a close up of his face.

“How did you get these close ups?” Marshall asked, his voice shaking.

“It’s called a zoom lens, darling. What do you think? I used it before in Montreal.”

As he sifted through the pictures, one in particular held him spellbound. Angelo stood in front of the water, his head thrown back. He sat at Angelo’s feet. He had his arms around his knees, his face resting on one of his thighs.

He remembered that day well. They had gone riding and stopped to look at the beautiful waterfall. He had taken one look at Angelo and decided he had to have him, there, then, at all costs. They had lingered awhile, making love. He ran his tongue over his lips suddenly as if he could still taste him. He placed that picture underneath another.

In the next one, he was on his knees performing fellatio. Angelo's hands were in his hair. He had seen a lot of pictures of himself with men doing exactly same thing, but this wasn't simply sexual, it was stunningly erotic. He swallowed hard, hiding it under the others.

He sat down on a rock at the side of the road, ignoring the fact that Hal had walked off without so much as a goodbye. He turned back to the first picture and examined it again.

He didn't know how long he sat there, staring at that picture. He shuffled through the others, pausing at the ones where Angelo was in full focus, one where he stood in the bedroom the first time they had made love. He had watched as he slowly undressed. He ran his finger over the image of his body. God, no wonder he couldn't keep his hands off him.

He smiled, thinking of touching him tonight and stood up. He shoved the pictures into the shirt. Hal didn't need these pictures. They belonged to him.

As Marshall walked back up the road to get Neige, his anger grew. Damn that Hal. He had never minded the fact that Hal took pictures of him before, with men. But somehow, this time he felt violated by Hal's intrusion.

\* \* \* \*

Cruz stood outside his office. He watched as Marshall came over to untie the horse from where she was secured to the veranda post. He looked both angry and sad somehow.

Something very curious was going on with Marshall and Hal. Hal always seemed to be lurking around, asking a lot of questions, and when he and Marshall met, they always acted very secretive, going off together whispering. Their meetings often appeared hostile.

Over the last two years, Cruz had come to consider Angelo his friend. He knew he was involved with Marshall Munduso and he was concerned. He had nothing against Marshall, he was a nice enough young man but he didn't understand his relationship with Hal. Hal was a weird guy.

"Angelo is a good teacher," Cruz said suddenly, looking at Marshall. "You are getting very good on the horse."

"Yea, I actually like riding Neige," Marshall shot him a smile. "I don't know if I could handle Angelo's horse. El Nino is pretty wild."

Cruz nodded. "Yes. Takes a wild man to handle her," he laughed faintly.

Marshall grinned. "Guess so."

"How are you today?" He asked casually.

"All right, fine," Marshall narrowed his eyes. "Why do you ask?"

"Just that you seem down, depressed even. Everything, all right?"

"Yes, everything is fine."

"I think Hal has a bad effect on you," Cruz looked away, clearing his throat, "although, it's really none of my business."

Marshall sighed. God, did it show that much? Did Cruz suspect something? "It's fine. Old history. I'll be okay as soon as I'm..." he trailed off.

"With Angelo," he smiled softly, meeting his eyes.

Marshall smiled back, without commenting. "Got to go," he replied. "See you later, Cruz."

He nodded, "Sure," he said, lifting a hand as he watched him gallop off to the house.

Angelo had put a lot of trust in that young man over the last few weeks. Cruz wondered if maybe he was letting his heart rule his head. He hoped he was wrong. When he had the opportunity, maybe he'd mention it. But he'd have to be careful. He'd seen his friend over the last few weeks undergo some sort of metamorphosis. He smiled all the time and was more good natured. It could only mean one thing. Angelo was falling in love.

## Chapter 39

As Marshall made his way back to the house, he thought about Hal. He was growing impatient. He knew he would have to try and encourage Angelo to make him his beneficiary soon. But it wasn't easy to do. He had no idea of how he was even going to broach the subject. What he wanted most of all at this moment was to be with Angelo, to talk with him, to make love. He put Hal out of his mind. He wasn't going to think about this now. Instead he was going to think about tonight when again he would hold Angelo in his arms.

The days of November seemed to fly. Marshall did his chores and Angelo helped him finish painting the barn, which turned out to be a lot of fun. Everything was fun with Angelo. He could make him laugh about nothing.

In between, they made love and they talked. They talked about everything, sex and politics, the history of this country and Rome, their childhoods and their dreams.

One night they lay together in Angelo's bed talking about travelling. Marshall said, "You know, coming here to South America is the first time in my life I've ever been out of Montreal."

"Really?" Angelo said.

Marshall sat in between Angelo's open legs, with his back resting against his chest. Angelo's arms were loosely placed around him, while one hand lazily stroked his thigh.

They had just finished making love. They had gone to bed right after eating tonight. Marshall had leaned over during the meal and whispered to him. "I have to have you soon."

He had smiled at him, lifting his wine glass and answering Marta's question about the rain.



Every conversation lately was about rain. Although they had had light showers, they hadn't had a good rain in over six weeks. It was a worry for the crops.

That night, Ricardo and Maria had joined them for dinner. They, too, chattered on about the need for rain.

Marshall couldn't have cared less about the rain. His eyes kept returning to Angelo, tracing his cheek bones and the shape of his generous mouth, his throat, the breadth of his shoulders. Wanting to touch him was becoming intolerable so he leaned over and told him so.

The meal went on for another half hour. Marshall had excused himself and said goodnight. "I'm very tired," he yawned, meeting Angelo's eyes.

Marshall knew he understood the message although he made no indication.

Almost an hour later, he appeared in the room.

"Fifty-two minutes," Marshall groaned as Angelo walked over to the bed. "You made me wait almost an entire hour."

Angelo chuckled as he pulled off his shirt, freeing his hair. "Do you think it will be worth the wait?" Angelo drawled.

Marshall watched him as the muscles rippled across his chest and his stomach, and the thick black hair fell loose around his face. "Umm, so far, so good," he had said, getting up on his knees and opening his arms to him. "Come here, you," he whispered. "You tortured me throughout dinner and now you must pay for your sin."

Angelo came closer and laughed. "I didn't do anything during dinner."

Marshall wrapped his arms around his waist and kissed his chest. "You don't have to do anything. That's the point."

"Who was it that said 'All good things come to those who wait'?" Angelo raised an eyebrow, and ran his hands over Marshall's back.

"Some idiot...I have no idea," Marshall murmured, kissing his mouth. "I hate him. Now shut up," he demanded.

Almost two hours later, comfortably resting in his arms, they talked about travelling. It was true Marshall had never been out of Montreal before he came to Brazil.

"Well, where would you like to go?"

Marshall looked around at his face. "Really?"

"Why not? If you could go anywhere, where would it be?" He adjusted his pillow and lay back.

"I don't know, but I'd at least like to see Rio."

"Marshall, you and Hal backpacked all around here and you didn't see Rio?" Angelo asked, surprised.

"We...ah..." Marshall had forgotten that story. "Well, no. Actually, we got caught up in the rainforest, Amazon and stuff."

Angelo narrowed his eyes. "Is this another lie, Marshall, like the one about you guys being university students?"

"Well, yes and no." Marshall sighed.

"What do you mean, yes and no?"

"Hal and I...well, Hal pretended he had money but he didn't, so we didn't get to backpack around for long. We had to get work so that's how come we ended up here. I basically saw some of Sao Paulo. We spent all our money on plane fare. We did land in Rio but it was a layover. We didn't see anything."

He couldn't look at him. He hated the lies that came out of his mouth.

Angelo considered this for a minute. "Well, so we will go to Rio for a few days."

"What?" Marshall looked around at him.

"I will take you to Rio," he grinned at him.

"But the horses and the..." Marshall began moving around in excitement.

Angelo made a face. "Stop it, you devil. Stay still," he closed his eyes, holding his arms. "I'll have Ricardo take care of things. But I can only go for three days because I have a lot of stuff to do here and so do you."

"When do we leave?" Marshall asked, excited, turning around in his arms and laying on top of him, kissing his hair.

"I'll make the arrangements. We'll go Friday and come back Sunday night. We'll stay on the Copacabana beach. It's the nicest spot."

## Chapter 40

All week Marshall looked forward to the day they would leave for Rio. He decided not to tell Hal because he knew he wouldn't approve, but he didn't want to think about that now. He was too excited about the trip, about the thought of the two of them being completely alone together for the first time.

They left before the sun rose on a Friday morning. They drove to the airport outside of Sao Paulo, where Angelo left his car.

The plane trip was very short. By the time they were in the air, it was time to come back down again. They arrived in Rio that afternoon.

It was warm when they got off the plane, but not humid. Angelo rented a car and they drove to the hotel, a thirty seven floor resort, called Le Meridian which stood right on the ocean front.

Their room was at the very top, a beautiful suite with a huge king size bed, full bathroom, and a fireplace.

The hotel had a theatre, a fitness centre and even a pool, which didn't seem to make much sense to Marshall, given that the ocean was just outside the door.

There was also a wonderful restaurant attached to the hotel called Le Saint Honore. At around seven that evening, they went to the restaurant to eat seafood and drink delicious wine. Angelo was in a very good mood. He ate heartily and laughed a lot. Marshall felt as if he were floating in a dream.

Later that evening, they stood together in their room looking out the window. The view was breathtaking. White sands and palm trees lined the road directly below them. In the distance, spectacular mountains dominated the landscape.

"That's Gavea Mountain," Angelo told him, pointing at it. "People

hang glide off it onto the beach.”

“Wow,” Marshall said, shaking his head. “They must be brave. I wouldn’t do that.”

Angelo had showered and changed into a pair of navy shorts and a yellow tank top. He looked beautiful, he smelled wonderful. The view out the window paled in comparison.

“Want to go walking on the beach?” Angelo asked suddenly, moving away from the window. “Everything’s open twenty-four hours. There is even a gay beach in Ipanema.”

“Really,” Marshall laughed, his eyes moving over Angelo as he went into the closet and took out a plastic bag. He threw it at him.

“What’s this?” Marshall laughed as he caught it in his hands.

“Just a little gift I picked up in the hotel while you were in the shower.”

Marshall opened the bag to find a pair of light blue shorts with a beautiful cotton short-sleeved shirt. The shirt was a darker shade of blue with the faintest imprint of palm trees in the background.

“Is this for me?” Marshall asked. He wasn’t used to receiving gifts.

“Yeah. Try it on,” he said, but Marshall was already beginning to undo the buttons.

It fit perfectly. It made him feel like a completely different person. “You have good taste,” Marshall told him, as he whirled around in front of him.

Angelo ran his gaze over him. “You’d look sensational in anything, but you especially look sensational in nothing.”

Marshall moved closer to him and kissed his mouth. “That can be arranged.”

“Not if we’re going to get out of this room, it can’t. Come on,” he urged, pushing him out the door and locking it behind him.

They took a walk, Marshall holding Angelo’s arm close to him. No one blinked an eye. They stayed on the beach to watch fireworks. Angelo told him they had fireworks every night on the beach. Lovers sat together, kissing in the moonlight as the lights exploded in the sky.

They sat on the beach. Marshall smiled at Angelo as he watched the fireworks with the excitement of a small boy. Marshall reached over and took his hand. He turned his face to him and their eyes locked.

Music rang out over the beach. Angelo suddenly jumped to his feet,

pulling Marshall up with him. "Let's dance?"

He was drenched in moonlight. Marshall's breath caught in his throat for a second.

Even though the band was playing some distance down the beach from them, the music drifted up to where they were. They were totally alone.

Angelo smiled at him as the cool night breeze blew his dark hair around his face. He pulled him into his arms. They began to dance, moving slowly to the rhythmic Latin beat.

Marshall moved deeper into his arms, laying his head on his shoulder. He moved his lips against his neck. Umm, what heaven it was to hold him like this, to run his hands down the length of his back, to hear his soft breathing, his strong steady heart beat. The heat from his body was intoxicating and the way he moved against him was enough to drive him out of his mind.

He didn't know exactly how long they remained there alone, dancing. It might have been twenty minutes or more. He ran his hands over his silky hair, removing the leather cord that held it. He pressed his hair to his lips, breathing in the subtle fragrance, rubbing the strands against his cheek. "So soft, your hair," he whispered.

They both laughed, moving a bit faster to the beat as Angelo pressed his lips to his forehead, then his mouth.

Marshall kissed him deeply, passionately, tightening his hold on him as they kept dancing. Then he pulled him down in the sand on his knees. The kisses became more forceful, their passion rising like the ebb of the tides. Marshall broke away from him, laughing. "Wow," he whispered, his chest heaving. "Let's go back to the room."

"Sounds like a plan," Angelo said deeply, getting up on his feet, taking Marshall with him.

"Oh, I have a serious plan," Marshall replied, a devilish glint in his eyes.

"So," Angelo teased, following him across the sand, "are you going to give me a hint about this plan of yours?"

"As if you need any hints," Marshall replied as he started to run. Angelo started to run behind him.

"If I catch you, can I have you?" He called after him.

"If I'm running too fast, let me know," Marshall cast him a

flirtatious glance backward.

They were both out of breath, and laughing like fools when they reached the lobby of the hotel.

The woman at the front desk grinned at them. "Ah...the two handsome boys," she said in English.

Marshall and Angelo nodded at her, and said goodnight. They waited impatiently for the elevator, never taking their eyes off each other. Once they got on, Angelo sobered and turned to Marshall, "Did she say boys?"

"Ah, did she hurt your ego?" Marshall taunted him, laying the palm of his hand on his chest...

"Never mind," he told him with a grimace, which caused Marshall to howl with laughter.

In the room, Marshall stripped off his new clothes, then motioned to Angelo. "Come here, boy," he slurred, "Tonight, I will teach you how to be a man."

Angelo raised an eyebrow. "Oh, yeah?" he moved over to him and took him in his arms. "Okay, professor, I am your willing and most humble student," he said, kissing him deeply.

Marshall stepped out of his arms and smiled at him. "First you need to get out of those clothes, slowly." He went and lay down on the bed.

"Ah, a strip tease?"

"Um, go ahead student."

Angelo bowed his head. He undid his shirt and threw it at him, causing Marshall to laugh and unceremoniously take off the rest.

"That wasn't very sexy," Marshall protested, laughing.

"Oh, I know," he said, "but this is." He ran his hands up over his body and moved seductively toward the bed, lifting his sex in invitation. "How about that, teach? Do I get a passing grade? And how about this?" He bent down over him and let his tongue swirl around the head of Marshall's cock.

Marshall let his head go back. "Oh yeah," he whispered.

"And how about this?" He moved a hand under Marshall's ass and inserted a finger up inside of him. "Do I pass this test or do I have to stay after school?"

Marshall reached up and placed his hands in his hair. He kissed

his mouth, squirming as Angelo moved his finger in and out of him.

Angelo pulled away, laughing, forcing Marshall over onto his stomach. He pulled his hips upward and placed a hand on his ass. His tongue replaced the finger and Marshall just about lost his mind. A few minutes later he heard the condom package tear and he whimpered a little. "Yes, take me. Take me, baby. Now."

"What will I have to do for homework?"

"You're perfect," Marshall groaned, "you pass...Jesus...you pass...pass!"

Angelo fucked him hard and long, his hand reaching around to torment his cock at the same time. The tension was sublime and release came leaving Marshall grasping, his heart pounding, and his body reeling from the pleasure. He clung to him all night, waking up every once in awhile to kiss him mouth, caress his sex, and check to see if he was real...if it all was real.

\* \* \* \*

The next day, they woke up and went for a swim on the beach. Afterward, they went to eat Bahaman shrimp with coconut powder at the Copacabana Palace. Marshall thought the food was delicious.

They changed, then Angelo took him sightseeing. The city was only twenty minutes away by car, so they spent the day and most of the evening in downtown Rio.

The Corcovado Mountains overlooked the city. The mountain was 2340 feet high and on top of it stood this huge statue called Christ the Redeemer.

Angelo took him on the cable cars and they rode two different cars to the top of Sugarloaf Mountain. They spent some time on the summit where they could see the entire city. It was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen.

In the city, they visited some of the museums and the Botanical Gardens. Rio had an urban forest, called the Tijuca Forest, which fascinated him. Angelo told him it was the only one of its kind in the world.

Finally, they toured the old part of Rio called Praca XV with its narrow streets and small shops. They ate a delicious meal in a

restaurant before heading back to the hotel.

They made fast and furious love in the hotel. Marshall couldn't resist touch touching his wet skin and Angelo took him in the shower, rough, clumsy and satisfying.

Angelo had bought them both new dress pants and shirts in Rio. Marshall's shirt was red and shiny. It had cost a pretty penny but he had fallen in love with it when he'd seen it.

Angelo had bought himself a white shirt with a gold thread running through the collar and the cuffs. It was quite Bohemian and it suited him.

They went to a gay bar called Le Boy in Copa. Angelo told him that the bars here were mixed, gay, lesbian and straight. There were no leather bars in Rio. They were into integration.

The bar was a long time establishment, with drag shows, a great band and dance floor.

Marshall felt wonderful and carefree. They danced, and drank fancy rum drinks. He was aware of how many eyes watched them. Angelo was a beautiful man and in spite of the number of gorgeous men checking him out, Angelo never strayed from his side once. He didn't even give any of the other guys in the bar a second look.

At one point when they were dancing to a slow Latin song, a young man dancing beside them leaned over and said something in Marshall's ear.

The music was loud and he didn't understand him. "Pardon," he said.

The young man laughed as Marshall struggled to ask him to repeat. "You speak English," he replied.

"Yes," Marshall nodded. "What were you saying?"

"I said," he smiled, repeating himself louder, "it must be pleasant holding such a beautiful man like that in your arms, especially when you are so much in love."

Marshall swallowed. He smiled awkwardly, steering Angelo deeper into the crowd on the dance floor.

Angelo met his eyes, noticing how he'd positioned himself to avoid further contact with the man. "What did he say to you? You look upset. Did he insult you?"

"No, nothing like that," Marshall muttered. "He just told me that



I...I was a good dancer, that's all."

Shortly after, Marshall told Angelo he was tired and wanted to go back to the hotel. They were back in the room by midnight.

When they crawled into bed, Angelo moved his hand over Marshall's thigh. He pulled him closer, kissing his neck.

Marshall pushed away from him gently and whispered, "Not tonight, okay? I'm a little tired."

There was hesitation. Angelo moved away, releasing him. "No problem," he said softly. "Get some sleep. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," Marshall said.

He wanted to cry. These feelings made no sense. He had been having the time of his life until that man in the bar had spoken to him. He couldn't be in love, because when this was over, he would leave Brazil with Hal. This man lying beside him might think he loved him, but if he ever found out about him, that would be it.

Yet he had told him about the prostitution. He hadn't hated him, like Hal said he would. But then, he didn't know about the other stuff, the scams he'd pulled with Hal back in Montreal, all the men they'd robbed.

It was easy to confuse sex and love, especially when the sex was this good. That's what they were both doing, confusing sex with love.

One day, he would just be gone. He would leave Angelo and never see him again. The thought of that suddenly seemed unbearable to him.

Marshall's body heaved as he cried... He buried his face in the pillow to muffle his sobs. A part of him wanted to wake Angelo up, tell him everything... He actually reached out his hand to touch him, but changed his mind. He couldn't. He could have him arrested, have Hal arrested. And Angelo would hate him. He couldn't bear that.

At least he'd be gone before Angelo realized he'd been taken. With this one, he couldn't do it. He wouldn't be able to look him in the face at the end like the others.

He pushed these feelings deep inside him, the way he had buried many feelings in his life that were just too painful. He dried his tears. He had to stop thinking about what that stranger had said to him in the bar. He told himself the man lying next to him meant nothing to him, while his entire body ached to hold him. He longed to caress his skin, to kiss his lips, to taste him. He watched him as he slept. "My sweet

beautiful lover," he whispered in the dark, stroking his hair. "This is our time together."

Marshall closed his eyes and pressed his lips against his shoulder. He fell asleep, his cock so hard, it ached. He dreamt something he couldn't remember upon waking, but he knew it was horrible.

He awoke to singing. He smiled. Angelo was singing in the shower. Marshall listened, beginning to sing along to *My Girl*, only changing it to *My Guy*...

*"I've got sunshine on a cloudy day. When it's cold outside, I've got the month of May,"* Marshall joined in, as he slipped into the shower with him.

Then they turned up the volume. Angelo took him in his arms and did an exaggerated dance with him. *"I know, you say, what can make me feel this way, my guy...talking about my big guy...my guy..."*

They laughed like fools... Angelo did a formal little bow.

"Don't give up your day job, eh?" Marshall teased.

"Ha, ha," he slapped him playfully on the butt.

"You're in a good mood this morning," Marshall kissed him on the corner of the mouth, and began to soap his back.

"Umm...yes, considering I didn't get any last night," he teased as Marshall moved his hands around in front and began soaping his chest.

"Poor deprived baby. I could make up for it this morning," Marshall suggested, pressing his body against his.

"Yeah," Angelo replied, "you'd have to work really hard."

Marshall laughed as he fondled his erection. "I don't think I'm going to have to work that hard."

He ran his hands over Angelo's body as the water rained down on them. Angelo leaned back in his arms and Marshall closed his eyes, his hands roaming freely over his body. How many men in that bar would have given their right arm last night to be in his place at this moment? He pressed his lips to Angelo's neck. He trembled when as he heard him moan softly and say his name.

"Christ, you could drive a man out of his mind," Marshall groaned. "When you make those sounds, I want to devour you."

Angelo turned around in his arms and pulled him out of the shower. "Take me to bed and devour me," he mouthed against his

cheek. "Besides, I'm due for another lesson, you know the one where you teach me how to be a man," he said coyly.

Marshall laughed. "Yeah, right," he grinned as Angelo kissed him, "as if you need any lessons."

Marshall followed him to the bed. He stood looking down at Angelo lying naked on the bed. If there was a more beautiful sight, he'd never seen it. He swallowed.

"What's wrong?" Angelo asked him.

"Nothing." *I love you. I don't care about anything anymore except touching you, that's what's wrong. I've made such a mess of things and if you knew, you'd hate me. I finally have the world and I can't accept it.*

He reached for him. Marshall closed his eyes. He melted into those strong arms, felt his mouth on his and moaned as his touched his skin. Suddenly, Marshall reared up, pressed Angelo's arms over his head and gazed into those beautiful eyes. He wanted to fix that image in his mind forever. He wanted to possess him, never let him go.

"What are you doing?" Angelo asked, laughing.

"I want to fuck you."

Angelo smiled. "Go ahead."

Hot tears stung his eyes. "If I do, I'll..." He couldn't. It was too much. It would destroy him. He shook his head. "Not now, okay?" He released him, got off the bed. "I'm a little tired."

"Why don't you sleep, baby? Come here. We'll sleep, okay?"

He nodded. He went and lay down beside him. He fell asleep.

They didn't leave the hotel room until three that afternoon.

They ate again at the hotel restaurant before they checked out... Angelo turned in the rental car at the airport. As they were lifting off in the plane, Marshall looked out the window, again mesmerized by the sheer beauty of the ocean and the mountains.

He said a silent goodbye to Rio, knowing he'd never come back with Angelo again.

## Chapter 41

By some miracle, Hal didn't chastise him about going to Rio with Angelo. He was a little miffed, however, that Marshall chose not to mention it to him.

"I couldn't tell you because it was a spur of the moment thing," Marshall explained as they walked together down the road the following Wednesday afternoon.

It was Hal's day off. He asked Marshall to spend the afternoon with him so they could talk. Angelo had gone to Sao Paulo early that morning with Ricardo to do some business, so there was no chance of them being interrupted.

"So was it worth it, the trip?" Hal picked up a stone and hurled it down the road.

"Yes," Marshall nodded, looking around him. He didn't want to discuss their trip.

"Christmas is coming. Has he suggested anything?" Hal inquired.

"He hasn't said anything about Christmas. He's worried about the lack of rain. That's all he and Ricardo ever talk about, rain. When I know something, you will."

"You know, Marshall, I was thinking, maybe it would be a good idea if you said it first," Hal stopped and met his eyes.

The sun was bright in the sky. Birds chirped loudly over head and he could hear the cows in the field nearby.

"I can't," Marshall said.

"Why not?"

"I...well...I think it's better if he says it."

"Maybe he's waiting for you."

"What if I say it and it scares him off?" Marshall demanded.

"Well, start hinting around. Are you still doing him good?" Hal threw at him.

"Doing him?" Marshall repeated dumbly, glaring at him. He knew what he meant, but he didn't like the way it was said. He made it sound cheap. It was anything but cheap. "You mean is the sex still good?"

"Whatever. Does he get off with you or not?" Hal snapped.

Marshall closed his eyes. "The sex is great. The sex is...incredible, actually."

Hal scoffed. "Guess you'll be missing that, eh?"

Marshall didn't answer. Instead, he kept walking. Eventually Hal caught up. "You are keeping your head, right?"

"Yes, I'm keeping my head, Hal." *It was his heart he wasn't so sure about.*

"Have you asked him about the plantation yet...who he will leave it to when he croaks?" Hal demanded.

"No. I will," Marshall managed, biting his lip. "I have to pick the right moment. But Hal, we're not going to hurt him. I won't..."

"Stop worrying about it," Hal sighed deeply. "That's my department."

A silence fell between them... Marshall stopped and looked at him. "Hal?"

"Yeah?"

"Kiss me."

"What for?" Hal asked.

"Just do it, okay?" Marshall said, meeting his eyes.

He pulled Marshall up next to him. He smelled of stale cigarettes and sweat. He opened his mouth and pressed it onto Marshall's, digging his tongue into his mouth. Marshall tried not to gag. He was absolutely repulsed. He broke away.

"How was that, baby?" He smirked. "Better than that Farelli guy, I bet?"

"Yeah, it was fine Hal," Marshall muttered, "just fine."

Tears lit his eyes as he walked back to the house.

He was sitting on the veranda when Angelo came driving up with Ricardo.

Maria came out on the porch, saying something to her brother-in-law as he got out of the car.

Marshall jumped up and ran to meet Angelo, who was smiling.

He was so happy to see him. He wanted to jump into his arms. "Hi. How was your trip?"

"Good," he said as Ricardo and Maria went into the house together.

"Come with me," he said softly and Marshall followed him out to the barn.

"I took care of the horses today, Angelo," Marshall protested.

"Yeah, but I need some taking care of, too," Angelo said, turning around and pulling him into his arms just inside the door. They kissed deeply, Marshall's arms winding around his neck.

"I've missed you so much," Angelo whispered fiercely against him as he hugged him tighter. "I was thinking about you all day."

They kissed again, this time the kiss growing more passionate as Marshall pushed off his jacket and propelled him backward until they fell together in the hay.

Angelo howled with laughter. "We're going to spook the horses."

"God, I hope so," Marshall moaned against him, taking off his shirt, then undoing his pants.

"You are incorrigible," Angelo told him, lying back, still laughing.

"I have no idea what that means but I like it...I like it...and I like you," he growled, lifting his sex out of his pants.

Marshall was sucking Angelo's cock when he heard the truck pull up. He groaned in frustration. "Shit."

Angelo searched for his pants, then paused to lean over and lick Marshall's lips slowly with his tongue. He kissed him deeply.

Marshall put on his shirt and got up out of the hay, holding Angelo's pants.

"How come I'm always the one caught with my pants down?" He lifted an eyebrow as Marshall stood up with him.

"Must be because of what you got in those pants, mister," Marshall's mouth quivered with humour, letting his eyes rest on his sex for a moment.

"Umm...I see. I understand everything now," he pulled him against him and grabbed his buttocks.

Marshall howled with laughter. "You don't understand anything...least of all the effect you have on me. Now go

on...sexy...we have company.”

Angelo let him go, pulled on his pants and came out of the barn.

Cruz was standing there. Marshall came out after him, wanting to laugh because Angelo had hay in his hair.

“Hey, Cruz,” Angelo lifted a hand.

“You’re back I see,” Cruz smirked.

“Yep, just got back.”

“How’d it go?”

“We’ll talk about it over a drink. Come on into the house,” Angelo threw an arm around him.

“Think I’ll finish some work in the barn,” Marshall nodded at them and retreated to let them talk.

\* \* \* \*

Cruz sat in the living room and accepted a glass of wine from Angelo. Ricardo and Maria sat out back eating their supper.

Angelo began to give Cruz the details of his meeting with the port authorities in Sao Paulo when Cruz interrupted him.

“Angelo, I’m sorry. I need to talk to you about something else.” He reached over and removed a piece of straw from Angelo’s hair.

Angelo blushed some. “Must have gotten that when I...”

“Listen, I’m your friend. I know we haven’t known each other that long, but I consider you one of my best friends, Angelo.”

“Thank you, Cruz. The same here,” Angelo smiled at him.

“I would be the last to moralize anything to anyone and that’s not what this is about. I know you are involved with Marshall.”

Angelo looked down at his glass, then up again. “Yes. We’re involved.”

“It seems pretty serious and it’s none of my business who you sleep with, Angelo. God knows you’ve been tolerant of Marta and my situation.”

Angelo nodded silently.

“I’m concerned, Angelo. It’s this other guy, Hal. Marshall meets with him on a regular basis and he is always upset afterward. I don’t trust him, Angelo. I have the feeling he’s up to something. He’s a creep and...”

"What do you mean Marshall meets with him on a regular basis?" Angelo cut in.

"Marshall meets Hal every once in a while, and they go off together."

Angelo narrowed his eyes. "Are you sure?"

"Of course. Why would I tell you this? Sometimes Hal tells me to ask Marshall to meet him at a certain time."

"Marshall has been trying to steer clear of Hal, Cruz. I don't understand why he would..." Angelo trailed off, shaking his head.

"Angelo, listen to me. Sometimes when we are involved with someone, we don't think clearly and..."

"I think clear enough, thanks Cruz," he replied stiffly.

"Now I've made you angry, right?" Cruz sighed.

Angelo took a breath. "No. Thanks for telling me. I'll talk to Marshall about it."

"Okay... You know I wish you all the happiness...I..."

"It's fine," Angelo replied stiffly. "Let's drop it, all right. Let's discuss the meeting. I'll handle it," Angelo gave him a faint smile and the subject was dropped.



## Chapter 42

Angelo acted strange over dinner that night, and he drank a bit more than he normally did. Outside on the porch, he was silent until Marshall said, "Is something wrong?"

"Why didn't you tell me you've been meeting with Hal?" Angelo demanded irately, not looking at him from where he sat in one of the wide back chairs.

Marshall froze.

"Who told you?" Marshall muttered... He knew it had to be Cruz.

"That's not important. Is it true or not? Have you been meeting Hal behind my back?" He cast him a glance. Marshall nodded slowly, clinging onto the porch rail.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked, his voice laced with anger.

"I didn't think it was an important thing to mention," Marshall shrugged, looking at his feet.

"Didn't think it was an important thing to mention?" Angelo looked over at him... His voice sounded completely calm, but Marshall saw anger in those big dark eyes.

"Why are you angry at me?" Marshall asked him, his heart sinking.

"Because, you wanted this job so you wouldn't have to see Hal. Then you go off and meet with him secretly, behind my back? Are you sleeping with him?" Angelo stood up. His voice raised in volume.

"No, of course I'm not sleeping with him," Marshall moaned... "Why in the hell would I want to sleep with Hal? Is that what this is all about? You're jealous!"

"Yes," he said. He reached out and yanked him close to his chest, glaring down into his eyes... "I'm jealous. I'm jealous as hell at the thought that you might be sleeping with any man other than me!"

Abruptly, he let him go. He turned away for a minute. Then, he threw his wine glass on the porch. It shattered, leaving a red stain on the wood.

Marshall jumped a little and bit his lip. "Jesus," he whispered, coming close and placing his arms around him, laying his head on his back. "Listen to me. Hal is no competition for you, baby. There is no other man. There never could be." Tears coursed down his face. "I love you. Christ, Angelo, I love you more than I love my own life."

Marshall turned him around to face him. Angelo wiped the tears off his face with his fingers, then pulled him into his arms. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I'm an idiot. I just went crazy with the thought..."

Marshall stroked his cheek. "No matter what happens, listen to me." He forced him to look him in the eyes. "No matter what happens, I want you to remember that I will love you all of my life." Marshall's voice was intense and he gave his shoulder a little shake.

Angelo lifted his chin, and softly he said, "And Marshall, I will love you all of mine."

He bent his head down to kiss him, but Marshall shook his head. "No!" He pushed him away, placing a hand up in front of his face. "No! Don't say that...don't ever say you love me!"

He turned around and ran, leaving Angelo standing on the veranda.

## Chapter 43

Marshall knew he had to get himself together. Angelo would think he was crazy if he kept it up, or worse, he would start to suspect something.

It had worked. Angelo had declared his love for him. Now, all he had to do was prove it, by leaving him his estate.

He should feel victorious, but he felt only despair. Now that Angelo had confessed his love for him, it wouldn't be long until he was forced to betray him.

But where in hell would he find the strength to do it? He knew that stranger in the bar was right. He was in love with him. There was no doubt in his mind. And, although he'd never felt this emotion before, he knew what it was. It was the most intense, all consuming feeling he had ever felt. It was tenderness and pain, passion and longing all tied into one giant knot inside his gut.

He stood up, drying his eyes. He would tell Angelo he had run away when he heard those words because he was scared. Angelo knew how he had grown up. He knew there was no love in his childhood. He would understand his reaction.

Angelo loved him. He loved him in spite of his past, in spite of the many faceless men he had slept with. But then, he had to keep reminding himself, he didn't know everything.

Angelo was sitting on the porch when he came up the road. He looked up, and Marshall saw how relieved he was. "Where have you been? I almost went looking for you. I told you about wandering around at night. It's dangerous."

Marshall walked up to him and met his eyes. "I'm sorry about earlier. Please forgive me. You took me by surprise, that's all. I never

expected you to say you loved me. I know I said it to you but...I didn't expect to..."

Angelo laughed slightly. "I never expected to say that myself. I don't know who was more surprised, you or me."

Marshall reached over and took his hand. "Take me inside. Show me how much you love me."

Angelo squeezed his hand, pulling him forward. He wrapped his arms around his waist, placing his cheek against his stomach.

Marshall stroked his hair... He swallowed something hard in his throat, forcing the tears back in his eyes.

Angelo released him and stood up. They didn't say a word as they made their way to Angelo's bedroom. They didn't need to say anything. When the door was closed, all the things they didn't say exploded into the room.

Christmas came and with it came the rain. This was cause for celebration. Two days before Christmas, Angelo woke Marshall up in the morning and said, "How would you like to spend Christmas in Rome?"

Marshall let out a yelp and within twenty-four hours they were on their way to the airport.

\* \* \* \*

Hal hitched a ride into Santa Branca the day before Christmas and called Frank. "Hey Frank," he said into the receiver. "How in hell are you? Merry..."

"Hal," Frank barked into the phone, cutting him off, "the police have been around here asking questions about you and Marshall."

There was a brief silence before Hal exploded with rage... "Fuck the police. We're out of the country. They can't do a goddamned thing to us. You didn't say anything, did you?"

"Do you think I'm insane? Of course not. Hal, if they trace you back to me..."

"Cool it, okay?" Hal lowered his voice, looking around the empty restaurant. "What kind of questions were they asking?"

"They want to talk to you. They want to talk to both of you. I think one of those closeted freaks talked. I think one got the balls to go to

the cops.”

It wasn't like Frank to talk with such vulgarity. Hal laughed.

“What in hell are you laughing about?” Frank demanded. “You won't think it's so funny if...”

“Chill, Frank. Relax. They can't prove anything.”

Frank sighed. “I hope so. Anyway, where is that kid of yours in terms of progress? My contact is getting restless.”

“He's gone to Rome with the mark.”

“Rome? Is that wise?”

“They'll be back in a couple of days. Don't worry... I have my eye on him.”

“You better. And what about getting the necessary paperwork?”

“He's working on it.”

“Well, he better work faster because after the papers are signed, then...well, you...you...know what needs to happen,” Frank stuttered.

Hal laughed. “Had a hard time with that one, didn't you, old man?”

There was no answer. Then Frank said, “Do you trust him?”

“Marshall? Hell, no. I don't trust anyone but he's all we got. So I'll make sure he follows through.”

“Is he going to be difficult at the end?”

“Probably, but like I told you Frank, I'll take care of him.”

“And Hal,” Frank added, his voice growing more authoritative. “When this is over, don't think of coming back here, understand?”

“Merry Christmas, Frank, and fuck you,” Hal muttered, slamming down the phone.

Hal took a seat at one of the tables and ordered a coffee. Frank had a nerve. Here he was in this hole, taking all the risks while Frank was sitting pretty in his nice comfy house in Montreal. Now the cops were on his ass. He had to make this work. He needed a shit load of money so he could disappear. He wasn't going to end up in prison. Marshall just better come through.

## Chapter 44

Rome was beautiful. They stayed in a hotel in the heart of the city, a short distance from the Villa Borghese Gardens and the Trinita Dei Monti Church.

The hotel was made out of white marble and directly in front of their window on the second floor was a beautiful fountain with statues of Roman gods.

They took a one day tour around the city. Marshall loved the quaint little cafes. Christmas day, they spent in their hotel room, drinking wine and making love. Angelo had dinner brought up and they ate succulent pheasant and drank champagne. Later they made love and Marshall lay in a state of absolute peace and contentment in Angelo's arms. He'd almost drifted off to sleep when Angelo said, "Marshall, I need to talk to you."

Marshall opened his eyes and smiled up at him. He hugged himself closer to him and sighed. "Okay, what is it?"

"I don't know if you realize just how much I love you," he whispered, touching his hair.

Marshall swallowed.

"I've never been in love like this. I guess I need to know..." he took a ragged breath, "if you feel the same way."

He looked into his eyes and Marshall couldn't look away. A tear ran down the length of Marshall's face. He hastily wiped it away. He couldn't speak.

Angelo moved away from him and sat up. "I have no one, Marshall. My parents are dead. I'm probably not going to have any children. If something happened to me..."

Marshall's heart went into his stomach. "No," he said, shaking his

head.

Angelo looked at him again. "If something happens to me, I want you to have the plantation. I don't want it to fall into the hands of that drug lord, you understand?"

"But Angelo, you hardly know me," Marshall whispered. What was he doing? Isn't this what he wanted, what he and Hal were here for?

"It's just something I've been thinking about." He smiled. "I'm not going to die tomorrow, Marshall," he said.

Marshall reached over and pulled him into his arms. He clung to him, closing his eyes, placing his lips on his shoulder.

"Marshall," Angelo gave him a questioning look.

"I don't want you to die," he whispered, as tears streamed down his face.

"I'm not going to die," Angelo laughed, putting him away from him. "Don't be silly. I didn't tell you about this to scare you. I just wanted you to know how much I love you. I need you to..."

"I love you, too," Marshall whispered against his cheek. They kissed deeply.

"Then you'll stay with me?" Angelo asked him, his eyes searching his.

Marshall nodded. He couldn't speak. He wanted to say, yes, forever, but he instead he kissed him again, his throat full of unshed tears.

Angelo fell asleep shortly afterward. Marshall laid next him and stared at the ceiling.

## Chapter 45

They came back right after Christmas and Marshall felt depressed when they touched down at the Sao Paulo airport. All his problems were here because Hal was here.

They had a New Year's Eve party at the house and several people Angelo knew from Santa Branca and Sao Paulo came. It was fun. Ricardo and Maria seemed almost in a good mood during the holidays so that was also a change from their normal routine.

It was still raining, which seemed to please everyone, then two weeks later, people began to complain about the rain. They needed the sun to come back.

One day in late January, Hal came walking into the barn unexpectedly. Marshall looked up in surprise from where he stood grooming El Nino. "Hal?"

"Been awhile eh, Marshall?" He leaned against the stall.

El Nino snorted and stamped his feet.

"He doesn't like you," Marshall said.

"Fucking beast, shoot him right between the eyes," Hal made his finger like a gun and aimed it at the horse. "Poof," he said, grinning.

Marshall felt a chill run down his back.

"Well, I guess you know what I'm here for. How was Rome?"

"Fine," Marshall said, kicking at some hay with the toe of his boot.

"Did you ask him about..."

"Didn't have to," Marshall looked up, meeting his eyes. "It's done. He's left the plantation to me."

Hal laughed, slapping his hands together, as he did a little dance. He grabbed Marshall and hugged him. Marshall stiffened and jumped back.



Hal sobered. "I have something for you," he said.

Marshall glanced at him. "What?"

"Not here, you idiot. Come to me tonight."

"I don't think I can, Hal. Angelo found out I was meeting you and he was upset with me. I promised him I wouldn't anymore."

"Oh, really?" Hal laughed. "Afraid I might be competition for his action," he said smugly, grabbing his own genitals. "I'd make him look like a snot nosed boy in the sack," he bragged.

Marshall looked away. "Sure, Hal," he murmured. "Anyway, I can't come."

Hal grabbed Marshall by the shirt and slammed him up against the wall, knocking the wind out of him. "Listen, you fucker, I'll kill you. Don't you dismiss me like a servant. You remember who is boss here. Don't think you're going to double cross me, take off with all the loot. It's not going to happen!"

Marshall stumbled back as Hal released him. He got his breathing under control and sighed deeply. "I wouldn't do that, Hal. I wouldn't..."

"Damn right you wouldn't," he sneered. "Besides, the police are asking about us back home."

Marshall's jaw dropped. Every muscle in his body tensed. "Why?"

"Why?" He mocked. "Why do you think? One of those closeted freaks went to the cops probably."

"Oh no," Marshall's lip trembled.

"Oh grow up," Hal demanded. "You're a criminal. There was bound to be questions sometime. Don't worry about that now. They have no idea where we are. But, we need money, lots of money so we can live somewhere else. Going back home wouldn't be such a good idea."

Marshall nodded, feeling numb with horror.

"So, come to me tonight so we can finish this thing."

"All right," he breathed. "I'll be there when I can, may be after he's asleep, but I have to be careful."

"Sing him a lullaby, and then come down to meet me."

"Come half way."

"Scared of the dark, Marshall?" He murmured.

"Yes," Marshall replied. His fear of the dark had a long history.

"What time?" Hal laughed.

"Around one," Marshall told him. "Now get out of here because he could see us. He's in the house."

Hal grunted something and walked out of the barn.

Around one o'clock in the morning, Marshall began to make his way down the road in the direction of the bunkhouse.

At one point, Hal stepped out of the shadows and almost scared him to death.

"Jesus, Hal. Okay, make it quick."

Hal handed him a little bottle filled with white powder.

"What in hell is this?" Marshall asked, examining it under the light of the moon. "It looks like salt."

"It has no taste, no colour."

Marshall's jaw dropped, his hand trembled. "This will kill him."

"Not overnight, it won't. It can take years. By that time, we'll be long gone. You just do what I tell you. You sprinkle no more than the tip of your finger in his food or drink once a day."

"They kill rats with this, don't they?" Marshall blinked. "It's arsenic, isn't it?"

"Don't worry about it."

When Marshall didn't react, he grabbed his arm and shook him. "Marshall, did you hear me?"

"Yes, no more than the tip of my finger," he said, as if in a dream.

"The effects are cumulative. It weakens the victim by stages before the fatal dose."

"What do you mean by fatal dose?" Marshall demanded. "I'm not going to kill him."

"Don't worry..." Hal muttered, "just make him sick, that's all and take him to the brink."

"How sick will it make him?"

"May give him the shits, pains in his gut. Could give him a rash on his skin, but unlikely at that dose. Probably just make him feel crappy."

"And how long do we do this for?"

"A week or two," Hal muttered, "Then we send in the special doc...and all that jazz. He'll make a fake death certificate and that's it."

Marshall studied his face. "That's the part I'm not sure of, Hal."

"Don't worry about it," he waved that away. "The buyer is waiting. We'll unload this place, have the cash and be out of here. Is that clear?"

"No, it's not clear," Marshall replied angrily. He could smell bullshit a mile away. "I can't inherit his property if he's still alive. We already talked about this back home."

Hal ignored his comment.

The air was heavy tonight and, suddenly, he was finding it hard to breathe. Marshall sucked in some air. "Hal, I don't understand how we can get his property without..."

Hal struggled to keep his voice calm. "Marshall, this is my department. Everything is arranged. Just do as I tell you. We'll have a death certificate. We will have a notary who will validate this certificate. That's all we need. Before they discover he's alive, we'll have the money and be out of the country. Now do as I tell you."

"What are you planning to do with him? There has to be a body. Hal, this doesn't make sense to me. I..." Marshall shook his head, trailing off.

Hal grabbed him roughly by the collar. "Do you trust me or not?"

"I..." Marshall began, struggling against him.

"The only way he's going to end up dead is if you don't follow my instructions to the letter. Is that clear?"

Marshall nodded, licking his lips.

Hal released him and Marshall put the bottle into his pocket. "Then, what happens when we get the money?"

"Then it's goodbye, Brazil, and hello Easy Street," he sang.

When Marshall didn't smile, Hal came closer to him. "Don't fuck this up, Marshall... You are in as deep as I. This is our shot to get out of this business. You want that, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, but..." Marshall began.

"You don't want to go to prison. You know what they do to pretty little pieces of used meat like you up there, don't you Marshall?"

Marshall shuttered.

Hal smiled.

## Chapter 46

That night Marshall slept badly. He had a dream about when he was a little boy. He heard his mother screaming at his father. His father threw a bottle at her. He saw the blood and broken glass all over the living room.

"You bastard!" She hurled at him. "I hate you. You're a drunk. Get out of here. Get out of my sight."

Marshall saw himself standing there, a little boy, peering around the corner of his room. "Go to bed," his father told him, "Or I'll whip your ass."

Then they came and took his father away. He was crying in the dark... He was pounding on the door of the closet. "Let me out. Let me out of here. I'm scared. I'm scared of the dark." But no one came. No one came for hours.

His mother told him every day how much she hated him, until she tried to kill him. Then, they took her away, too.

It ended finally with Angelo gently shaking him. "Marshall," he said.

He opened his eyes. His mother was not trying to kill him. In fact, she was far away from him now. He looked up at the man hovering over him and threw his arms around his neck. He hugged him close to him. "Never let me go, Angelo," he said softly, kissing his neck.

"What is it, Marshall? What's wrong?" he asked, gently pulling away from him. He stroked his hair and wiped away the tear running down his cheek.

He could have told him then. He could have told him everything, but he'd stop loving him if he knew. Instead, he said, "I had a bad dream, that's all." He turned his face away.

"Tell me," Angelo insisted, putting both hands on the sides of his face and forcing him to look at him. "I'm here. You're safe. Tell me."

"It was...my mother," he sighed. "She was trying to kill me. She put me in the dark. I was there for hours." His chest heaved.

Angelo narrowed his dark eyes. "Did this really happen to you?"

He nodded.

Angelo drew him close to him and rubbed his back. "She's gone now, Marshall."

"No one ever loved me," he sobbed into his shoulder. "My father left...she kicked him out because he drank. And she hated me. She hated me because I was no good, like him." He cried harder.

Angelo held him and told him it wasn't true. "You are good, Marshall. You're worthy of love. I love you."

"Oh, God," he murmured against his mouth. They kissed deeply, then Marshall lay back down and closed his eyes. He had never told anyone about his parents before. He felt Angelo's arms encircle him and he fell into a deep peaceful sleep.

## Chapter 47

February came and the weather fluctuated between rain and sun. Angelo claimed it was good for the crops, but the rain depressed him. Often when he was finished working and Angelo wasn't around, he would go and sit on the bed in Angelo's room, the bed that had become his. Sometimes he would fall asleep and the same dreams would come back again. He'd be pounding and pounding on the door, submerged in the darkness. And no one would come.

The sky seemed heavy and gray when it rained, and without end once it had started. It was as if sorrow fell from the sky with all the tears of the broken-hearted coming together in a giant symphony of pain.

Marshall would sit on the bed and take out the little bottle and stare at it, as if staring at it would somehow cause it to speak to him. Instead, only the rain spoke to him, pounding endlessly on the ground, breaking his heart.

The first time he used the white powder, he sprinkled only a few particles into Angelo's wine. Angelo drank it without hesitation, announcing it was his twenty-seventh birthday in between sips.

Marshall excused himself from the table and threw up his dinner in the bathroom.

Later that evening, because Angelo didn't seem to be suffering any ill effects from it, Marshall practically forgot about putting the stuff in his wine. He seemed to be very happy and energetic. They celebrated his birthday by dancing under the moonlight and making love.

Angelo never hesitated to drink the wine. Then again, why should he? He had no reason to suspect the man he loved was trying to kill him.

Although he tried not to think about what he was doing, as the days wore on, he found himself waking up long before the dawn so he could check to see if Angelo was all right. He began to closely watch for signs that he was sick. Each night when he put the small amount of white powder into his drink, he told himself that it would be all right.

He had convinced himself this powder wasn't intended to kill him. He would be sick for awhile. He wasn't sure how the rest was to work, but Hal knew. Angelo would be angry and hurt once they were gone, but he'd be alive. He wouldn't have the plantation, but he never really wanted it anyway. He said he was going to sell it, go back to Rome. Maybe he'd even forgive him. They could live in Rome together. Once Hal had the money, he wouldn't care what they did. That's what he told himself on a good day.

The signs that the powder was doing its work were visible about ten days later. One morning as they lay together in bed after making love, Angelo told him he had a stomach ache.

Marshall tried to remain calm. He held onto him tight.

"Hey," Angelo protested, "I have to get up. Let me go."

Marshall held on tighter.

"What is wrong with you?" Angelo demanded, struggling away from him.

"I love you," Marshall said, "that's all."

Angelo gave him a curious look.

"When did it start, your stomach ache?" Marshall asked him, watching him as he got out of bed.

"I haven't been feeling great the last few days. Might be something I ate. But this morning, the pain in my stomach is pretty intense."

"I'm sure it's not serious," Marshall told him, coming over to him to stroke his hair. Marshall put a hand on his forehead. His skin felt kind of clammy. "You don't seem to have a fever. Think you caught a bug or something?"

"Could be," he replied, giving him a quick kiss.

Later on in the day, Angelo said he felt better. They went horseback riding. Marshall was becoming quite adept at riding and Angelo praised him often, making him smile.

"I love you," Marshall mouthed as he galloped ahead.

Angelo chased after Niede with El Nino, having no problem

catching up.

The rain had slacked off some, but it was still sprinkling and, by the time they returned to the house, the rain poured down again in earnest.

"I'm starved," Marshall announced. "Let's go find something to eat."

He placed an arm around Angelo as they finished taking care of the horses.

\* \* \* \*

Later, Marshall made a fresh fruit salad and chicken sandwiches. Marshall handed him a glass of wine across the table, already laced with the powder.

He eyed the glass that sat beside his plate. This time, he had put in the amount Hal told him to. Was it too much? He reached across the table. "You know," he said, "that glass is dirty."

But just as he was about to take it from him, Angelo reached for it and lifted it to his lips. "It's fine," he said, drinking deeply from it.

Marshall bit his lip and withdrew his hand.

Italian's drank wine. It was in their culture. Marshall remembered him saying mothers would put a drop of wine on the nipple of the baby bottle to get the infant to drink milk in Italy. It was quite usual for him to drink two glasses of red wine a day. He liked it with dinner and a glass later in the evening.

It rained hard again. He sighed as he got up to clear the table. He noticed that Angelo had eaten very little tonight, less than half a sandwich and no more than a bite of the salad. He watched him as he dried the dishes and put them in the cupboard. He had lost a little weight, enough so that it was noticeable. His jeans, normally snug, now sagged in the back.

When he smiled at him, Marshall noted how his cheeks looked hollow.

They finished up and went to sit outside. Marshall skipped the dose tonight. Angelo sipped his second glass of wine. He lit a cigarette and looked up at the night sky.

"How can you do that? Just smoke once in awhile?" Marshall shook



his head, moving his chair closer to him and slipping his arm in his.

"I don't know. Just can. Never been addicted to anything..." he looked at him and smiled, "except for you, that is. I'm hopelessly addicted to you."

Marshall pressed his lips against his mouth for a second, then sighed. "Is there a cure for your addiction?"

"No cure. It's a terminal addiction." He kissed his forehead, then his eyes, his nose and finally his mouth.

Marshall put his arms around his neck and hugged him to him. "I love you, baby." He had this sudden feeling of dread, as if their time together was slowly ticking away.

"You better," he placed his arms around him.

They broke apart, Angelo taking another drag off his cigarette.

"I used to smoke when I was younger. Almost went nuts trying to quit," Marshall laughed.

"How did you finally do it?" Angelo asked, lifting an eyebrow.

"Suffering and pain," he grinned. "Also the price of cigarettes went up and they were too expensive, so I just bummed them from other people for awhile. Finally I stopped asking for them when I noticed that my smoking friends were avoiding me."

"Umm," he said with a faint smile, throwing the cigarette onto the ground. "The mooch."

"Yep, that was me. Anyway that's only the second cigarette I've seen you smoke since I've known you."

"I know it's bad for me, but lately I've been feeling so crappy. Took some antacid but it didn't seem to help."

"You didn't eat much tonight."

"I don't seem to have much of an appetite lately and I've lost six pounds."

Marshall frowned. "Six pounds?"

"Got on the scale today and I've gone from one hundred and ninety-five to one eighty-nine..."

"Maybe you should have a doctor look you over," Marshall suggested lightly, knowing it was too early for that suggestion.

"Well, I will do that if I don't feel better soon."

They got ready for bed. Marshall lay in bed waiting for him to come out of the bathroom. This was enough. He wasn't going to do this

anymore. He needed to talk to Hal. It was time to do whatever they had to do to end this.

After awhile, when Angelo didn't come out of the bathroom, Marshall rose and went in to check on him. "Are you all right?" He asked.

He stood at the sink with a washcloth on his face. He looked at him when he came in. "Had a bad case of the runs, I'm afraid," he said, looking kind of embarrassed. "I must have some kind of stomach flue."

Marshall took his arm and pulled him close. He kissed his face. "Don't worry, baby, I'm sure it's nothing serious. Why don't you come to bed?"

"I will. I've got some wicked cramps in my gut and a vile headache."

"Why don't you take some aspirin?" Marshall suggested. "Come on, lay down and I'll get you some."

He took him to the bed. His knees seemed weak so he supported him. He didn't like this at all. Damn it. If something happened to him, he'd never forgive himself.

He got into bed, moaning. Marshall went into the bathroom and got him some aspirin and a glass of water.

Angelo took it and closed his eyes. Marshall lay down beside him and watched until he was sure that he was sleeping. Then he went out, saddled Neige and rode to the bunkhouse.

## Chapter 48

It was dead quiet at this time of night. Marshall dismounted and walked into the bunkhouse, going directly to Hal's bed. He nudged him gently.

Hal opened his eyes. "What are you..."

"Shush," Marshall told him, "come outside. I need to talk to you."

Hal came outside in his underwear, which was not a pretty sight. Marshall ignored his state of undress. "I'm scared, Hal. How much more of this shit am I supposed to give him? He's in pain, he's losing weight and he's sick. I'm not going to kill him, Hal."

"Good," Hal rubbed his hands together, ignoring his concerns. "It's working."

"Did you hear a fucking word I said?" Marshall snapped. He grabbed Hal by the neck and propelled him backward.

Hal's eyes widened.

"Answer me, goddamn it. How much more? You told me the effects were cumulative which means that it gets worst the more you give, right?"

He shook Hal a little.

Hal reached up and put his hands around Marshall's arms. He wrenched his hands off his throat.

"Don't you ever do that again!" He hissed, touching his throat with his hands. "What in fuck is wrong with you?"

"You. You are what's wrong with me. You and this whole goddamned fucking stupid scam!"

"Don't you go getting chicken shit on me now, you little worm," Hal grabbed his arm. "I'll kill you, I swear."

"You can kill me if you want, but no one is going to touch him."

"You idiot! You've fallen for him, and he's only using you."

"If he was only using me, he wouldn't have left me the plantation, would he?" Marshall met his eyes defiantly and pulled his arm away.

Hal sighed and his eyes grew angry. "I'm going to tell you something, Marshall. You are the only one keeping him alive. Unless you do exactly what I tell you, I'll kill him myself."

"I'm not giving him any more of that poison," Marshall told him. "And, if you push me, I'll tell him everything."

"Listen, I'm getting that money with or without you. Either you both live or you both die. I'll get my money either way," Hal threatened.

"You're a bastard. I hate you."

"Doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is the money," Hal gave him a terrible smile.

"How could I have been so stupid? How could I have let you manipulate me into doing everything I did, and now this?"

"Because you are an idiot, with no mind of your own. You are so pathetic you'd be a slave to anyone who said they loved you. Like I told you before, who in hell would waste their time loving you? You're a whore."

"He would," Marshall replied softly, his eyes blurred with tears. "He loves me."

"Yeah, and boy did he pick a winner!" Hal laughed softly in the cool night air.

Marshall wrapped his arms around himself, his body filled with dread. "I will go to the police," Marshall said, giving Hal an intense look of hatred.

"You could," Hal shrugged. "But you won't, because I guarantee I'll kill him before the police get here."

He knew he meant it. "No, God, please," Marshall grabbed hold of Hal's arm. "Tell me...tell me how to keep him alive. I will do anything, Hal. I'll give you everything, even my share of the money"

Hal shook him off. "You're not backing out of this, Marshall," Hal growled. "You are going to that law office, picking up the money and bringing it to me. It's your name on the papers, not mine. Now, I want you to go back there and for the next week, double the dose."

Marshall shook his head. "No Hal," he shook his head. "You get the doctor. I'm not giving him any more. He's sick already."

“Double the dose!” He mouthed. “When the time is right, I will send in our man.”

“Is he a real doctor?”

“Of course not, stupid,” Hal sneered.

“Hal, he’s going to need a real doctor,” Marshall pleaded.

“He can get one after we’re gone. Do as I say if you want to keep your lover alive. Now get to hell out of here, I have to get some sleep.”

Hal had gone back inside.

## Chapter 49

Marshall went home and had the same dream, the one where he was locked in the dark, in the closet. He got up, took the bottle with the white powder and dumped it down the toilet.

At night as he held Angelo, he imagined himself stabbing Hal with a knife over and over until he was sure he was dead. Then, he would fall asleep and dream he was killing him again.

He could tell Angelo the truth and they could escape, get out of here, go somewhere Hal would never find them. But he knew Angelo would never trust him again. No, his best chance of saving him was to pretend to go along with Hal.

One morning, Angelo woke up moaning. He was too weak to get out of bed. Marshall got up and put a cold cloth on his face. He told him he would call a doctor.

"The nearest clinic..." Angelo began, straining to rise off the bed, "is..." Marshall came over and eased him back onto the pillow.

"I'll take care of it. Just rest," Marshall said, his stomach in knots. He placed his face close to his. "I love you. I promise you that I'll take care of you. No one will hurt you."

Angelo gave him a curious look.

"I'll get the doctor," Marshall said. "It's probably just the flu or something."

Marshall saddled up the horse and rode down to the fields. When he saw Hal, he motioned to him. Hal stopped pruning the tree and came to stand close to him.

"Send for your doctor," Marshall said between clenched teeth. "Send for your fake one, and then I'm sending for a goddamned real one," Marshall hissed, leaning down close to his ear.

"You doubled it, like I told you to?" He asked, wiping his sweaty

brow with the back of his hand.

“Hal, Jesus Christ,” Marshall’s voice grew louder, tense. “He can’t even walk.”

Hal nodded. “All right, all right. Calm down. I’ll get him to come this afternoon.”

“Hal, if your doctor doesn’t show up by one o’clock, I’m calling a real doctor. Do you understand me?”

“Whatever. He’ll be there,” Hal smirked.

Marshall didn’t answer. He just turned and rode hard back to the house. He stayed at Angelo’s side all morning. Marshall kept a close watch on the clock. Maria seemed concerned for once. She came in and brought Angelo some soup, but he couldn’t eat.

He threw up three times, vomiting blood... Marshall cleaned it up off the floor. Marshall was terrified. He told Maria to call for a doctor. He didn’t care anymore what Hal did to him.

He paced the floor when Angelo slept and ran to his side when he woke up. He watched him bring his knees to his chest several times in pain, then collapse back onto the pillow.

Hal’s bogus doctor came promptly at one in the afternoon. He was a short stout fellow carrying a doctor’s bag. He spoke in heavily accented English. He asked Marshall to leave the room so he could examine the patient.

“No. I’m staying right here,” Marshall said, pacing. He didn’t trust this man. He could do something to Angelo. Where in hell was the real doctor? He knew Maria had contacted him. He was supposed to be on his way.

“It is not good news,” the man told Angelo, as he poked him here and there.

Marshall’s eyes went to the phone. Maria should call the doctor again. What was taking him so long?

“Senior,” the man looked at Angelo, “I believe you may have a very rare form of cancer. It’s terminal. Unfortunately, it is in the advanced stage. I will confirm my diagnosis this evening by phone.”

“There is no treatment for this cancer?” Angelo asked, his eyes searching the doctor’s face.

The doctor shook his head, playing with his little black bag. “Not at this stage. I would suggest you get your affairs in order.”

"Don't you need to do some specific tests to determine..." Angelo began.

"Yes, yes," he waved his hand. "I will have to do those at a hospital. I will send an ambulance for you this evening, but I must make sure there will be a bed available. I am sorry, Senior Farelli. It is hard to take, especially for a man of your young years. I want you to take this pill for the pain," he handed it to him. "Try to rest."

Angelo took the pill from the doctor's hand and turned his head to the window.

Marshall followed the man outside to his car. He put his hand on his arm. "What did you give him?" He demanded.

"Just a sedative," he shrugged. "Anything I give him at this time is of no consequence."

"What do you mean?" Marshall looked baffled. "He will recover in awhile," Marshall insisted.

The man laughed harshly. "Recover?" He looked at him as if he were crazy. "Why in hell would we want him to recover? He's dying," he said casually, opening the car door and climbing in.

Cold fear began to claw at Marshall's insides. "Yes, but not really," Marshall shook his head. "I mean you planned to come back tonight and put him somewhere temporarily until..."

The man started the engine and met his eyes. "No one is coming tonight," he laughed, "except maybe the dead wagon to pick up the body." He put his foot on the gas and peeled out of the yard.

The car sped off leaving nothing but a trail of dust behind it.

Angelo was dying. It had been the plan all along. He had to die. It was the only way Marshall could inherit his plantation, the only way he could sell it. He had known it all along. He just hadn't wanted to accept it.

Blinded by tears, Marshall walked back into the house. Maria stood in the hallway.

"Call that doctor again," he screamed at her, making his way back to Angelo's room. He was going to tell him everything.

The door was locked. He pounded on his door. And as he called out his name, he thought, *Please, please Angelo, don't hate me.*

"Angelo! Angelo! I need to talk to you. I have to talk to you now...please! Open the door. Open the door!"



## Chapter 50

Angelo had spit out the pill the doctor had given him. There was something strange about that man who had come into his room. He wasn't a doctor. No doctor could determine he had a terminal disease without doing blood work of some kind. And, he had never seen a doctor with dirty nails.

But what disturbed him the most was Marshall. He didn't want to think about the strange way he was acting. All he knew was that he had to get to a hospital or he wasn't going to make it.

He had crawled out of bed as soon as Marshall and the phony doctor had left the room and had managed to lock the door. Then he called Robert. He was a doctor, practicing in a clinic in Rio. He had joined the Doctors without Borders program as soon as he'd graduated. They had attended the university together in Rome.

Robert Marconi was pleased to hear from him.

"Angelo," he said, his voice excited, "how are you? It's been a long time since I've heard from you."

"Robert," Angelo managed, his hand shaking, "I need your help. I need to see you immediately. Can you meet a helicopter at the airport in Guarulhos, if I commission one this afternoon?"

He could hear voices outside his window and knew Marshall was talking with that doctor. Then he heard the sound of a car driving away. He gripped the phone.

"Of course I can, but what's wrong, Angelo? You sound horrible."

"I am so weak I can't walk, I can't eat. I have severe pains in my stomach. My bowels are loose and I started with this skin rash the other day. Robert, I think someone is poisoning me."

"My God, it sounds like arsenic. How long has this been going on?"

"Two weeks maybe, but it's been really bad the last two days."

"Come to me right away. Hurry, don't delay. I will head out to the airport right now."

"All right, hurry, Robert," Angelo added. Right after, he called a man in Sao Paulo who had a helicopter service. He told him he would pay him triple scale if he arrived within the hour. He said he would be there.

Angelo did his best to put on his clothes but each movement caused him excruciating pain. He was scared. He didn't want to die.

He heard Marshall pounding on his door shortly after he hung up the phone. He closed his eyes. After awhile, he gave up and went away. He didn't trust anyone right now. He had to concentrate on getting to Robert.

## Chapter 51

Marshall took the horse and galloped down to the coffee fields. He was blinded by rage and fear. “Where is Hal?” He demanded as Cruz came out of the office.

Cruz looked at him with a curious expression. “He’s in the processing plant. What’s wrong, Marshall?” Cruz asked, stepping off the porch.

“It’s Angelo,” Marshall said frantically. “Please, you’ve got to go to the house. Get him to a hospital. Maria called the doctor. He hasn’t come. My God, help him!”

Before Cruz could ask him anything else, Marshall turned the horse around and went galloping off toward the plant.

He jumped off Neige before she had even come to a stop, his shoes stuck in the mud... He tripped and almost fell, then ran to the door. He kicked the door open.

Many of the workers looked up in surprise as Marshall came tearing in, screaming at the top of his lungs, “Hal! Hal!”

Hal came down the aisle to meet him. “What’s this all about, Marshall?” He tried to sound casual, aware of the eyes on him.

Marshall made a running leap for him, knocking him down. He landed on top of him and starting swinging. The others began to gather round them, curious.

“You son of a bitch...you bastard,” Marshall accused, “you lied to me. You fucking lied to me! That doctor fraud says he’s dying for real...he’s dying for real, Hal. I hate you. I’ll kill you, you mother fucking son of a bitch!” He continued to beat on him.

Blood ran down Hal’s mouth. Marshall kept swinging until he felt the tip of a blade against his ribs. Then he stopped.

Hal laughed and, with a big grin, he met his gaze. "Good thing none of these monkeys in here speak English or I'd slice your intestines apart. Get the fuck off me and come outside where we can talk."

Marshall rolled onto his back, tears running down his face in rivers. Hal took him by the collar and pulled him to his feet. "Nothing to see here," he growled at the onlookers. He walked outside, putting the knife back into his pocket, and wiping the blood from his mouth. Marshall followed him.

"What in hell is wrong with you?" Hal demanded as they walked away from the plant.

"He won't let me in the room," Marshall spat. "He's on to us. What did you do, Hal? What did you make that Doctor give him? You promised he would see a real doctor."

"Keep your fucking voice down. Do you want to go to jail?"

"I don't give a shit if I go to jail or not!"

"Okay, okay," Hal said, "calm down. What do you mean he won't let you into his room?"

"I pounded and pounded and he didn't open the door. He locked me out! I'm scared. I'm really scared!"

Hal grabbed him and steered him over to the horse. "You weak little fuck. Don't you get it? We can't let him escape." Hal kept pushing him. "Get on that goddamned horse and take me to the house. We have to find him, now!"

"No," Marshall shook his head. "I won't let you hurt him, Hal."

"Get on the goddamned horse, Marshall," Hal said between clenched teeth. "I'm not going to hurt him. I just need to see where he is. He could be calling the cops. Do you want to be arrested?"

"I told you, I don't care," Marshall replied, "but you're not going to touch him."

"Well, I care," Hal roared. "You're the one who gave him the poison, remember? Get on the horse, now!"

Marshall slowly got on the horse and Hal jumped on behind him. Hal swatted the horse and he began to gallop. A billow of dust kicked around them as they rode. "Why do you have to fuck everything up, Marshall?" He growled in his ear. "You are quite the useless bastard, aren't you?"

Marshall couldn't see. He could hardly think. Where was Angelo? Was he lying in his room dying? Hal wouldn't touch him. He'd kill him first.

Hal suddenly yelled at him to stop the horse. "Whoa...whoa...get this old nag to stop! Listen," Hal said as Marshall pulled the reins and told Neige to stop in the middle of the road. "Listen," Hal insisted, "what's that?"

A loud sound rumbled in the distance, and suddenly they both looked up in the sky to see a helicopter overhead.

"He can't leave. We can't let him leave. Marshall, go, go on," Hal slapped the horse again and she took off down the road.

Marshall started to laugh... He laughed and laughed until he felt the tip of that cold steel against his back. "You better hope he doesn't get away or I swear I'll kill you. You won't be laughing."

Finally, they arrived at the gate and Marshall stopped the horse. In the distance they could see Cruz's truck over in the field. He was helping Angelo into the helicopter.

Hal swore. "Fuck, fuck! He's leaving."

Marshall watched as the helicopter lifted off the ground as the tears dried on his face. Then he turned to Hal and said, "Guess that's the end of that. That's the end of everything!"

Hal pushed Marshall off the horse. He landed heavy on the ground... "If he's lives, it's the end of you," Hal glared down at him.

Marshall rubbed his bruised shoulder. "Well, I guess it's the end of me then," Marshall threw at him. "He's going to the hospital and they'll help him there."

"Dream on, Marshall," He smirked. "Your lover is a dead man."

Marshall tried to get up, but everything went black.

## Chapter 52

Robert Marconi was waiting for Angelo in a truck he'd borrowed from a friend. With the help of the helicopter pilot, they lifted Angelo into the back and took him to the hospital in Rio.

Robert took his blood pressure and his pulse. He was not in good shape. "What happened, Angelo?" He asked him in Italian. "Who did this to you?"

He shook his head. "You still friends with Luigi Santinni?"

"Yeah."

"He still a cop in Sao Paulo?"

Robert nodded, rechecking his vital signs. "Yes, as far as I know. I haven't spoken to him in awhile."

"Can you reach him for me?"

"I'll try, but Angelo you have to concentrate on getting well. From what you told me on the phone, this sounds like arsenic. I need to do a test to make sure."

Angelo nodded. "I'm probably not going to make it, Robert... I don't have much time. I need to talk to Luigi." His voice was barely audible.

"Don't say that," the young doctor shook his head. "Don't say you're not going to make it, Angelo. You'll be just fine. Now don't talk, save your strength." He was scared. Obviously, someone had given Angelo a near lethal dose of arsenic. Why would someone poison Angelo?

Men with a stretcher met them at the hospital emergency room and they whisked him down the hall, with Robert shouting out orders in Portuguese. Robert didn't understand any of this right now but there was no time to think about it.

\* \* \* \*

Angelo knew people were around him. He was hooked up to tubes and there was a lot of activity around him, other things that he was too weak to see. Robert worked on him along with two other doctors.

"Angelo, listen to me, this is Doctor Maderas and Doctor Scott. We have to do a test to make sure it is arsenic we are dealing with. Then we will be administering dimercaporal directly to the muscles every four hours."

"Senior Farelli," Doctor Maderas leaned closer to him, "how long have you been vomiting?"

"The last two days, maybe."

"Not before?" she asked.

"No. Last time there was some blood with it," he managed.

"Not to worry," Dr. Scott shook his greying head, "the lining of your stomach is probably irritated. You are in the second stage, Mr. Farelli," he said in English, then looked at Robert for confirmation that Angelo understood what he'd said.

Robert nodded. "Yes, Angelo speaks English." He tilted his head to look closer at Angelo. "Dr. Scott is American, also with the Doctors without Borders program, Angelo. He has worked with a lot of poisoning cases, mostly people poisoned from the water supply."

"Good," Angelo said weakly. "At this point, Dr. Scott, I can use all the help I can get," he replied in English.

Dr. Scott squeezed his hand. "The test for the arsenic is being done... We will have the results within a half hour. You are in the stage just before the terminal stage, Mr. Farelli. We have to keep you hydrated and warm so that you do not go into seizure and then into shock. If this happens, you will die almost immediately or within a few days from kidney failure."

"Perfect," Angelo tried to swallow, but found he couldn't.

"Listen," Dr. Maderas said, "you are strong and healthy and a young man. We can fight this, senior," she said in Portuguese, patting his shoulder. "You have come to us just in time."

He nodded. "What are my chances?"

The three doctors looked at each other for a few seconds. Dr. Scott

finally spoke. "Let's not talk in terms of statistical probability. We will do all we can. Dimercaporal is an effective treatment for arsenic poisoning. We will administer it for two days, every four hours, then twice on the third day, then once a day for five days after."

"Sounds pleasant," Angelo commented dryly. He knew from the expression on the doctor's faces that they were less optimistic than they were making out.

Dr. Scott smiled. "Stay positive, young man. Attitude is half the battle. I will be back soon. Try to rest."

Doctor Maderas nodded compassionately at him and followed Doctor Scott out of the room, where they spoke in low voices.

Robert moved closer to him. He took his hand. "Yes, rest now," Robert said. "You need all your strength to fight this. How are you feeling?"

Angelo sighed. "Like a truck rolled over me, backed up and rolled over me again," he said in Italian.

He was soaked to the skin. Robert told the nurse to go and get him a wet cloth and when she returned with it, Robert took it and wiped Angelo's forehead and face.

"Thanks, that feels good," he said weakly. "Robert?"

"Yes," he said, wiping Angelo's throat and his chest.

"Yes, Angelo?" He leaned closer to him. "You are having problems swallowing again, aren't you?"

Angelo nodded. "Yes, yet my mouth is full of saliva. Listen to me while I can still speak. You need to call Luigi. Have him call me on my cell phone as soon as possible. Where is my phone?" He asked, looking around.

"They took it. Against hospital regulations. I will give him your room number but Angelo, can't this wait? You are in no condition to..."

"That's exactly why it can't wait, Robert," he said. "I'm not stupid. I know I could die at any moment. I need to talk to him. Only he can help me. If I'm going to die, Robert, someone is going to pay for it!"

Robert sighed. "If it is what we think it is, do you know who could have..."

He nodded.

"How did it happen? How did you let it... was it your great uncle?"



Angelo shook his head. “No, it wasn’t Ricardo. He is not my greatest fan, but he doesn’t want to kill me. It’s complicated, Robert. Just call Luigi.”

Robert nodded. “All right. Try to rest. I’ll do what I can.”

## Chapter 53

Marshall wasn't sure what Hal was up to. He just left him lying on the ground. After he regained consciousness, Marshall struggled to his feet and led Neige up the road, keeping his eyes open for Hal.

Right now he felt quite numb. Even the pain from his fall didn't register in spite of the fact that his shirt was soaked through with blood.

Hal had called Angelo a dead man. *God, let that not be true.* Surely, he was on his way to a hospital right now to get treated.

As he walked to the barn with Neige, he made a decision. If Angelo died, Hal would pay. He had nothing left to lose now. He would find a way to kill the bastard, then kill himself. He couldn't live with the pain of knowing he had been the cause of Angelo's death. And he wouldn't be able to live without him.

As he led Neige into the stall, he eyed the pitchfork. He reached for it, then suddenly heard Hal's voice behind him. "I wouldn't do that if I were you, Marshall."

He turned around to see Hal with a gun in his hand.

"Where in the hell did you get that gun?" Marshall's eyes widened. He withdrew his hand from the pitchfork.

"I saved it for a special occasion," Hal sneered. "Somehow I knew you would fuck up, because you are a first class fuck up, Marshall!"

"You're right, Hal. I am a fuck up," he said, meeting his eyes, "but you want to know why? I'm a fuck up because I played along with your little scheme and I may have killed..." his voice broke, and he struggled to continue. "I killed the man I love." Hot tears coursed down his face. "I don't care what you do to me, Hal. Kill me. You'd be

doing me a favour.”

“Oh how dramatic.” He laughed brutally, then reached over and grabbed his arm.

Marshall winced from the pain, looking to see the blood running down his hand.

“I’m not going to kill you, Marshall because that would be too good for you. Besides, I need you. Now stop your goddamned blubbing. We’re going inside the house and wait for the call. You just better pray someone calls to tell us he’s dead, because if he was on to us and had time to open his big mouth, the police are going to be all over this place.”

Marshall shook his head, tears pooling in his eyes. “You’re evil, Hal,” he whispered.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m the devil himself,” he scoffed, wiping the sweat off his forehead. He began to push him toward the door.

“We can’t go into the house, Hal. Ricardo, Maria and Marta are in there,” he told him, stopping dead before reaching the door of the barn.

“Well, we will just have to make sure they don’t cause us any trouble, won’t we?” Hal sneered, pushing him again until he stood outside.

Marshall stumbled toward the front door of the house as Hal’s hand grabbed at the back of his neck. “Don’t hurt them, Hal,” Marshall breathed. “There is no reason to hurt anyone.”

“Shut up. I’m running this show. You just keep your mouth shut and do as I tell you.”

Marshall swallowed and walked into the house.

## Chapter 54

Dr. Scott came into Angelo's room about twenty minutes after Robert had left. "We have good news and bad news, Mr. Farelli," he announced.

Angelo looked at him. "Give me the good news first."

"Well, I can give you both at once. It is arsenic poisoning, which means we know what to do."

Just then the phone beside his bed rang. "Dr. Scott, give me five minutes. I have to take this call. It's important," he implored.

"You may not have five minutes, young man," Dr. Scott replied sternly.

"Please, I promise you may do whatever you want to me after the call. Just give me five minutes."

Dr. Scott nodded and handed him the phone.

He waited until he left the room, then he said, "Luigi, its Angelo."

"Angelo? Robert told me you're in bad shape. What happened?"

Angelo switched from Italian to English. "I want you to check on two people. The names on their passports were Marshall Munduso and Hal Green. They were supposed to be..." he paused for a moment, his head swimming, then continued. "They had work visas from Canada. Born in Montreal, at least Marshall was."

"Okay, and why am I checking these?"

"I think they may have poisoned me. I haven't figured it out yet...I mean the reason, but..."

"How were you involved with these men, Angelo?" He asked.

"They work on my plantation in Brazil. I became...ah...intimately involved with one of them and he worked at the house. He had access to my food, Luigi." He felt tears at the back of his eyes. He had never

put it into words before, had never even let it slip into his thoughts, but now a lot of things made sense.

“Can you give me a description of them?”

“The one called Marshall has shoulder length curly dark hair, brown eyes. He’s slim and about five ten, five eleven. He is maybe twenty or twenty-one. I’m not sure. He’s Italian. The other one, Hal, is older, maybe twenty-six or twenty-seven, dirty blond hair, around the same height, thin, strange eyes although I can’t tell you what colour. Never got close enough, didn’t want to. Anyway, he’s not what you’d call handsome...not like Marshall,” he said, trailing off.

“All right, I’ll get in touch with the Canadian police and check these things out. I’ll call you back as soon as I find out anything.”

“Well do it fast because I may not make it, Luigi.”

“Christ, don’t say that, Angelo. Look, I’ll get back to you. Get well.”

The three doctors and two nurses came into the room.

Robert took the phone out of his hand. “Sorry, he has to go,” he said and hung up. “Times up, buddy. It’s time to save your life.”

They wheeled him out of the room and down the hall. A nurse injected something into his drip and he felt himself falling. He could hear Robert’s voice far away in the distance saying, “it’s going to be fine, Angelo. You’re going to make it.”

Why...why...his mind screamed. He saw Marshall’s face. Why did you try and kill me...I thought you loved me...I really thought you loved me. He was sobbing in his dream, sobbing like a child. He’d felt no greater pain... In fact, it was more than he could bear. They had shared such intimacies and Marshall had looked deeply in his eyes, pretending to love him and he had believed him. He had held him in his arms and trusted in his sighs, trusted in his kisses. How could his body have lied to him in that way? And all the while, behind his back, Marshall had been slowly draining his life away.

Suddenly, it felt as if his chest had crashed in on his heart. He felt himself shaking violently.

“My God,” he heard a voice say in the distance, “do something. We’re losing him! He’s going into shock.”

## Chapter 55

Maria and Ricardo froze when they saw Hal with a gun. Marta came out of the kitchen and screamed. Ricardo pulled her over beside him. Hal pointed it at them. "Sit down," he barked, "and don't move, or I swear, I'll blow you away."

Although Maria didn't understand what was going on, she sat down. Ricardo told her to be quiet in Portuguese and pulled Marta down beside him. She began to cry softly.

No one spoke in the complete silence that followed.

Marshall took a seat on the sofa across from the others. Maria and Ricardo glared at him with hatred. Marta had buried her head in Ricardo's shoulder, muffling her cries.

Marshall knew those two had never trusted him and now their suspicions were confirmed. He couldn't blame them for how they looked at him. He deserved it.

He laid his head back and closed his eyes.

Hal picked up the phone and dialled a number. After a few minutes, he spoke into the receiver in English, "Everything is a fucking mess here. I just thought you should know. That goddamned Marshall went and confused his pecker with his brain. Anyway, we should know what's going to happen soon. If that stupid bastard lives, we're fucked. If I don't get a phone call soon, we're out of here. I'm not going to the joint."

He paused to listen to the other voice, then said, "Look, fuck you. I'm the one taking all the risks here, not you, so just calm the fuck down. I told you there is still a shot. We're waiting for a call. I'll call you back when I have news." He hung up, swearing under his breath.

It seemed to Marshall that Hal was slowly unravelling. He sweated

heavily. He paced the floor with the gun in his hand, pausing every once in awhile to peer out the window.

"Who was that, Hal?" Marshall demanded, leaning forward suddenly. "Who is the other man you always call?"

He didn't care what Hal did to him. He knew Hal needed to keep him alive, at least until tomorrow, until they found out about Angelo.

Hal didn't answer him, so Marshall asked him a second time.

"None of your business," he snapped.

"Is it Frank Barter at Havendale?" Marshall sneered.

He wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"I'm right, aren't I? It is Barter. I knew he was an asshole the moment I saw him."

"Leave it alone, Marshall," Hal snapped. He peered out the window again.

Marshall ignored him. "He links you up with the boys, so that you can run your stupid cons. He must have seen me coming a mile away," Marshall said bitterly.

Hal gave him a sheepish grin. "Suckers are hard to miss. Poor wounded little jerk-offs who know how to hustle their wares."

"Your words don't affect me any more, Hal," Marshall stood up. "You can say anything you want. It's all bullshit. None of what you said was true."

"Believe what you want," Hal shrugged. "You think you're something just because the big man sucked your dick. But we both know he wouldn't have given you a second look if he knew what you were really about."

Marshall smiled. "He knew what I was about. I told him more about myself than I ever told anyone. And you know what? He loved me anyway."

"Well, like I said," Hal laughed, "he picked a winner. Look where that got him."

Marshall fell silent. He shook his head. "I would have never hurt him. I would have never let you..."

"But you did hurt him," Hal charged. "Don't think you are not just as involved in this shit as I am, maybe more. If I go down, Calletti, I'm not going down alone. You gave him the poison, not me."

Marshall narrowed his eyes. "What happened to the last one? There

was another one before me, another sap you used, wasn't there? What happened to him, Hal?"

"He didn't know when to keep his mouth shut," Hal countered. "He ended up dead."

Marshall nodded solemnly. "I see."

"Happy?" Hal jeered.

"All that money we made," Marshall shook his head. "I never saw any of it. And after this was over, you would have had no more use for me. You had no intention of giving me any of the money. What were you going to do, Hal, kill me?"

He grinned. "You seem to have smartened up some, Marshall. Too bad you get wise at this point, just when it's all going to end. You think I wanted you tagging along with me for the rest of my life? You're useless."

Marshall gave him a look of hatred. "Too bad I didn't realize what a miserable loser you were before..."

He stopped as Hal began to laugh. "Before you killed the only sap who ever gave a damn about you, Marshall? And you were right for a change. He did, you know. Poor misguided bastard. In fact, he might have been the only person on this planet who really gave a shit about you."

Tears rose in Marshall's eyes. He blinked them away, biting his lip.

Just then, they heard a vehicle drive up. Hal ran to the window and looked out. "It's Cruz. Fuck! Get rid of him, Marshall, or I swear I'll kill him and these assholes along with him."

Marshall held up his hands. "Calm down, Hal... There is no need to kill anyone. I'll take care of it."

"I'm watching you, Marshall. One false move," he said, blinking from the sweat in his eyes, "and the old lady gets it first," he pointed the gun at Maria who put a hand over her mouth in fear.

"I'll send him away," Marshall told him, his heart beating wildly in his chest.

He pulled open the door and walked outside, lifting a hand, trying to appear casual. "Hi there, Cruz," he gave him a forced smile. Inside, his gut was tied into a knot of fear. *Go away, damn you. Fucking get out of here!*

Cruz glanced at his arm right away. "What happened to you? You're



bleeding.”

“Nothing, a little accident, that’s all.”

“Have you heard any news from Angelo? Has he seen a doctor? I’m surprised you didn’t go with him.”

“No...I...I...” Marshall began, “I haven’t heard anything yet. And I wanted to go with him but...he wanted me to stay here...take care of things,” he muttered.

He nodded, looking at the front door. “He hasn’t been feeling well for a week or so. I hope they find out what the problem is. He looked pretty bad when he left.”

“I’m sure he’ll be fine,” Marshall said, feeling the bile rise in his throat.

Cruz narrowed his eyes and adjusted his hat in the sun. “You look pale.”

“I’m fine, fine. Look, why don’t you...” Marshall began.

“I’m going to speak to Ricardo,” he cut him off, making a move toward the house. “I need his advice about something.”

“No,” Marshall blurted, shaking his head. “He’s ah...gone. Don’t know where he is.”

“But his truck is right there,” Cruz pointed to his vehicle parked beside the barn.

“Yeah, well he must have taken one of the horses,” Marshall told him, moving closer to the door.

“Strange. Well, I’ll just get a drink of water,” Cruz said, heading up the steps toward him. “I’ll say hello to Marta at the same time.”

When Marshall literally blocked his path, Cruz raised an eyebrow.

“Ah, I’ll get you some water. Marta is busy,” he breathed. “I’ll say hello for you. Wait here.”

Cruz narrowed his eyes. “What’s going on, Marshall? Why don’t you want me to go into the house?”

*I’m trying to save your life.* He opened his mouth to speak when suddenly the door flew open. He turned around to see Hal who pointed the gun directly at Cruz. It happened so fast. The shot fired, the bullet whizzed right past him. It hit Cruz directly in the chest, the impact knocking him backward off the porch and onto the ground.

Marshall gasped, moving aside as Marta pushed past Hal and came running outside. “Cruz!” She screamed, sobbing as she fell to her

knees beside him.

Marshall looked at Hal, sheer horror in his eyes. He cocked the gun and fired. "Hal, No!" he cried out, grabbing blindly for the gun barrel. But it was too late. Marta's dead body lay limply on top of Cruz. Blood slowly drained from their bodies, creating a blended pool of it all around them.

Marshall placed his hand over his mouth to stop himself from throwing up, but he threw up anyway, over the railing, until there was nothing left in his stomach except for bile.

He looked around for a moment, then grabbed Marshall by the arm. "Pathetic little Nancy boy," he accused. "Shit."

He shook him so hard, his teeth rattled. Then he dragged him inside and pointed at Ricardo and Maria. "Get some rope and tie these two up. Put some tape over their mouths, and throw them in the other room. Then you're going to help me get these bodies into the barn, out of sight. Now move!"

"But they could still be...I mean, what if they are...alive," Marshall stammered, shaking all over. "What if..."

Hal gave him a mocking glare. "Believe me, stupid, they're not alive. When I aim, I aim to kill."

## Chapter 56

Angelo opened his eyes hours later to see Robert smiling at him in relief. "We almost lost you. Thank God you're awake."

"I'm thirsty," he managed.

"Can't give you anything to drink, Angelo, but I'll wet your mouth, all right?"

"Did Luigi call?"

"Yes, but I said you—"

"Get him back on the line for me, Robert," he said weakly, "please, now."

Robert dialled the number. "Detective Santinni please," he said in English. "Tell him it's Angelo Farelli returning his call."

"Could you give me a minute, Robert?" Angelo met his gaze. He wasn't sure what Luigi would tell him and he wanted to be alone when he heard it.

Robert nodded with a frown and handed him the phone. "I'll bring you some ice. Don't exert yourself," he said and left.

"Angelo?" Luigi's voice came on the line. "How are you?"

"I don't know, alive, which is something I guess. What did you find out?"

"Sure you want to know?"

"Yes. I want to know."

"Well, the passports and the work visas are fakes. They were never officially issued by Canadian customs. The two men are Marshall Calletti and Hal Makin, both former residents of a school for juveniles in Montreal called Havendale House. Hal Makin has been arrested for some petty stuff but nothing ever stuck. The police have been watching Makin for quite some time trying to gather evidence on him.

Apparently a man came forward last year claiming Makin and Calletti blackmailed him. He was some sort of big shot in the Catholic Church. From what the detectives following the case in Montreal tell me, Calletti seduces wealthy gay men and Makin works in the background taking pictures. They make the guy pay money in exchange for their silence. They have probably done this to other men, but they won't come forward due to fear of exposure."

Angelo closed his eyes. "Jesus." He couldn't think of anything more to say.

"It's a pretty cold game they play. Makin is a real winner. He had another kid with him before. The kid turned up floating in St. Laurence River a few years back. They never proved he did it, but he was hauled in for questioning."

Angelo said nothing.

"Angelo?"

"Yeah. I'm just realizing what the scam was. I played right into their hands."

"Angelo, don't," Luigi said gently.

"I lost my head. I don't understand how I could have been so stupid." His voice shook.

"Don't beat yourself up over it, man. They are first class con artists." He paused. "I'm sure someone is waiting in the wings to pay good money for the plantation?"

"Columbia drug lords," Angelo replied softly.

"That figures," Luigi echoed.

"I've had offers. I know he wants to use the plantation for cocaine."

"All we need to do is call your notary, have him call the house and tell those guys you're dead. When they come in to sign the papers for the estate, we'll be there waiting for them."

"Do it," he said.

"I'll get in contact with the Montreal police," Luigi said. "They'll want to be there. Do you remember his name, the Colombian that who offered to buy the plantation?"

"Manolo Bacelar, I think, but it might not be the same one."

"Doesn't matter, one drug baron is the same as another. Give me an hour."

Angelo reached over and replaced the phone on its receiver. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep, but all he could think of was Marshall and how he had betrayed him, how he had tried to kill him. He pictured him in his mind, his smile, his kiss and his touch. He slept, only to dream of making love to him. Then he saw him standing there with a knife. With a sadistic smile, he leered at him. "Did you really think I loved you? What a fool you are, Angelo! What an idiot!" He lifted the knife directly over his heart and stabbed him again and again and again.

He awoke to the phone ringing. For a moment, he wasn't sure where he was. Then he saw the nurse sitting beside him. She lifted the phone, spoke, then handed it to him.

Angelo took the phone. "Hello?" he managed.

It was Luigi. "A couple of Montreal police detectives are on their way to Brazil as we speak."

Angelo tried to shake off the remainder of his sleep.

"All right. Is there anything else I need to do?"

"No, just get well," he said.

"Thanks," he replied.

"Angelo?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry this had to happen to you."

"Thank you," Angelo replied. "No sorrier than I am."

## Chapter 57

By eight thirty in the morning, Marshall hadn't slept a bit and neither had Hal. Maria and Ricardo were tied up and lying together on Angelo's bed, their mouths sealed with tape.

He had been forced to help Hal carry Marta and Cruz into the barn. Hal had covered them in hay. Marshall had cried silent tears the whole time. Doomed lovers, he thought, just like Angelo and him.

Now sitting on the sofa in the same position he had sat in all night, his clothes covered in blood, he felt nothing but loss. He saw Angelo in his mind. He could imagine him walking around in this room. In fact, the first time he had ever laid eyes on him, it had been in this room. The painting still hung on the wall to his left, but he couldn't bear to look at it. My love, he thought, my love. His heart ached. Was he dead? Was there a chance he had gotten to the hospital in time and was still alive.

All night, every time Hal had gone to the window to look outside, Marshall prayed the police had arrived... The police meant that maybe Angelo had survived. The police also meant Ricardo and Maria would be all right. But the morning was here now, and it had brought only silence with it.

Did Angelo realize he had betrayed him? He couldn't stand the thought of that. He couldn't stand the thought that he had died thinking he didn't love him.

His mind raced, his head pounded. He was nauseated. The thoughts going around in his head never ended. They just grew more intense. Maybe he'd go mad. That would be a good thing.

When the phone rang, Marshall almost jumped out of his skin. He stared at it until Hal grabbed him and threw him on the floor next to it.

"Pick it up," he growled, "and don't fuck up. Understand?"

Marshall picked it up with a trembling hand, "Ola?" He said.

"Marshall Munduso?"

"Yes, that's me," he replied.

"This is Senior Cordosa. I am Senior Angelo Farelli's legal representative. I wish to inform you that Senior Farelli died last night."

Marshall put his head down on the table and sobbed.

Hal took him by the hair and pulled him to his feet. He slapped him several times and pushed the phone at him.

"Senior Munduso?" He heard on the other end of the line.

Marshall shoved Hal away from him. "I'm sorry," he said into the phone, wiping his eyes on his bloody sleeve. "I'm just upset...I..."

"I can understand that. My sympathies. You are aware that he left you the plantation in his will?"

"Ah...we talked about it, but..." Marshall licked his lips.

"Yes. I would like to arrange a meeting. There is a prospective buyer in the wings and he is anxious to..."

"Of course," Marshall sniffed. "Ah, when?"

He listened to the instructions, looking at Hal. He covered the receiver with his hand. "He wants a phone number," he said softly.

Hal rattled off his cell phone number. Marshall repeated it slowly to the notary, then said goodbye and hung up the phone.

"Well, what did he say?" Hal demanded.

"He's dead," Marshall told him, shaking his head slowly. He sunk down onto the sofa, placing his hands over his face.

"Where do we go?" He persisted.

Marshall wiped at his eyes.

"Where do we go, Marshall?" Hal insisted.

"The notary...ah, will, ah...call to arrange an appointment tomorrow or the next day."

Hal relaxed. He marched around the living room, then threw back his head and howled. "It will all be over soon," he came over to where Marshall sat and reached out a hand to him. "Come on, kid, no hard feelings. We did this. We're magic. We're going to be rich."

Marshall glared at him. The man he loved was dead and so was he, as soon as Hal didn't need him anymore.

Hal smiled "Okay, so you don't want to talk? I can understand that.

You'll feel better once we're on the road. Come on, get your shit. We're driving to Sao Paulo tonight. We'll rent a great hotel in the city, have a little dinner and wait for the call."

Marshall couldn't move. Angelo was dead. *God, no. God...God...*

"Come on, Marshall," Hal grabbed him by the arm and pulled him to his feet. "Stop acting like a fucking zombie. We've got to get out of here. Get your stuff and let's go."

He pushed him toward the bedrooms. Marshall watched him blindly from the corner of the room, as he jammed his few meagre belongings into his knapsack. *You're dead, Hal. I don't care how I do it. You are a dead man.*

"Let's go," Hal said, throwing his bag at him.

Back in the living room, Marshall froze. "Maria...Ricardo...in the bedroom? We have to..." Marshall stammered, looking over his shoulder toward the hallway.

"Are you nuts?" Hal shook his shaggy blond head. He pushed him toward the door. "They could call the police."

"We can't just leave them," Marshall struggled against Hal. "They could die here. I'm not going to—"

"Let 'em die, what do you care?" He barked, taking his arm and dragging him outside. "Get in the truck," he told him, brandishing the gun, "or I'll blow your head off."

"Then do it!" Marshall told him, his voice calm and his eyes boring into Hal's. "Kill me. I don't care. I'm not leaving them like that. They're old. They could die. My hands are bloody enough already."

As he walked back into the house, Hal followed on his heels, swearing under his breath. Marshall walked into the room and looked down at the two frightened people on the bed. "It's okay," he said softly. "I'm not going to hurt you." He reached over and untied Ricardo's hands.

He blinked up at him.

"I cut the phone line," Hal said. "At least they can't call the cops. Let's go!"

Marshall looked at Ricardo for a moment. Then he made his way back outside. He didn't look at Hal. He just crawled into the passenger seat of Cruz's vehicle and closed the door.

Hal gave him a stormy look as he got in behind the wheel. He



started the engine. Soon, the vehicle was careening toward the fence. "Cruz must have made a good salary to afford a vehicle like this," he announced suddenly, "unless Farelli owned it." Hal said as they headed down the road, "Maybe Cruz was doing him, too."

Marshall sneered at him. "Fuck you, Hal."

He laughed, falling silent.

Soon, they were whizzing passed the coffee trees and some of the workers, who lazily lifted a hand at them.

Marshall lowered his head.

"We're going to have a great time in Sao Paulo, Marshall," Hal sang out. "I can't wait to sleep in a real bed and have decent food. Working on that plantation was hard work. What have you got a taste for tonight? I think I'm going to eat shrimp. What about you?" He asked, barrelling the vehicle down the mountain road.

"Fucking shut up," Marshall screamed at him.

"Touchy, touchy," Hal mused. "You'll change your tune once you get your hands on all that money. You can buy yourself a dozen Angelo Farelli's if you want. You know I didn't mean what I said back there. You'll get your share of the money."

It didn't matter that it was a lie. He didn't care anymore and the further they got down the mountain road, the deeper in despair he became. Tears stood in his eyes. Angelo was dead. Cruz and Marta were dead, too. Marta's father was dead.

He turned his head and leaned his forehead on the window. His shoulders shook with silent grief. *God, God, God.* He was implicated in the killing of four people. And Hal, well he would make five.

He closed his eyes as Hal turned on the radio, humming along with some South American tune. He was a monster, an absolute monster.

How in hell had he come to this in his life? If only he could go back, go back to when he and Angelo had first met. The time they'd had spent in Rio together, in Rome, the way he'd made love, the way he'd laughed. He could have turned his back on Hal then, told Angelo the truth. Angelo would have helped him. They would have faced Hal together, but he had been too scared, too afraid to see the love fade from his face. And now Angelo was dead.

Hal drove at breakneck speed over the mountain roads. Maybe they'd never make it to Sao Paulo... Maybe Hal would lose control of

the truck and they would both be killed.

Marshall eyed the steering wheel and thought of the sweet relief death would bring. Better than that, he would take this bastard with him.

## Chapter 58

Luigi Santini was a handsome man in his late twenties who stood almost as tall as Angelo did. He was fair-haired and blue eyed, descended from the southern part of Italy. He had been at the university with Angelo and Robert. They had all been good friends.

Luigi had arrived a few hours before the Montreal Police. When he'd walked into the hospital room, he had been dismayed to see Angelo in the shape he was in.

After giving him a brief hug, he introduced Angelo to Jean-Guy Dejardin and Mary Williams, the two Montreal detectives who had been collecting evidence on this case for over six years.

Angelo shook their hands, greeting the Canadians in French.

"We must tell you, Mr. Farelli," Detective Williams said, "you will have to come to Montreal at some point in the future to testify."

He nodded. "Of course."

She was a little woman in her forties with orange hair and bright green eyes. She had a strong clear voice and was all business. "We are waiting for a call from your notary. He will let us know when the meeting will be, and then we will stake out the place and wait," she announced.

"The sting operation is in place," Jean-Guy added. "We have worked out an arrangement with the Brazilian government to extradite the criminals."

"Police from Brazil, as well as from Columbia will be onsite," Luigi told him.

"Manolo Bacelar will be at that meeting. The Colombian authorities want him bad."

Angelo thanked them. "I'm concerned about my grandmother and

my uncle. I don't know if they are in danger and I..."

"We'll make sure the Brazilian Authorities send someone out there right away, Mr. Farelli," Detective Desjardin replied.

Then the nurse suggested they leave. "Mr. Farelli needs his rest."

Luigi stayed behind a few minutes. He took his hand. "How are you?"

"Better, I think. They injected me with this stuff every four hours. Not pleasant."

"Robert told me it was close."

Angelo nodded. "I don't want to think about it."

"After you get better, we'll have one hell of a party."

Angelo grinned at him. "Just the two of us, Luigi?"

"Still a flirt," Luigi threw back his head, laughing.

"And you're still terminally straight. What a pity," he managed.

"I always told you, Angelo, that if I was to jump the fence, it would only be for you."

"Hey, hey, hey," Robert said, walking into the room, "Hands off, cop. He's mine."

Angelo rolled his eyes. "I wouldn't go fighting over this body just yet."

"Time for your injection. Sorry, Luigi," Robert slapped his arm.

"I have to go anyway. I will be back, Angelo."

Angelo raised a hand to him as he left and Robert prepared him for another treatment. "You know you're not out of the woods yet, my friend. You need to rest. All this excitement is not good for you."

"It will be over soon," he sighed, closing his eyes.

"And then what?" Robert asked him.

"And then I can figure out how I'm going to go on living."

## Chapter 59

Twice Marshall was ready to grab the wheel and drive them off the mountain, but each time another vehicle was coming in the other direction and he changed his mind. The closer they got to Sao Paulo, the more traffic there was and so Marshall gave up on his plan. He couldn't be responsible for killing anyone else.

They arrived in the city at around four in the afternoon. They spent what seemed like hours in traffic. By six-thirty, they were installed at a hotel on Paulista Avenue overlooking the skyscrapers and the endless traffic.

Hal was singing again. He went into the bathroom and turned on the hot water. "I'm going to take a bath," he announced.

He came out into the bedroom again with the gun in his hand. "I'm sure he'll call tomorrow. I hope it's in the morning so we can set up the meeting for the afternoon. If not, it will have to be the day after."

He pressed some numbers on his cell phone. "It's a go," he said into it. "I know you'd kiss me if you could. Anyway, I will call you when it's over. Can't tie up this line." He hung up and went into the bathroom again.

Marshall smiled. Hal hadn't put the gun down once since they had arrived at the hotel. Hal was worried. That was good. Let the bastard be scared for once.

He got up and went out on the balcony. He could always jump. Then Hal wouldn't get anything.

"Marshall," Hal called from the bathtub.

Marshall came back inside the room and looked at him.

He stood at the bathroom door with only a towel wrapped around him. "You know," he grinned, "I feel so good tonight I might even let

you suck my cock.”

Marshall met his eyes blandly. “Really? Don’t do me any favours, Hal.”

“Come on, time to have fun. I know I’ve been tough on you,” he said, dropping the towel.

Marshall was repulsed by his skinny body.

“But, honey, admit it, I had to be tough to get us to this point,” he said, shrugging into one of the terry cloth robes the hotel had provided. “Okay, so you got a little attached to the mark this time. He was—”

“A little attached?” Marshall laughed bitterly, “You think I got a little attached?”

“So, a lot attached,” Hal ran a hand through his damp hair.

“Not attached, Hal. In love, I fell in love,” Marshall eyed him coldly. “Of course, you wouldn’t understand what that means.”

Hal followed him with his eyes as Marshall paced the room. “I’m sorry, Marshall,” he said gently. “Forgive me. I have been insensitive to—”

“Oh shut up, Hal! You are full of it. You don’t mean anything you say. I’m not buying it anymore,” Marshall told him, looking at the floor.

Hal lay back on the bed with a sigh. “Let’s go out and eat something. You’ll feel better. Later, we’ll come back here with some champagne and who knows... whatever happens, happens.”

“Nothing is going to happen, Hal,” Marshall fixed him with an icy stare. “So forget your celebration. You want a fuck, hire a hooker!”

Hal jumped off the bed and caught Marshall’s arm. He squeezed it brutally in the place that was cut and bruised.

Marshall pulled his arm away.

“You listen to me. You will do what I tell you. And if I want you tonight, I’ll have you. You understand? And you’ll like it. I’ll make Farelli’s prick feel like a Popsicle stick.”

Marshall went into a rage. With strength he didn’t know he had, he grabbed Hal by the throat and threw him into the wall. “Don’t you ever talk about him again, you understand me?” He slapped him hard in the face twice. “You have no right to even say his name!”

Hal stood in stunned silence, his jaw slack.

“Now you listen to me,” Marshall said in his face, “and listen hard because I’m only going to say this once. You need me now, more than I need you, so you’re not going to shoot me even if you want to. There is too much at stake. So tonight, I’m going out that door and, if you’re lucky, I’ll come back again. Then I’m going to sleep and if you get anywhere near me with your dirty hands, I swear to you, I will jump off that balcony.”

Hal went to move, but Marshall held him fast, his adrenaline pumping hard through his veins. “You see, Hal,” Marshall gritted his teeth, “I’m the one holding all the cards now. So be very careful what you say, because one more thing out of your dirty mouth about Angelo and I’ll strangle you! Is that clear?”

Hal nodded as Marshall stepped back.

“Good,” he said. “Now, have a nice little celebration,” Marshall told him. “Drink your champagne, eat your shrimp and fuck yourself while you’re at it.”

While Hal drank his bottle of champagne and ate the triple order of shrimp he’d ordered from downstairs, he spoke to Frank on the phone.

“Are you sure he’s going to go through with it?” Frank demanded on the other end.

“He will. He’s as greedy as me. Not to mention you. Then after it’s over and I have the money, I’ll give the little bastard exactly what he wants, which is a bullet right between the eyes.”

“I told you, Hal, I don’t want to hear that shit. I have to go. Everything is in place. When Marshall gets the money, call me and I’ll tell you where to go with it. Understand?”

“Yeah, yeah, no sweat,” Hal said.

“Don’t phone me again until it’s a done deal,” Frank added, then hung up.

## Chapter 60

Marshall had no idea how long he'd been walking in the rain. He hadn't a clue where he was. He was soaked to the skin.

All he knew was that Angelo was dead.

He had fallen down on his knees in front of the first church he'd seen and prayed. He prayed for death, for release. "My God," he cried out, "why give me everything and then take it away again? It's my punishment. It's my punishment. It's hell. It feels like hell!"

He sat there on his knees for the longest time. People walked by him on the street and stared. He got up and, like a drunk, he staggered on, water running down his face, his hair plastered to his head. It was almost dawn before he found a lone taxicab sitting on a dark street corner and decided to get in and head back to the hotel.

Once back inside the room, he fell on the bed and closed his eyes. He dreamed of a waterfall, strange noises in the dark, and coffee, lots of coffee, and a tall beautiful man with haunting eyes, who was dead.



## Chapter 61

Dr Scott came in to see Angelo in the morning. “How is it going?” he asked.

“You tell me, Doc,” Angelo sighed.

“We have been checking for kidney damage. You’ve been lucky. There doesn’t seem to be any. Your stomach is in bad shape, though. You are going to have to take it easy for awhile. No spicy foods and lay off the wine and coffee for a bit.”

“No pleasures in life at all,” Angelo managed a smile.

“You are a miracle, young man. Many people wouldn’t have survived. I think I’d be safe in saying that you’re going to make it.”

“You mean no more injections?”

“Sorry,” he gave him an apologetic look, “we have to finish the treatment. I know it’s painful.”

Just then Robert came in.

Dr. Scott nodded at Angelo and told him he’d be in to see him tomorrow.

Robert lifted a hand to him, then came to stand near the bed. “You look better today.”

“Feel like shit,” Angelo replied. “How are you?”

“Tired,” Robert sighed, looking at him. “Angelo, we’re old friends. How did this happen?”

“I don’t know,” Angelo replied, not looking at him.

“You were lovers, you and this Marshall. I understand this, but why in hell would you leave him the plantation and...” Robert trailed off helplessly.

“To prove I loved him,” he whispered miserably.

“I don’t understand,” Robert shook his head.

"He grew up without love. I don't even think he knew what it was. I tried to show him—"

"Don't tell me you're feeling sorry for him?" Robert snapped, "He almost killed you."

"I thought he loved me," Angelo said, his chest heaving.

Robert's voice softened. He was in great pain. He regretted his anger. "Did you love him?"

"I did. I really did," he whispered, tears lit his eyes, a single one escaped down his cheek. He brushed it away.

"I'm sorry," Robert said, rubbing his friend's arm.

"I don't really think he meant to kill me," he whispered.

"Angelo," Robert protested, "he poisoned you. He meant it. He knew what he was doing."

"I can't believe that he—"

"Angelo...I..." Robert shook his head.

"I'm not excusing him, Robert," Angelo met his eyes. "He is just as guilty as that scumbag he was with, but I think he might be more naive than bad."

"Well, just try not to romanticize him."

"I've already done that," Angelo replied bitterly, his mouth twisting. "Don't think I can be that stupid twice, do you?"

Robert gave him a kiss on the forehead. "See, if you'd only fallen for me when you had the chance."

Angelo smiled.

"The door is still open, you know," Robert gave him a meaningful look.

Angelo gave him a dopey grin. "I suppose I am obligated to you. You did save my life."

"Umm...that means you owe me big time." He came closer and whispered. "Think I'll take it out in trade."

Angelo laughed a little. "You'll have to wait until I'm off my back. I can't even walk."

"No problem. I'll take you any way I can get you," he replied in Italian, raising his eyebrows.

Angelo laughed again. It felt good to laugh.

"I know it's not easy, but try to put that guy out of your mind," Robert said softly and left the room.

Put him out of his mind. Now how was he supposed to do that? How could he forget his very heart beat? His very breath? He could never forget the way they had made love, the way he'd tasted, the way he'd felt in his arms. How could he forget him, when even now he could hear his soft whispers against his ear? Put him out of his mind. That was easier said than done. He swallowed his tears, turned his head toward the wall and tried to sleep.

## Chapter 62

Marshall realized he was walking into a trap just before Hal woke him from his dream. The realization hit him all of a sudden like a slap in the face. Something had been nagging at him, a piece of the puzzle that didn't fit. Angelo had locked the door to his room right after that man impersonating the doctor had left his house. Even when he pounded and pounded and called his name, he didn't answer. He *knew*.

That meant the phone call from the notary was a set up. Angelo had time to tell someone before he died. Tomorrow, the police would be waiting. He actually laughed aloud.

Hal looked over at him from the other bed curiously. "Finally lost it, Marshall?"

Marshall smiled as he climbed out of bed. "Good morning," he sang, "it's a good day." He hadn't slept more than a half hour or so. His head spun as he tried to stand on his feet. His eyes felt gritty.

Hal blinked at him. "What happened to you?"

Marshall shrugged and went into the bathroom to shower. Angelo would have the final victory, even in death. *I'm going to make sure of it, my love.*

When he came out of the bathroom, washed and dressed, Hal was sitting on the side of the bed ordering room service.

Marshall waited until he got off the phone. "Hal," he said, "I just wanted to let you know that I'm not going to the notary's office by myself, eh?"

"What?" Hal looked up at him.

"I said I'm not going alone to sign those papers... You're coming with me."

Hal shook his head. "I have no business there, Marshall."

"You are coming with me," Marshall met his eyes, "or I'm not going... Get ready," he folded his arms across his chest. "When the call comes, you're coming with me."

Hal sighed in frustration... "I better because I don't trust you, you little creep. You could take off with the money."

"I could do that," Marshall told him. "Get dressed."

Hal got up and went into the bathroom.

Marshall looked out the window. It was smoggy today. The tops of the skyscrapers were barely visible. Marshall closed his eyes, remembering the beauty of Rio, the beauty of Angelo's face. "I love you, Angelo," he whispered out loud, "and I promise you, my love, if he doesn't rot in prison for this, I'll kill him myself."

The call came at noon telling them to meet at an office building not far from the hotel at one-thirty.

\* \* \* \*

Hal watched Marshall curiously in the back of the taxi. He had this strange little smile on his face. What a mood switch. This one was nuttier than a fruitcake.

They arrived at the huge office tower at ten after one, and took the elevator to the eighth floor. A man holding a briefcase stood outside the office. He introduced himself as Senior Cardoso, adding that he was the deceased's representative.

Marshall shivered at the word "deceased".

"I'm Marshall Munduso. This is my friend Hal Green," he managed, trying to contain his misery. "He's along for moral support."

"Of course," he shook his head, eyeing Hal. "A terrible loss. Senior Farelli must have thought a great deal of you, Mr. Munduso. He left you everything."

Before either Marshall or Hal could respond, two other men showed up. Senior Franco, who was tall and slender, offered his sympathies to Marshall... The other man, heavy set with a bad complexion, simply nodded his head, not bothering to introduce himself.

They quietly filed into the office. The man called Senior Franco

asked them to sit down around a huge conference table.

"You have the last Will and Testament of Senior Farelli?" Senior Franco inquired of Senior Cordosa.

"Yes," he produced a paper. "I can dispense with formalities. No one needs to sit through all the legal mumbo jumbo," he smiled. "He left everything, including his land, holdings, stocks and insurance money to Senior Munduso. I only require the necessary signatures and—"

"Do we have a death certificate?" Senior Franco asked.

"Yes. Here it is," he handed over a document.

Marshall closed his eyes.

Hal shifted in his chair.

"Fine, fine. My client here wishes to purchase the land from Mr. Munduso. He is willing to pay three times the market value, providing Senior Munduso is in agreement."

Hal nudged Marshall when he sat staring straight ahead, his eyes moving to the death certificate lying in front of him.

Marshall nodded, swallowing, tears in his eyes. "Yes. I don't have...I mean I'm willing to sell. I'm not staying here. I'm going home."

"Good. I have the papers here," Senior Franco began. "You need only sign the documents after Senior Cardoso signs over the property to you."

Marshall's eyes went to the death certificate lying on the desk again.

*Angelo Farelli, died 9:30 p.m. April 8, 2003.*

"Excuse me," Marshall said, pushing the papers away from him. He stood up, feeling sick. "I need a washroom."

Hal issued Marshall a cold stare.

Mr. Franco pointed to the room on the left.

Marshall went inside, closed the door and started trembling. He closed his eyes. He could see Angelo sitting on the veranda outside, the moonlight illuminating his face. He could hear his voice, feel his touch. "My God, I loved you so much," he murmured to no one.

Then the outside door burst open.

"Police, freeze. Get your hands up. You are under arrest!"

Marshall sighed in relief. *Thank you, God.* He needed this to be

over... He opened the bathroom door and called out, "I'm here."

He walked out with his hands in the air, just in time to see a woman slapping the handcuffs on Hal.

The one called Franco and the nameless buyer were also being arrested. Only the other notary remained unrestrained.

A tall man with fair hair came over and placed him in handcuffs. Marshall didn't resist.

"Hi, Marshall," he said solemnly, leading him out of the office. Someone rambled off something to him about having a right to an attorney.

Outside, Marshall saw them putting Hal into a separate car... Suddenly, he called out, "Hey, Hal, how's it feel to be fucked by a dead man?"

Hal tried to turn around, swearing, as they pushed his head down and propelled him into the car.

The blond man got in beside Marshall and another cop with a Montreal badge got in on the other side.

"So what was that all about?" Jean-Guy asked him as the car juttet forward.

Marshall closed his eyes.

"Yeah, what did you mean by 'how'd it feel to be fucked by a dead man'?" Luigi looked at him curiously.

"It means what it means," Marshall said, eyeing him.

"Sounds like you knew the cops were going to be here," the Montreal detective commented, looking out the window.

"What if I did?" Marshall asked softly.

"Strange thing to do...you want to go to jail?"

"I want to die," Marshall lowered his head...

Luigi didn't comment. He decided those words were better left to the police shrink.

Jean-Guy shook his dark head. "Going to go the insanity route, Marshall? Think you can get away with it?"

"I'm not going any route. I'm not insane."

"Umm...don't say too much. You'll ruin your defence," Luigi commented.

Marshall looked at him.

"You're going to pay, kid," he said.

Marshall looked down at his hands. Oh, he'd already paid. He had paid far more than this cop would ever know.



## Chapter 63

After a week of having lived in an overcrowded holding cell in Sao Paulo, Marshall and Hal were finally escorted to Canada by Mary Williams and Jean-Guy Desjardins.

Marshall was taken through the airport in handcuffs and shackles. He hadn't slept. He felt his mind beginning to slip away from him. He would let it happen. He didn't want to hold on to it anymore. He didn't want to see Angelo in his mind anymore. He didn't want to hear his voice, to taste him on his lips.

At the customs, Jean-Guy showed custom agents all the necessary papers and they boarded a flight to Rio. The customs agents didn't give them any problems, perhaps anxious to get any criminal element out of their country.

Immediately upon landing at Rio, the officers whisked them down another runway and boarded on a direct flight to Montreal.

Marshall sat in an inside seat next to Jean-Guy Desjardin, his hands handcuffed to chains that connected to the shackles around his ankles. They sat in the back of the plane. Hal sat directly in front of him with Officer Williams on the aisle.

Marshall hadn't seen Hal in almost a week. The police had placed them in separate jail cells when it became apparent that Hal wanted an opportunity to rip Marshall's head off.

As the plane rose in the sky, Marshall looked out the window and watched Brazil disappear. He could almost imagine the beach where he and Angelo had danced in the moonlight. He closed his eyes in misery. He was too numb to cry. In fact, he was as dead as Angelo was.

## Chapter 64

Frank Barter was in another one of his moods today. For the last week, he knew that Gracie had noticed how on edge he was. When he came in the door, she seemed to tense. “Good morning, Frank,” she said...

What in hell was good about it? Hal had ripped him off. The little bastard must have made a deal on the side with that Colombian. He hadn’t heard from Hal in over a week. He hadn’t heard from Manolo, either. He was living on the edge. It was only a matter of time until they came for him. He managed to mumble a return greeting.

“I take it you haven’t seen the news this morning,” she blurted, just as he was about to go into his office.

He paused. “No. I made a decision to stop listening to all the horror stories out there. Why, what happened? I suppose the bridge is going to be blocked again from construction all bloody summer.”

“It’s not the bridge. It’s about...well...I thought you might like to know, seeing that they were both former residents here.”

Frank’s heart almost stopped. He gripped the door handle. “What?”

“They brought Hal Makin and Marshall Calletti back from Brazil today. They were arrested for fraud and murder.”

Frank felt as if he couldn’t breathe.

“I knew Hal was no damn good,” she quipped. “I told you, but you didn’t believe me, Frank. All that time you invested in him never did him any good. But Marshall,” she sighed. “I was sad to see Marshall involved. He wasn’t a bad kid. But I knew it would lead to no good when he got involved with that Makin guy.” Gracie kept talking, but Frank could no longer hear what she was saying. Her voice was like a foghorn in his head, getting farther and farther away. He gripped his

chest and tried to speak. Outside, tiny snowflakes began to descend from the sky.

“Frank? Frank?” Gracie said, coming close to him. Then, she let out a cry as he fell into a heap on the floor.

## Chapter 65

Marshall listened to the sounds echoing around him in the Bordeaux jail. The clicks, groans and whimpers were a far cry from the exotic sounds of Brazil.

He got off his bunk... Through his tiny window, he watched the sun rise in the sky.

Two different people told him he would soon be assigned a lawyer from Legal Aid who would handle his defence. He told them not to bother. No one listened.

He looked around his cell at the stripped bed, toilet, washbasin, and at the small desk and chair which stood beside the window.

He had no appetite. The warden had warned him last night that he had to eat. "If you don't eat anything by the end of next week," he said, "you will be put in the hospital and force fed. We are watching you."

They put him on suicide watch. Death was all he thought of.

Four days after he entered Bordeaux, he tried to hang himself in his cell with his sheets. He was almost blue when they found him. He was whisked away to the infirmary where this short stocky man without any hair came to talk with him.

"I'm Doctor Leclerc, Marshall," he said, extending his hand. "It seems you tried to kill yourself."

"Really?" He replied dryly. How about telling him something he didn't know? Marshall turned his face away. He couldn't do anything right. He couldn't even kill himself.

The doctor spoke to him in English. "You were on suicide watch. The guards were very sensitive to the possibility that you might try something. You expressed a desire to kill yourself to a police office when you were arrested."

Marshall didn't respond.

"Do you care to talk about it?"

Again, there was no response.

"Marshall, I'm going to prescribe Paxil. It's an anti-depressive. Also, I will make sure you have something to help you sleep. The guards will make sure you get your pills when you are supposed to. If you need to see me, just inform one of the guards. I will come to you as soon as possible."

He waited. Marshall didn't look at him.

"Just remember, Marshall," he added, "what seems unbearable today will get better in time. As long as you are alive, there is hope."

Marshall turned his head and looked at him. "Really?" he blinked. "Can time bring back the dead, Doctor?"

The doctor paused, surprised he had spoken. "No," he shook his head, "unfortunately not, but even the pain associated with losing someone you love grows weaker in time and—"

"Unless you can bring the dead back to life," Marshall cut him off bitterly, "don't talk to me about hope."

The Doctor sighed, "We'll talk again soon, Marshall."

Marshall turned his head back to the window. A single tear rolled down his cheek. He was given a shot of something that forced him into a foggy, restless sleep. Angelo was there in the fog. He reached out to him. He was gone. Then he heard a woman's voice, one he hadn't heard in a long time. "You miserable little bastard...you're going to turn out just like your father. I hate you. I'm going to fix you. I'm going to kill you."

*No Mommy, please don't hurt me anymore!*

## Chapter 66

Natalie Tibault ran a hand through her short dark hair and sighed as she looked at the file in front of her. Her law partner, Anne Frenier had walked in this morning and had thrown it haphazardly on the desk in front of her.

Natalie looked up at her and said, "You got to be kidding! I'm swamped. What's this?"

"A file I swiped from Records...thought it might interest you." She set a cup of steaming coffee in front of her.

Natalie smiled in gratitude. She hadn't had time to make any coffee. She glanced at the note pasted to the front of the file folder. "Not another pro bono case." Natalie shook her head. "I can hardly pay the mortgage now. Pretty soon, I'll be working for nothing. I have a big heart, Anne, but I do like to eat."

Anne laughed. "If you don't take it, it will go to Legal Aid and God love those guys down there, but you know how it is. They are overworked and..."

"What is it?" she asked. "Why should I be interested in this anyway?"

"It's the Brazil thing. Remember the two guys they brought back from South America for attempting to fraud and poison that plantation owner?"

"Oh yeah, right," Natalie picked up the file.

"The one guy Hal Makin has a lawyer, a high priced one at that. He has the money to pay. He would have made bail if the judge would have allowed it. Marshall Calletti, his accomplice, does not have any money that we know of, so it's Legal Aid for him."

"Umm," Natalie opened the file. "Why is this something I should

care about, Anne?"

"Because it will remind you of a case we worked on almost ten years ago to this day. Remember Daniel Coteau and his older brother, Francois?"

"Yeah. I remember," she replied.

How could she ever forget? Daniel Coteau was manipulated into shooting his parents. He got life. She had tried to get the sentence reduced to temporary insanity based on the fact that Daniel was psychologically dependent on Francois, but she had failed.

"Weren't the parents abusive?"

"The father was emotionally abusive to Daniel because he believed that he wasn't his real son. Francois was adored by his parents."

It all came back to her. That case had almost convinced her to leave the legal profession.

"Are you telling me we have another Daniel and Francois Coteau here?" Natalie began to skim the file.

"In a sense. I'm sure you will see some similarity. Thought you'd just like to look at it before Legal Aid gets its hands on it," Anne mused. "Oh, by the way, I swiped it so..." she held a finger to her lips and grinned.

Natalie laughed... "Thanks Anne, that's all I need...another case," she rolled her eyes, "and a partner I will have to defend on a charge of theft."

Anne laughed. "Let me know what you decide. I have to get that file back soon. Someone will be looking for it."

"I'll read it and take it back myself. Don't worry. I'll make something up."

## Chapter 67

Angelo wandered aimlessly around the plantation house, looking for this and that. Robert watched him from where he sat on the sofa. It looked like he was going to make a full recovery. He had been very lucky, but he was still a little weak and he needed to rest.

Robert felt coming back here to this house was a mistake. It had been just a little over a month since Angelo had been as near to death as one could be without visiting the morgue.

Angelo had insisted, saying he wanted to get some personal belongings. He had been very upset when he heard the news about Marta and Cruz. Robert had a hard time keeping him in the hospital during the funeral. He wanted so desperately to be there, but he was far too weak to travel.

Richardo and Maria Hernandez had moved to Sao Paulo temporarily to live with other family. The ordeal they had experienced had traumatized them and Maria's health had deteriorated greatly.

Angelo had instructed Senior Cardoso to put the plantation up for sale. Then Ricardo had offered to buy it. Cardoso advised Angelo to hold out for a better price, but he'd decided Ricardo should have it. The plantation had been in the Hernandez family for three generations. Angelo told Robert that in spite of the bad blood between them, he felt good about putting it back where it belonged. He had never really been one of them anyway.

Robert protested when Angelo told him he needed to come back here. He needed some kind of closure, but he wasn't sure he was going to get it.

Robert had insisted on coming with him. Angelo seemed a little annoyed, telling him to stop fussing over him.



Robert knew Angelo needed time alone, to think. He was in a lot of pain, and he didn't seem to know what to do with it. Robert finally understood that he had to let Angelo do what he believed he had to.

While he began to empty his bedroom closet of clothes, Robert noticed how Angelo kept looking over at the bed. The pain appeared to settle over him and cause him to take a gasp for air.

Robert watched him. When he said his name, Angelo jumped a little.

"We don't have to sleep in this house tonight, do we?"

Angelo looked up at him as he placed some t-shirts in his suitcase. "It's a little late to go back to the city tonight."

Robert sighed. "I guess it is," he walked back out of the room.

\* \* \* \*

A few hours later, they had dinner. Then Angelo disappeared. When he didn't come back after a half hour, Robert went looking for him.

He knew what Angelo called saying goodbye was just an excuse to relive the past, a past he should be putting behind him.

He found him out back, looking up at the night sky. He looked so alone. He knew it was too soon to step in and fill the void. He would wait a little while.

Robert smiled as Angelo began to point out some of the night stars. It was fate that had brought them together again, and he was going to do everything in his power to make it work this time. Back at the university, they had been too young. It wasn't the same anymore.

Angelo would have to go to Canada to testify in the future. He would have to see those two bastards again. Robert knew he would need him to lean on and he would be there... One day, Angelo would realize they had been meant for each other all along.

Robert studied him, his arms folded across his broad chest, his brow furrowed in concentration. He thought of Marshall Calletti. He knew it was selfish of him to feel grateful to him, but he was. If that bastard hadn't hurt him, Angelo would have never turned to him.

As he stood beside him in the moonlight, it took everything he had not to reach out and touch him. But he knew Angelo wasn't ready yet. He would be sleeping down the hall tonight, alone.

Later in the evening, after a few glasses of wine, Angelo started to talk about Cruz and Marta. "I went into the barn and..." he paused, his throat working. "You know, I can't believe they're dead. It seems unreal. Why did Hal Makin have to kill Cruz and Marta? They were innocent."

"They were in the way," Robert sighed.

"I can't believe how they died."

"Try not to think about that, Angelo. I know it's horrible, but try not to dwell on it too much," Robert urged.

"I can't help but feel somewhat responsible. After all, I took Marshall into the house. I..."

"No," Robert said. "You are not to blame. You couldn't have known what those men were capable of."

Angelo nodded. After a few seconds, he said softly, "They were in love, you know."

"They were having an affair?" Robert raised an eyebrow, leaning forward in his chair.

Angelo nodded, sitting on the sofa, his feet curled up under him. Robert could see his eyes glistening with unshed tears in the lamplight.

Robert leaned back against the seat. He was stretched out in an armchair near the door. He had drunk far too much wine. They both had.

"Cruz was married, wasn't he?" Robert added.

"Yes, he was married, but it had been an arranged marriage. He never really loved her. There was no passion. He had a lot of respect for her though, and he would never have humiliated her by leaving her. I don't think she loved him either. And they had children, too. He adored the children."

"Sad."

"Yes, especially for Marta who loved Cruz so much. She knew he would never leave his wife. I guess she had no choice. She was passionately in love with him, and he with her."

"Passion," Robert sighed. "Desire. They can make you do some crazy things sometimes."

"Umm..." Angelo nodded, draining his glass, looking off in the distance. "Passion has no basis in logic. There is no thinking involved. It is pure lust and physiological reaction." He closed his eyes for a

minute. "In those moments, there is no rationality."

Robert almost got out of the chair and walked over to him. Angelo didn't need to explain to him about passion...

"At least they died together," Angelo added softly.

Suddenly, Robert stood up and said, "I have to sleep." He needed to put some space between them. "We have to get out of here early tomorrow if we are going to make our flight to Rome."

Angelo nodded. "Okay, my friend, sleep well. Goodnight."

Robert went down the hall to the bedroom. Angelo remained in the living room.

After Robert had retired, Angelo thought about going down the hall and crawling into his bed. Instead, he curled up on the sofa, only to dream about things he couldn't remember in the morning.

## Chapter 68

Natalie Tibault read Marshall Calletti's file in detail. He had already been through a preliminary hearing. The judge had decided to hold the case over for trial. Marshall Calletti was being detained in Bordeaux jail until the trial took place, which could take upward to two years.

She left her office and took the file back to Records at the courthouse. She would request it officially once she had made a decision.

Then she called the Crown Prosecutors' office on her cell phone.

The lawyer prosecuting the case was Paul Seguin. She was lucky enough to get him on the first try.

"Paul," she said in French, "this is Natalie Tibault. How are you?"

They hadn't spoken in awhile, although they had had dinner a few times last year. He wasn't a bad guy, but he was a bit of a status seeker which turned her off. Unlike her, he had come from a wealthy background. His father was a judge who had hobnobbed with society's elite. His mother was an English-speaking politician in the Provincial Liberal Government. At the age of forty, he was one of Quebec's youngest and most prominent prosecutors.

"Natalie!" he said, sounding genuinely happy to hear from her. "How are you?"

"Good. Busy, but good. I hear you will be prosecuting the Calletti case."

"Calletti...ah... Sounds familiar, refresh my memory."

"One of the young guys who was brought back from Brazil a few weeks ago," Natalie reminded him, pulling over in front of a Subway.

"Oh yes, murder and fraud, unlawful confinement and all that nice

stuff. What's your interest?"

"I might want to defend him."

He laughed. "Why? He can't pay. Legal Aid will take care of him."

"I'd like to go see him at Bordeaux, talk to him." She got out of the car and checked the menu through the window.

"You can talk to whomever you like," he said. "Why tell me?"

"I just wanted you to know that I might take it on pro bono. You don't have a problem with that, do you?"

"Not at all, but it's a dud, Natalie, not to mention a political hotbed," he said. "The guy is going up to the big house, ten to life. What in hell kind of defence could you come up with? The victim he tried to poison lived to tell about it and now there are other men coming forward. This has been going on for years. And there was a silent partner in all this, a psychologist who runs some group home for boys."

"Has he been arrested?"

"He's in critical condition in the hospital. Apparently, he had a cardiac arrest, minutes before the cops arrived to question him. Talk about timing," he scoffed.

The traffic whizzed by and Natalie ducked into an alley so she could hear him. "So, one of the two other suspects ratted on this guy, is that it?"

"Yep. They never go down alone."

"Anyway, just wanted to make sure you'd have no problem facing me in a courtroom."

"Not at all, but personally I advise you against doing this. From what I hear, the guy hasn't been too co-operative with the lawyers who have seen him so far. All he seems to be interested in is sticking it to his partner."

"Really? Well, good. Maybe we can make a deal. I mean, Hal Makin was the one who murdered those people."

"That's the story. Also, a young boy Makin was involved with before Calletti showed up in the river."

"So it might mean we can make a deal," she persisted.

"I can't make any promises. We'll see what he has to offer," he replied cautiously.

"Good. I'm going to see him," she said.

"Suit yourself. Don't forget the press is all over this one."

"Umm," she mused.

"So...when should we get together again for dinner, Nat?"

"Soon, Paul," she replied hastily. "Got to run. See you," she said and rang off, putting the phone back into her purse.

She walked into Subway and ordered a sub. As she sat in her car eating, Daniel Coteau came to her mind. He had died mysteriously in prison soon after he had been incarcerated, but his brother Francois never saw a day behind bars. He presently runs a restaurant he'd bought with his parent's insurance money in Ville Lasalle.

The Brazil case brought the Coteau trial flooding back to her. She'd always felt she had failed Daniel. Maybe she could help Marshall Calletti.

As she took the last bite of sandwich, she called her office. She told her receptionist to reschedule her appointments for that afternoon.

## Chapter 69

Marshall was surprised when a guard came to his cell at two that afternoon and told him his lawyer was there.

“Another one?” Marshall inquired. “I just saw one this morning.”

The guard shrugged. “Come on,” he said.

Marshall walked with him down the hall and was led into a private room. A woman sat behind a table. She was in her early thirties with short dark hair, dressed in a navy suit. She stood up as he walked in. The guard nodded, then walked out and shut the door, leaving them alone.

“Mr. Calletti,” she said in English. “I’m Natalie Tibault. I would like to talk with you if you don’t mind.”

Marshall gave her a bland look. “About?”

“About your case. Please sit down,” she invited. She had a pleasant voice. She spoke with the faintest of French accents, much the way Angelo had spoken English.

He took a seat. “Are you a lawyer?”

“Yes. Here is my card,” she handed him one.

He took it, glanced at it, then put it on the table beside him. “Mind if I smoke?”

She shook her head. “Go ahead. I’m used to it by now. I was a smoker myself at one time.”

“They don’t allow me to have matches in here,” he said. “I have to ask the guard for a match. Hold on,” he said, getting up and going to the door. He knocked and indicated that he needed a match through the window. The guard opened the door and lit his cigarette.

He came back over, puffing on it. “Did you want one?” he asked.

“No, I gave it up a long time ago,” she replied.

"Me, too, but circumstances..." he trailed off.

"Umm," she sighed. "I've read your file. I am interested in defending you. I realize the court has appointed a lawyer but, if you agree, I will take your case at no cost."

"Why?" he asked. "You don't even know me."

"Well, Legal Aid is overworked and I think you will have a better chance with me as your lawyer."

"What do you care?" he demanded, sucking in some smoke.

She seemed lost for words. She met his eyes, paused, then said, "I once defended someone like you and I lost. It was a long time ago, so I have some personal reasons. I don't believe it was fair what happened to my client."

He didn't comment.

"Can I ask you why Hal Makin has money to pay a lawyer, but you don't? Weren't you working together? Surely, you have money to—"

"I never saw any money. He controlled it all."

"He took care of you then?" she lifted an eyebrow.

"Yes. He handled the money."

"Even your share?"

He nodded.

"Didn't you think that maybe he was using you?" Natalie inquired. "After all you were doing most of the work and he was pocketing the money."

"He told me he was taking care of it for me. He thought I'd just waste it."

She pursed her lips. "I see. Can you tell me how you met?"

"Look, I've already answered all these questions, lady. I also told the other guys that I don't need a lawyer."

Her eyes widened. "I assure you, Mr. Calletti, that you do. You are in very serious trouble. You could get ten years to life."

"I won't," he replied, shaking his head.

"Believe me, you will," she insisted.

"I won't live that long, Ms. . . Tibault. I have no intention of it."

He met her eyes so boldly she actually moved her chair back.

"Are you telling me you're sick, or that you intend to kill yourself?"

"Doesn't matter. You can sit here and talk all you want. I don't care what happens to me now. I will find a way to end it."



They sat there across from each other and the silence echoed like a scream.

"You can do one thing for me, though," he said after a few minutes.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Make sure that Hal Makin goes to prison for life."

Her eyes widened. "Well, I...I'm here to defend you, Marshall," she told him. "But, of course you can help your case if you testify against Hal Makin. I've already spoken to the prosecutor. He might be willing to accept a deal."

"Will that guarantee he rots in prison?" He demanded, leaning toward her across the table.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "It won't hurt," she replied.

## Chapter 70

All that night, her meeting with Marshall Calletti played over and over in her mind. The next morning, she went to request his file, but it was gone.

“Who has it?” she asked.

“Jeff St. Germain at Legal Aid, Ms Tibault,” the receptionist replied.

“The court has now appointed him as Marshall Calletti’s legal counsel.”

Natalie nodded and left. Two hours later, she sat outside Mr. St. Germain’s office. He was a kind man with gray hair, near retirement and definitely overtaxed. He was surprised anyone would come to him requesting to take a case off his hands.

“The Calletti case?” he laughed. “Why would you want that?”

“Personal reasons. Have you seen him?” she asked.

“Calletti. Yes,” he nodded, “once.”

“Your impressions?”

“He doesn’t want to be defended, wants to commit suicide. He tried once already. Now they’re watching him pretty carefully, but he’ll find a way to do it. I doubt that kid will make it to trial.”

“Aside from the obvious, why is he suicidal?” Natalie asked, sitting down.

“I have no idea, Ms. Tibault. He told me not to waste my time. He told me that Makin was evil and he wanted to kill him.”

“Umm,” Natalie interjected. “He asked me if I could make sure Makin went to prison for life. He’s willing to testify against him. There’s a plea bargain in there somewhere.”

He shrugged. “Don’t know how far you’d go with that. Since the press has got wind of this story at least seven men have come forward

claiming to have been victims of Marshall Calletti. He and Makin had quite a scam going.”

Natalie considered what he’d said. The publicity wasn’t good. But testifying against Makin had to score points for Marshall on some level. “What about the other guy, the guy at the institution?”

Jeff opened his file. “Ah...Barter, Frank Barter, ran a group home, Havendale House. He recently died of heart failure. Apparently he was deeply in debt, liked the casino. He brought the two suspects together, and it wasn’t the first time.”

“I see. What’s the other one like, Makin?”

He lifted a hand. “Ah...typical sociopath, I hear. No remorse, no admission of guilt. He fingered Barter. Heard he’s pretty scary. I’m glad I’m not defending him.”

“Umm,” Natalie took a breath. “If Marshall Calletti agrees, will you let me take the case off your hands?”

Jeff eyed her. “Sure, if you want it that bad.”

She stood up. “Thanks, Jeff, I owe you one.”

“Maybe not,” he laughed and watched her leave.

## Chapter 71

When Natalie Tibault came back to see him two days later to ask if he would accept her as his legal counsel, he told her it made no difference to him who defended him.

A week later, she received all the paperwork. She was Marshall Calletti's lawyer. She began investigating the case a few days later. When she was satisfied that she had all the information she could get at the time, without his input, she went back to Bordeaux.

She saw his psychologist before she saw him, that spring afternoon in late May. He was not very informative, except to say Marshall was on suicide watch and he seemed despondent and had little will to live. He ate just enough to prevent them from force-feeding him and did not associate with anyone in his cellblock. He spent his time lying on the bed in his bunk and staring at the ceiling.

"I put him on anti-depressives," he added, "but they are not doing any good. He has terrible nightmares and he seems obsessed with the idea of killing Hal Makin."

"You must see this often," Natalie said, "with prisoners. The thought of incarceration long term must be very depressing."

"Yes, but with Marshall, I don't believe it's that," he shook his head. "This is confidential," he said, "so keep it to yourself."

She nodded, moving closer to him.

"One time he asked me if I could bring back the dead. When I said no, he told me there was no hope then."

"Bring back the dead?" She blinked. "He means those he has hurt or..."

"I have no idea," he shook his head. "He is vague and often rambles in sessions with me. I can't make it out."

"Thanks, sir," she said and walked down the hallway toward the cellblock where Marshall was being kept.

She waited until he appeared in the conference room. She was shocked to see how much weight he'd lost. He was literally wasting away, his cheekbones so prominent they seemed to be poking through his flesh.

He sat down and stared at her. "So, you are my lawyer now, eh?"

She took out a package of cigarettes and gave him one. Then she leaned over and lit it.

His eyes widened.

"Privilege of being your lawyer," she grinned.

He smiled faintly at her. "Really."

She leaned back in her seat. "I know about your family, Marshall, the way you grew up, how you ended up in Havendale House."

"Must have made for fascinating reading," he remarked without emotion, puffing on his cigarette.

He looked around, his leg moving up and down. He had black rings under his eyes, his skin looked pasty.

"I'm here to help you, Marshall," she told him with a sigh. "I need you to—"

"You want to help me?" he interrupted, piercing her with his eyes.

"Yes, I do."

"Then help me kill Hal, and then help me to end it. These bastards, they watch me every minute. I need to..." He paused, leaning closer to her, "I ache to die," he said, his voice replete with anguish.

She tried not to react with horror. She made sure her voice was steady when she asked him why.

"It doesn't matter why," he shook his head.

"What if I told you that instead of prison, I may be able to convince the jury that you need treatment. That because of your background, because you never felt love, have no self esteem, that someone like Hal Makin could manipulate you into doing just about anything."

He laughed sharply. "But that's not true. I did experience love. And all that shit about getting me off, well I'd be pissing my pants with joy if I remotely gave a shit. But you're not listening to me!" He stood up and pounded on the table with his two fists.

The guard looked in the door, but Natalie shook her head at him

and mouthed the word, "Wait!"

"I'm listening, Marshall," she studied him.

He shook his head. "I want you all to leave me the fuck alone so I can die! I want relief...relief from the pain...from seeing him in my dreams...from...I want...I want..." He started crying. He went down on his knees and sobbed. "I want him."

Natalie came over and got down beside him. She placed her hand on his shoulder.

"You want...you want who, Marshall?" she urged. She knew the guard would come in at any moment.

"I want him," he sobbed, clutching her. "I just want to...I want to see his face again, hear his voice. I want him to know I never intended to hurt him. I loved him."

She encouraged him to get off the floor and made him sit down. She sat across from him again. "Let me try to understand, Marshall. Make me understand."

His eyes were red-rimmed as he looked at her, his face a mess of tears.

"I'm a loser. I'm nothing but a whore. No one...no one ever loved me, not even my own parents, and then he came along. I wasn't supposed to love him. I wasn't supposed to fall in love with him, but goddamn it..." He slammed his hand down again. "He loved me and I loved him so much...and I killed him...even though I loved him...I killed the only thing I ever loved...the only one who loved me...and I can't stand it...I can't go on living...why doesn't anyone understand that?"

He began hyperventilating. He doubled over and fell on the floor, gasping for breath. The guard came in and they carried him off to the infirmary.

Natalie waited for over an hour, trying to figure out who he was talking about. Who had he killed? It never dawned on her that he still believed Angelo Farelli to be dead.

Had he been in love with one of the two male victims in Brazil? There was Cruz Sampaio, a married farm manager in his middle thirties who was a possibility. Then there was Carlos Guterres, the fifty-two year old handyman who had been found hanging in a tree. My God, was there another victim they didn't know about yet?

Finally, she was allowed to go into the infirmary and see him. He was calm. The doctor told her he had had a severe anxiety attack and that he had given him something for his nerves.

She walked over to the bed and touched his hand. "Feeling better?"

He nodded. "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me."

"We'll talk tomorrow. Get some rest," Natalie told him and left the prison.

## Chapter 72

Two hours later as she sat in a downtown police station, her cell phone rang. It was Anne. The work was piling up and she didn't know how long the receptionist could keep shuffling appointments.

"I'll be in the rest of the week, Anne. I'm sorry. This case is taking up a lot of my time."

"Where are you now?" Anne asked.

"Police station in N.D.G. I'm waiting to talk to one of the arresting officers on the Calletti-Makin case. Something doesn't quite add up. Anyway, we'll talk about it later. Dinner tonight or do you and Jack have something planned?"

"No. He's out of town on a business trip for the company, so we're on."

"Okay... Make it around eight because I don't know how long I'm going to be waiting here. I didn't call ahead," she laughed. "I'll call you."

"All right. See you later."

Natalie took a breath and closed her eyes. She had gone over the victim list several times but she was beginning to think she must have missed something. If she had still been a smoker, this would have been the time for a cigarette. She had never seen anyone have an anxiety attack before. It was horrifying.

Finally, a detective who introduced himself as Jean-Guy Desjardin invited her to come into his office.

He offered her coffee, which she refused. "I've drank a lot of precinct coffee," she smiled, sitting opposite him at his desk.

He laughed and sat down. "Smart woman. I understand you are defending Marshall Calletti. You have some questions for me?"



"Yes." Natalie dug out her file. "Am I correct when I say there were six victims in Brazil? Three are dead, two were unlawfully confined and one is an attempted murder victim. He survived." She looked up at him for confirmation.

He nodded. "That's right. Three dead, three alive."

"Are you sure there is not another one?"

He looked alarmed. "Another one? I should hope not. Isn't that enough?"

"Then who is my client referring to when he says he killed the only one he loved? Who did he kill that he loved? Cruz Sampaio was straight and married as far as I know and—"

"Angelo Farelli," Jean-Guy interrupted her, swinging back in his chair.

She narrowed his eyes. "But he's not dead. He's a material witness."

"Yes, I know, but he is the only one that Calletti would have been in love with."

"Yes, but he must have been told that..." she trailed off. Then she gasped, "He doesn't realize he is still alive? His lawyer must have explained the charges against him at the prelim."

"It's possible he didn't understand," Jean-Guy offered, fiddling with his pen. "We have a young guy who is extremely depressed, suicidal even. I remember seeing him at the hearing. He looked like he was in a fog. I think he'd been given something for his nerves."

Natalie was outraged. "This is ridiculous to let him go on believing he killed someone when he didn't?"

"It was probably not intentional," the officer suggested. "Everyone assumed he understood that Farelli was still alive at the hearing. You know, that's how they were caught. They were led to believe that Farelli was dead."

She nodded. "I know. He tells me he loved this man."

Jean-Guy looked at her. "I think he's telling the truth about that. Calletti knew he was being setup when he walked into that office in Sao Paulo. He wanted to be arrested. Moreover, he wanted Hal Makin to be arrested."

She folded her arms across her chest and met his eyes. "You know this for a fact, that he knew it was a setup?"

"I was there. I still remember him screaming at Makin before my partner put him into the other squad car. He yelled out something about *how do you like being screwed by a dead man?*...he might have used fucked...can't remember, exactly. I also remember him telling me he wanted to die."

"Then you really don't believe he tried to kill Farelli?" Natalie asked.

He shrugged. "I think that kid has been through the mill. No one has ever given a rat's ass about him. Along comes this man who he is supposed to scam and, for the first time in his life, maybe there was some genuine feeling there. But this Makin character, he's a sociopath who had Calletti tied to him in some weird way. This kid doesn't have the skills to recognize what's real until it's too late."

She was quiet for a second. "You missed your calling, officer," she mused with a faint smile.

He leaned forward and shrugged. "I'm not really supposed to be saying this, but I've seen all kinds, Ms. Tibault. Farelli was meant to be dead before that meeting. Makin was supposed to make Calletti follow through. I think the only reason Farelli survived was because Calletti went a little lighter on the poison than he was supposed to. Listen, Calletti may be screwed up, but Hal Makin is a killer."

Natalie stood up. "Thanks, detective."

He smiled. "Good luck."

## Chapter 73

Angelo didn't want to stay with Robert at his house in Venice. It wasn't that he didn't feel grateful to him for everything he had done. He did. But Robert wanted far more from him than he had to give.

Often, he would catch Robert looking at him when he thought he didn't notice. He just knew that one of these nights, he would weaken out of pure loneliness and end up in his bed. He had nothing to give him emotionally. These past weeks, he had felt numb and empty.

He needed to concentrate on getting his life back. He had to get a job, develop an interest in something and find a place to live, alone.

It was time. He knew Robert would be upset, but he had to do it soon. The longer he waited, the harder it would be for both of them.

They had been lovers once, back in the university for a brief time. But when Robert became possessive and declared his love for him, he had ended it. He had been too young to be involved with just one person. He had always felt bad about what had happened. Robert was like a brother to him. He wouldn't put either of them through that again. He wouldn't use him.

It was these thoughts that occupied him this beautiful summer day in Venice as he sat out on a balcony overlooking the Grand Canal and drank. From where he sat he could see the former Venetian Republic's Prison and the Sigh Bridge, which was connected to the Palazzo Ducale. The legend was that the bridge was named by the prisoners who would sigh as they crossed it to the prison, because they knew they would never make it out of there alive. He felt like one of those prisoners. He felt condemned.

He avoided watching the news. He stayed away from the Internet.

He didn't want to hear or know about anything going on in Montreal. He dreaded the time he would have to fly to Canada and walk into that courtroom, but the day was coming. He couldn't avoid it forever. One day he would come face to face with Marshall again. It wasn't a question of if he could do, the question was how. How could he walk into that courtroom and look him in the face?

## Chapter 74

Marshall awoke in a cold sweat. He saw a man walking toward him in the dark. He was tall with broad shoulders. He spoke his name as Marshall held out his arms to him, and whispered something in return. When he came closer and he could see him clearly, he saw it was a bloated decaying corpse that peered back at him. Before he could scream, the image faded. "See," a voice whispered, "see what you've done to me."

He rolled over on his side and continued to dream. The medication the guard had given to him pinned him to the mattress. His struggle to rise out of the fog was in vain. The dreaming went on, so vivid, so real that he felt as if it was happening in this very room.

He was transported to a beautiful place with flowers and trees. In the distance, he could see Angelo sitting at a table in front of an outdoor cafe. He looked healthy and happy. He was smiling and waving.

Marshall started walking toward him. He stood up, looking straight ahead. Then suddenly another man met Angelo, a faceless man. They embraced. He stood, watching helplessly as they walked away together. Angelo didn't look back at him once. In fact, he had never seen him at all.

Someone was speaking to him. Then he felt someone shake him. He managed to open his eyes. He looked around his tiny cell and wondered when he had been transferred out of the infirmary. He didn't remember being taken back here.

The shadowy figure stepped back. Marshall sat up and rubbed his eyes, the fog beginning to lift.

"Hey, did you hear me?" The guard insisted, his face looming

close. "Get your pants on, your lawyer is here. Says she needs to talk to you."

Marshall began to dress. His face felt sticky and stiff with dried tears. He looked at the clock on the wall. It was almost nine o'clock at night. Maybe he was still dreaming. He didn't think he had a lawyer.

Marshall followed the guard past the cells and down to the room where he always met these people. Something must have happened. He tried to ask the guard, but was ignored.

When he was taken into the room, a woman was standing there, looking through the barred window. The guard nodded at her as she turned around, then left them alone.

"Marshall," she said smiling. "There is something we need to talk about."

At first he didn't recognize her. He blinked.

"Don't you remember me?" She asked him.

He nodded. "I'm sorry. It took a moment. It must be pretty important. They don't let anyone in at this time of night unless something is up. What is it?"

She sighed. She'd just spent twenty minutes trying to convince the warden to let her talk to him. She'd told him it could be a matter of life and death. He'd given her ten minutes.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"Tired. I was having a dream," he said, sitting down and putting his face in his hands.

"Was it a good dream?" Natalie took the chair opposite him.

"Not really," he shook his head. He looked at her with sleepy eyes.

"Let me ask you something," she came closer. "Do you think Angelo Farelli is dead?" She met his eyes.

He blinked at her and then opened his mouth. Within a few seconds, his eyes sparked with anger. "Is this some sort of sick joke? Is this what you fucking came here to do...to torment me with—" He stood up, scraping the chair across the floor. It fell over.

"No," she put up her hands. "Hear me out!"

His eyes blazed, but he remained silent.

"Angelo Farelli survived. He spent three weeks in a Brazil hospital, but they were able to save him. He made a complete recovery."

Marshall went white. Then, seconds later, his eyes rolled up in his

head and he fell forward.

Natalie yelled for the guard who came running in to help her get him off the floor. They sat him in a chair. After a few minutes, he opened his eyes.

"Get me some water," Natalie told the guard. "It was the shock, that's all."

The guard went to get the water.

Natalie put her hands on his shoulders, looking down into his face.

He nodded, searching her eyes, desperately. He wanted her to say it again. "Alive? He's really alive?" He clutched her hand so tight, she winced.

"Yes," she told him. "He's alive."

"Alive...alive," he whispered, rolling the word around in his mouth. He grabbed onto her hands. "Angelo is alive!" He started to laugh as if he had gone quite mad and the tears ran down his face as he began to cry. He stood up, pushing the chair over as he did. He put his arms around Natalie as he sobbed on her breast like a small child.

The guard came with the water. He told her she would have to leave.

She nodded and disengaged herself from Marshall. She wiped his face with the Kleenex she had in her pocket. "I'll be back soon. We will talk about this?"

He nodded. He was smiling through his tears. It moved her beyond words.

On the way home, she thought about Marshall. She knew she had to convince the jury that Marshall loved Angelo Farelli. His love for that man would be his salvation.

## Chapter 75

As long as he was alive, there was hope, Marshall thought. Angelo was alive. He hadn't killed him, hadn't taken the life of the only person in this world who had ever truly loved him. And although he knew there was little chance that they could be together, maybe one day he'd forgive him and... And what? He'd want him again? No, that was impossible, but then the fact that Angelo was alive had seemed impossible yesterday.

He longed to see Natalie again. Maybe she knew where he was, what he was doing. Had she talked to him? There were so many questions he should have asked.

He walked a few times around the yard, then stopped to watch some prisoners playing volleyball.

Then he saw Hal.

This was not the first time he had seen him. Although the warden had attempted to keep them separate, Marshall knew Hal was never far away. Looking at him, it dawned on him that his life might be in real danger. And suddenly it mattered.



## Chapter 76

Robert was not happy when Angelo told him he had rented an apartment in Rome. But finally, he did help him bring boxes from his house to the new place.

The money from the sale of the plantation had come through, which meant he had no excuses anymore for putting off his life. He considered buying a house, but decided against it. He didn't want to make any long term plans just yet. One step at a time.

It was both frightening and exciting to be at this point, to have an entire lifetime ahead of you with no idea what you were going to do. He knew it was a gift. He was damn lucky to have a life to be stressing over.

He had thought about car racing a lot over the past few months because he had always loved the excitement of the track. But he knew it wasn't for him. Considering his recent near death experience, coupled with the tragic way his father had died, racing was not even a possibility. No, life was far too precious.

He watched Robert as he wandered around his furnished apartment in the middle of downtown Rome. He sighed. Robert was sulking. He could hear it in his voice as he announced, "It's nice, but you will be lonely here."

"Robert," Angelo came over and placed his hands on his shoulders, "I have been with you all summer, making a nuisance of myself. I have to go on my own sometime, my friend. I have to think about what I intend to do with my life."

"You've never been a nuisance," Robert clucked his tongue. "I have a big house and...why should you live alone?"

Angelo shook his head. "I have to be alone to think. When I get

lonely, I'll call you. Right now, I have to decide what to do with myself. I can't just be a man of leisure the rest of my life," he grinned.

Robert smiled at him. "You could be a male escort."

"Right," he rolled his eyes.

Robert winked at him. "I'd hire you."

"Yea, Robert, but you're cheap and you'd want it for free."

He laughed. "Bugger off!"

After a few minutes, Robert said, "What about your university degree? You majored in journalism, didn't you?"

"Yes. Maybe I'll try and get a job with one of the newspapers or something. I could be a copy boy," he grinned. "I have a lot of experience with coffee."

Robert gave him a look of astonishment.

Angelo laughed. "Don't worry about me. Look, let's finish moving this stuff in and then I'll take you to dinner."

"MacDonald's?" Robert grinned.

"Yep, and I'm feeling very flush so you can have an extra pickle on your Big Mac."

Robert looked at him and grinned before slapping him on the back. "Gee thanks, Angelo, that's very generous of you."

"I know," Angelo replied as they both walked back outside, laughing.

After they carried the last few boxes inside, Robert said, "Come on, big spender, let's go eat. I'm starved."

They sped off in Robert's car to the restaurant. For a few minutes, with the wind in his hair, he actually felt normal, like everything was going to be fine. Tonight, it would all come back again.

## *Chapter 77*

Hal looked right at him. He was less than twenty feet away and Marshall knew he wasn't supposed to be.

He smiled at him, that crazy smile of his that was meant to convey some kind of feeling, feeling that he was incapable of.

Marshall held his gaze, his face a mask of hate. He thought about the many ways to kill someone. It would have to be very slow and painful.

His thoughts took him aback a little. The idea of killing Hal gave him an immediate surge of pleasure. That was somewhat unsettling. If anyone deserved to die, Hal did. But, when it came right down to it, he knew he didn't have it in him.

Hal issued him a smug look. Marshall turned away deliberately, intending to head back indoors. He looked over his shoulder at Hal one more time and saw him make his finger into a pistol. Slowly, he squeezed the imaginary trigger and fired at him in the air.

Marshall eyed the guard. "Keep that bastard away from me."

The guard turned his attention to Hal. He gave him a cold stare, which caused him to laugh.

Hal walked back over to watch the volleyball game after Marshall disappeared from his view. He had no idea who was winning, but in here it didn't really matter who in the hell won. He'd do anything to break the monotony.

He was not surprised that Marshall ran away like a little girl. He probably thought he'd kill him if he got his hands on him. Hal tightened his fists. Killing him would be too easy. He was pathetic in his suffering. Why put an end to that? Let him suffer. Marshall was the reason he was inside. Marshall had known they were walking into a

trap that day back in Brazil and he'd led him there. And he just knew he was going to spill his guts on the witness stand.

Right now, he'd wait, wait until the timing was just right, then he'd make sure he paid for his betrayal. And to think, he had betrayed him for a piece of ass.

## Chapter 78

Natalie noticed that Marshall was restless today. He paced up and down until finally Natalie said, "Please stop!"

He froze, looked at her, then came and sat down. "I'm sorry."

"What's wrong?"

"Hal Makin is what's wrong."

"Why? Has Hal been bothering you? He's not supposed to be in the same part of the prison. The warden—"

"Well, I saw him the other day. I think he's going to kill me. I just can't figure out what he's waiting for. Natalie, he probably knows I am going to testify against him."

"I'll speak to the warden," Natalie said.

He sighed. "He's going to kill me anyway."

"He's been in here for months, Marshall. I think if he wanted—"

"He's just biding his time."

Natalie looked at him. He had put on some weight and a light was in his eyes that hadn't been there. "If you feel he's a threat to your life, Marshall, I can get you put in solitary."

He nodded, twirling his thumbs around one another. "Not yet."

"I'll mention your concerns to the warden," Natalie told him again. "But right now, there are more important things to worry about. Two psychologists are coming by in the next few weeks to give you some tests. Are you up to it?"

Marshall nodded. He leaned forward suddenly and looked at her. "Ms. Tibault?"

"Yes?" she said, shuffling through some papers.

"Can I ask you about Angelo?"

He seemed almost breathless as he waited for her to react.

"I can't give you any news about him, Marshall. I don't know anything."

"Nothing, like...where he is or how he is? Is he back at the plantation or..."

"I have no idea," Natalie replied. "I'm sorry," she touched his hand. "While we are on the subject of Angelo, I need you to tell me about him."

"Tell you what?" he asked, seeming to welcome the opportunity to talk about Angelo Farelli. He sat back in his chair.

"Well...about your relationship. It's critical to your case."

"We were..." he paused, "lovers."

"For how long?" she asked.

"Ah...let's see. The first time I met him was near the end of August of last year. We became lovers before Christmas, maybe late October, early November."

"So you pursued him like the other men here in Montreal with the intention of..."

"With the intention of getting him to fall in love with me."

"All right, then you were going to kill him, but before he died he was supposed to—"

"No," he interjected, shaking his head. "I never intended to kill him. Hal never said we'd go that far."

"But, Marshall, you must have realized that Angelo Farelli had to be dead for you to inherit his property?" Natalie urged.

"Yes...no," he said. "I don't know. I suppose I did, but I didn't want to face it. I mean...I kept asking Hal and he told me it was going to be all right."

"Did you put the amount of poison in his drink that you were supposed to?"

"No. I was scared. When he got really sick, I stopped. I threw the poison away. I went to Hal and we had a fight. I couldn't bear to watch him suffer."

"Why not?"

"Because, I was in love. Because I was hurting someone I loved," Marshall said, running a hand through his hair.

"Are you sure you were in love?"

"Present tense. I am in love. I'm still in love with him and I will be

the rest of my life, even if he goes on hating me forever. There will never be anyone else for me.”

“So when did you know that you were in love, Marshall?” She wasn’t sure if she’d asked him that question as his lawyer or simply because she just wanted to know.

“The first time was when Cruz told Angelo I was meeting with Hal secretly. He was upset with me and with good reason, since I led him to believe that Hal and I had been lovers. He was hurt and his pain instantly became mine. I told him to remember that whatever happened, I really did love him. He said he loved me, too, and I ran away.”

“Why did you run? Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Hal wanted it. I knew we were winning and that soon I would have to do something I didn’t want to. I was living in a constant state of terror. Hal kept talking about the next step. I didn’t want to even know what that was.”

He took a breath. She could see this was hard for him so she waited.

He started speaking again. “Then he took me to Rio. We had the best time until this man in a bar in Rio where we were dancing said something to me. I was miserable afterward. I didn’t even let him make love to me that night and believe me, if you knew him, you wouldn’t refuse him.”

She smiled, carried away by his words.

“He is incredibly beautiful, both inside and out and he makes love like... well...” he blushed, “you get the picture.”

“Yes. Okay,” she shook herself a little. “What did the man say?”

“He said it must be nice to hold such a beautiful man in my arms since I was so in love with him. Something like that. I can’t remember his exact words.”

“And then you had to accept that you were in love,” Natalie scribbled down some notes.

“Yes, and I realized I had probably loved him the moment I set eyes on him. Sometimes I swear, Ms. Tibault, I forgot what I was supposed to be doing. Everything would blur together and I’d just be me with him and it would be so perfect.”

“And Hal, how did you feel about Hal at this time?”

"I was torn. Hal told me a lot of things that played in my mind. He told me often no one would love me, least of all someone like Angelo Farelli. I was used trash and I could never be free of my past. Gradually Angelo's words began to drown out Hal's in my mind, but there was always doubt in my head. Maybe that's why I kept on with it, until I understood Hal planned to really kill Angelo. He had been lying to me all along."

"But deep down you had to know, didn't you?" Natalie met his eyes. "You knew the intention was to kill him."

He shook his head. "I was so confused. I had never loved anyone before. He was so good to me and it was all new, like a little kid who first sees the circus. It's hard to explain."

"You told me that when you saw Cruz on your way to Hal that day, you told him that Angelo was sick and to call a doctor," Natalie said.

"Yes, but I can't prove that. Cruz is dead," Marshall protested.

"I know. That question was for me," she smiled.

Marshall nodded.

"And, in spite of the threat to your life, you untied Maria and Ricardo Hernandez."

"They were old. They would have died if we had just left them," Marshall replied.

Natalie nodded and stood up. "That's enough for today," she said, closing her briefcase.

"Ms. Tibault..." Marshall stood up now when she did.

"Yes?" She said, looking at him.

"Can you find out about Angelo for me?"

"I don't know, Marshall. I won't be talking to him for awhile. The wheels of justice turn very slowly."

She paused when she saw his disappointment. "If I hear anything about him, I'll let you know, okay?"

"Thank you," he said.

They said goodbye.

Two days later, Natalie received a phone call from the prison. "Ms Tibault, this is Warden Lemay. Your client, Marshall Calletti, has been transferred to the prison hospital."

"What happened?" Natalie gripped the phone.

"He was attacked in the courtyard, stabbed and beaten up pretty



bad. He is in critical but stable condition on the ninth floor. Thought you'd like to know."

"Hal Makin?" She demanded.

"We don't know. We are investigating. Doesn't seem to be any witnesses."

"I want my client protected, do you understand? I already spoke to you about this and..."

Warden Lemay sighed. "When he comes back to us, we will keep him quarantined."

"You better," she snapped, and hung up. She sighed. She felt guilty. She should have paid more attention to what Marshall had said about Hal Makin. She had severely underestimated him.

## Chapter 79

“It’s a crappy little job,” Robert said, biting into a piece of pizza at one of his favourite restaurants.

Angelo made a face at him and poured some wine from the bottle they had ordered. “Thanks a lot. I was feeling proud of it until you said that.”

It was the end of November and Robert was trying to talk Angelo into going skiing with him to Zurich over the holidays.

“That’s not what I meant. You could do better, that’s all,” Robert muttered, studying him. He looked so handsome. His long hair was a little shorter. He had it cut to his collar. It suited him. Everything suited him.

“They don’t give you the job of editor right away, you know,” Angelo smirked. “You have to work there at least a year and sleep with the boss.”

“Ha, Ha. Very funny. You could have gotten a job with one of the big Italian daily’s. Why that little paper?”

“Because it’s a liberal paper and we don’t have to suck up to anyone. We can say what we want.” He didn’t know why it was necessary to justify himself to Robert.

“It doesn’t pay anything. And no one reads it.”

“The pay is fine and it provides a great service. It tells people in the English speaking world what is going on in Europe.”

Robert took another bite of his pizza and waved his hand. “If you’re happy, fine. But that doesn’t mean you can’t come with me to Zurich.”

“All right,” he conceded. “I’ll come but I can’t go for two weeks, Robert. One week is all I can manage. What if you go ahead without me

and I join you for the Christmas week?"

"You mean it?" he asked, his eyes wide with excitement.

Angelo nodded. "Sure. You know how I love to ski. I haven't been skiing for ages."

## Chapter 80

Marshall spent almost two months in the infirmary. By the time he returned to the general prison population, he had fallen into a depression again. Two psychologists came to evaluate him. Both of them said he was clinically depressed.

He was pretty battered when Natalie saw him at the hospital. His face was a mess. Even after the cuts to his face healed, they had left ugly scars. They talked of cosmetic surgery but it would have to be done over time and given his background, his surgery was a low priority.

This is what Natalie believed was depressing him. Each time she saw him, she told him his face looked better but it was obvious he didn't believe her.

"Even if he forgave me one day, Natalie," Marshall said, "do you think he'd want me like this?" He held out his hands.

She didn't answer him. She didn't want to tell him what was on her mind each time he brought this up. Personally, she didn't know Angelo Farelli but she doubted he would ever forgive him for what he had done. His scarred face had nothing to do with it. He had to accept that whatever they had, it was over.

She did have news for him, though.

"Marshall, I have the reports from the psychologists. They concur with one another. You are suffering from depression. You have problems with trust and authority, and you have never dealt with your past. They believe that it was very easy for a person like Makin to manipulate you. Therefore, they will testify that they don't believe you are responsible for your actions and that you need treatment."

"What does that mean?" he blinked.

"Well, along with your testimony against Hal Makin, and the fact that you helped to save the lives of two people, it might mean you could be mandated over to a psychiatric facility for the criminally insane."

He sighed. "Doesn't sound so great."

"It's better than prison, Marshall."

He nodded. "I suppose."

"After Christmas, we are going to start calling witnesses and the prosecution will have a chance to question Angelo."

She said his name as if she knew him intimately. With all the things Marshall had told her over the last few months, she felt as if she did.

Marshall met her eyes. "Will he come here, to Montreal?"

"Yes."

"Will you see him?"

"Probably not."

"You have to, you have to see him for me," he leaned over the desk, his eyes desperate.

"Marshall, it's unethical," she said with a sigh. She wanted to yell at him to stop this foolishness, but she bit her tongue.

He shook his head. "Then I have to see him, Nat. I have to."

She stood up. "Out of the question," she snapped. Taking a few breaths, she brought herself under control again and asked him about his new cell.

"All right," he replied. "Secure."

"Good. Don't do anything to get into trouble. I'll see you soon."

\* \* \* \*

It would have been a challenge to get into trouble in solitary. He stayed alone most of the time, seeing no one. He watched television, read books and felt safe because Hal couldn't get to him.

They were still investigating what happened to him in the courtyard, but Marshall knew nothing would come of it. Hal was sly as a fox and he made sure no one had seen anything. But Marshall would remember it for the rest of his life.

The day it had happened, he had gone out in the courtyard to take a few minutes of air. He was just about to go back inside when he felt someone grab him from behind. He felt the pain everywhere and he

remembered he'd covered his eyes and his face had felt as if they were on fire. That's all he remembered.

He'd awakened in the hospital. The doctor had told him he was lucky to be alive. Six weeks later, they'd taken the bandages off his face and he'd looked at himself in the mirror and screamed. He hadn't known the person looking back at him. Now, he couldn't even remember what he'd looked like anymore.

He had one ragged scar, which ran from his left eye to his right cheek, right across his nose. Another one ran across his forehead and highlighted several small ones on the right side of his chin.

He had lost his gallbladder, his spleen and had come close to losing one of his kidneys. He had been lucky, the doctor said, but he didn't feel lucky. He lamented the fact that he had been handsome at one time. Now at twenty-two, he was a monster. The inside had finally come out.

The prison shrink put him on a higher dose of Paxil, which was supposed to make him less depressed. The only thing that prevented him from killing himself was the thought that soon Angelo would be in the same city.

## Chapter 81

Angelo left for Zurich two days before Christmas. Robert was very happy to see him. They spent most of those two days skiing and on Christmas Eve they sat together in front of a roaring fire, drinking wine.

Robert watched him as he stared into the fire. He wasn't happy, that's for sure. In fact, he looked extremely sad all of a sudden.

"Where are you, Angelo?" Robert said suddenly.

"What?" He seemed surprised.

"Where are you? Because you aren't here with me."

"I was..." he paused, "I guess I was thinking about what I was doing last year at this time."

"Which was? Don't tell me. You were with him!" Robert slapped his hands together, his voice sarcastic, angry.

Angelo nodded. "Yes. I was with him. We were in Rome."

"How fucking romantic," Robert commented, draining his glass. "Are we going to go down memory lane now?"

Angelo looked at him and shook his head. "No. I'm sorry. I just...sometimes I can't help but think of—"

"Him!" Robert growled, "The guy who almost killed you!"

"Robert," Angelo sighed deeply. "You have to understand something. I loved him. I was in love with this guy. I know it would be terrific if I could just wipe him from my mind, but I can't."

He leaned back for a moment and closed his eyes. "All the horrible things he did, they don't negate the good things. We had good times, Robert. I have memories that I just can't paint black because things went to shit. I wish I could forget I ever laid eyes on him. But there's a court case that stays around to remind me."

He didn't realize he was on his feet and that he was shaking, until Robert came over and gently took his arm. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I had no right to..." Robert bit his lip. "I just wish you could put this behind you and—"

"I will once the trial is all over, Robert. Then maybe I can get on with my life."

Robert smiled as Angelo ran a hand through his hair. "Look, it's Christmas Eve. Let's just relax and—"

Angelo met his eyes. "Do you want me tonight, Robert?"

Robert's heart went to his throat. "What? You mean it...you..."

Angelo pulled him into his arms and kissed him tenderly on the mouth. "Make love to me," he whispered softly. "I'm tired of sleeping alone."



## *Chapter 82*

Three prisoners committed suicide over the Christmas holidays. Although they tried to keep it quiet, the news always got out. Even Marshall heard it in solitary.

Natalie brought him chocolates and two cartons of cigarettes for Christmas, which was really nice of her, because she was constantly on his back to quit smoking.

He made her a card and bought her some nice stationary at the canteen. In the card, he wrote, “to the second person in my life who ever really cared.”

She was very touched by the sentiment.

On Christmas Eve, he dreamed of Angelo. They were making love. He woke up sticky and covered with his own semen. He cleaned himself up and stood looking out the window. He could see Christmas lights across the city. They reminded him of what the lights had looked like in Rome last year. They had rarely left the room, except for that tour they took. He had spent two days in Rome and saw most of it from the hotel window. But he didn’t care because all he wanted was Angelo... They could have been in a tent in the backyard.

Rome had been so romantic. They had lain naked on the bed, drinking champagne and listening to Christmas music. They had made love and then ordered a midnight supper, then made love again. They had planned to walk around outside the next day before going home, but they had awakened and ordered a huge champagne breakfast and then made love again. Even on the plane back to Brazil, he had wanted him. He had slipped his hand under his coat and fondled his sex all the way to Rio.

He swallowed hot tears. He ached to know where Angelo was. Was

he alone? Was someone touching him? The loneliness was excruciating. "I love you, even though I know you must hate me," he whispered to no one, closing his eyes. "Nothing will ever change that."

## Chapter 83

Natalie went home to Quebec City for Christmas. She must have had fifty messages on her machine when she returned, but only one message caused her to jump in her car. Marshall had spent three days in the infirmary over New Years. He'd taken an overdose. How he got his hands on a whole bottle of pills, she had no idea.

When she arrived, the psychologist told her he was fine. "Can't kill yourself with these things," he said. "Just make you sick. He's fine."

"How did he get a whole bottle?" Natalie demanded.

He shook his head. "I don't know. During Christmas, the staff is always distracted. You can get just about anything in here if you want it bad enough."

"Why did he do it?"

"He's depressed. Christmas is a bad time. We've had three this year, two on Christmas day. Just be happy he failed."

She nodded. "I want to see him."

"He's back in his quarters."

When she walked in, he barely looked up from where he was sitting at his writing desk. It was a snowy dull day outside and there was no sun.

"I want to talk to you," she said, slamming her briefcase down on the bed.

"Don't freak out because of the pills. I didn't mean to off myself. I just wanted to sleep."

"Christmas is depressing I know, but damn it... Marshall, I'm putting all this effort into your case and you do this shit." He could see she was very upset.

He stood up and came over to her. "I'm sorry. If you must know I

had a dream and I was reminded of the extremes in circumstances from one Christmas Eve to another.”

“You were with him last year,” she stated rather than asked.

“Yes, in Rome and we spent Christmas in bed.”

She saw a ghost of a smile on his face.

“It was the best Christmas I ever had and I miss him and time doesn’t help. I think I miss him more and more each day. These doctors tell me time will make memory fade. Nothing I did with him, none of the memories I made with him, have faded. If anything, they are more vivid than ever. I can remember every detail of his face, Natalie,” he looked at her. “I can see his eyes, the way he used to lift one corner of his mouth when he smiled. Do you know he had the most incredible mouth?”

She let him go on because she knew he needed to.

“His bottom lip was slightly fuller than the top one and when you kissed him, you had to take time to taste his lips, they were sweet. Sometimes he tasted of wine, sometimes it was...just him. He had this taste like vanilla...so subtle...so...”

He was lost. He was far away. She had no idea what it would be like to love someone like that, but somehow she didn’t want to know. She couldn’t ever deal with the loss.

“Marshall,” she said, “Marshall.”

He came back to her, tilted his head. “Sorry. What?”

“Please, don’t do this to me anymore, okay?”

“Okay,” he replied. “But you got to promise me something in return.”

“What?”

“When he gets here, you will go and see him, and talk to him for me.”

“Marshall,” she snapped. “We discussed this already. I could lose my job. I could be disbarred for just dropping in on him.”

“No one has to know. You don’t even have to discuss the case. You just have to tell him that I love him. Please, Nat, please,” he pleaded.

“No. That’s out of the question, Marshall. First of all, it’s...I can’t...I...”

“When is he coming?”

“Next week.”

Marshall closed his eyes. "All right. If you do this, I promise to cooperate with all those experts you send here. Please Nat. You don't have to discuss the case. Don't even tell him you are my lawyer if you don't want... Just say you have a message for him. Call him if you—"

"No more discussion of this," she shook her head. "Down to work."

They talked about Hal, how they had met, how their relationship had developed.

Before she left that day, Marshall looked at her sadly and said, "Natalie, what I asked you to do for me...please...please...I..."

She turned around and left without answering.

## Chapter 84

“I’m going alone, Robert,” Angelo said, packing his suitcase. “This is just to give my testimony to the prosecutor. He said a week at the most.”

“I don’t think you should go alone.”

“I don’t think you should worry so much,” Angelo told him, kissing him on the nose.

He picked up his suitcase and motioned to him. “Come on, if you’re driving me to the airport. I’m already late. Got to catch that plane to Montreal tonight.”

“All right,” Robert said. “It’s about time you buy your own car, isn’t it?” he teased.

Angelo nodded. “I will.”

When they arrived at the airport, Angelo grabbed his bag out of the back seat and said goodbye.

“Hey,” Robert complained, pointing to his mouth.

Angelo leaned in and kissed him.

“Umm,” Robert remarked. “Call me as soon as you get to the hotel.”

“Yes, Mother,” Angelo mocked and shut the car door.

Robert watched him disappear inside the airport. He had been dismayed when Angelo had received the call. He didn’t want him going to Montreal, especially not now when things had changed between them. They had become lovers again on Christmas Eve. Angelo often spent the weekends at his house and they would have sex. Their relationship was fragile, but he felt as if Angelo was moving toward a commitment. Now, he was leaving.

## *Chapter 85*

Anne sat at her desk looking at Natalie. She had been distracted most of the morning.

"I thought I saw the sun for a second or two earlier," Anne joked. It was after two and neither one had eaten lunch yet.

Natalie didn't respond.

"Nat? Are you hungry?" Anne urged.

She looked up. "Damn it, yes, but I don't have time to go out. Why don't you order us something?"

"I will." She paused for a minute, then said, "Natalie, are you okay?"

She put down her paper and looked at her. "Anne, do you believe in love?"

"Of course I believe in love."

"I mean love that is more important, stronger even than your own life?"

Anne sat down and gave her an inquiring look. "Are you in love, Natalie?"

She laughed. "No. Not me. Over the months I've listened to Marshall talk about Angelo Farelli and I've decided his love for him is a key factor in his defence. But I am quite...ah...I don't know...stunned by it all. No, that's not the right word...spellbound I guess."

She got up and poured herself some coffee. She was thoughtful for a moment. "Here are these two young men who meet at the ends of the earth. One is there to deceive the other, except he falls in love with him. Finally, after not knowing what love feels like, someone loves him. On the other end is a manipulating evil sociopath who forces him to

almost kill the man he loves. Am I making any sense?"

"Yes. I understand you."

"The odds that someone like Marshall would even find this man is like...almost nil, but he does. Anne, Marshall doesn't seem to be able to let go. He doesn't seem to understand that Angelo Farelli will probably never forgive him for what he did. Would you forgive someone for almost killing you?"

Anne shook her head. "No."

"And he was attacked in prison. His face was horribly disfigured." She rubbed her face with her hands. "And what Marshall asked me to do...well...it's...I could, but I..." She shook her head.

"What did he ask you to do, Nat?" Anne demanded, watching her partner with concern.

"Farelli is coming into the city today. He's probably already here. Marshall wants me to see him."

"Nat, do you think that's wise?"

"No. It's not wise. He wants me to tell him he still loves him and that he's sorry." Natalie sighed. Her eyes filled with tears. "Farelli believes that Marshall tried to kill him, that he never loved him. Marshall is in agony over the thought that he believes that because..."

"Nat," Anne came closer, placing a hand on her shoulder, "you are becoming too emotionally involved in this case. You are losing your objectivity. Marshall Calletti is no innocent. He did some horrible things, even before Brazil."

"But he is a victim, don't you see?" Nat appealed, pushing her files aside. "In his own way, he's been a victim all his life."

"But it's not up to you to—"

"I know." Natalie put up a hand, swallowing. "I know." She stood up. "I need some air," she announced, and walked out of the office.



## Chapter 86

Marshall was allowed two five-minute phone calls a week. This was the first time he had used both in the same morning. He left two messages on Natalie's machine. Both times, he said, "Please, Natalie, I know he's here in the city. I can feel him. Please go see him and tell him I love him and that I'm sorry. No one has to know. Please, Nat, not as my lawyer but as my friend."

Natalie arrived at Bordeaux a few hours after receiving his messages. The minute she walked into his cell, he asked her if she had seen him.

"No. I haven't seen him," Natalie shook her head, her hair still sprinkled with snowflakes. She took off her coat. "You used both your phone calls for the entire week to leave messages on my machine," she stated, looking him in the eye.

"I have no one to call anyway."

"You could have called him yourself."

He looked at her, his mouth open. "What?"

She knew what she was saying was wrong. "I could tell you where he is staying and you could call him at the hotel and..."

"And what?" Marshall got up off his bed and threw his hands in the air. "Talk to him in two five minutes segments? What are the chances he hangs up on me? Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I don't know that he probably doesn't want anything to do with me? I almost killed him."

"Or you don't have the guts to talk to him because you did try to kill him!" Natalie snapped, slamming her briefcase down on the little writing desk. She was angry, angry with herself mostly for getting caught up in all this.

"You're right. I don't have the guts." He couldn't stop shaking. "And I don't even have the right to hear the voice of a man I once held in my arms. I lost that right the moment he knew that I was a fraud and that I was trying to poison him. So don't talk to me about guts. I don't even know how in the hell I will ever face him again in that courtroom when the time comes, especially now that my face is a mess."

She lowered her head for a minute. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said any of that. It's not a good idea for you to have contact with him. I don't know why I—"

Marshall nodded. "I know. It's okay. I also know what you think Natalie, when I say he wouldn't want me now with my face like this. You think I'm crazy, because you know I still love a man who despises me, but you don't have the heart to say it because you're kind."

She bit her lower lip.

"I have nothing, Natalie," his voice broke, "nothing but my fantasy. It keeps me going. It keeps me alive, even if one day I know I'll have to let go of it. But one thing is true," he said, coming over and taking her hands in his, "I need for him to know that I really did love him and that I'm sorry. Not just for me but for him because I know," he paused, the tears rolling down his cheeks. He wiped at them and continued, "Because I know I hurt him deeply and it's killing me. I regret that most of all, don't you see? He trusted me enough to give me his heart, and I betrayed him in the worst way someone can." He squeezed her hands. "You have to try to understand...to hold someone the way I held him, the way I touched him, then for him to..."

He stopped, let go of her hands and turned away, his shoulders heaving.

Natalie wiped the tears from her eyes. "I'll do it," she said helplessly... "I'll go and talk to him, tell him what you want me to."

Marshall turned around and put his arms around her. "Thank you...oh Natalie...thank you."

It was after supper when she decided to see Angelo Farelli's. He was being put up at a hotel near the Justice building. She called the front desk and asked them to ring his room...

## Chapter 87

Natalie rang his room from the courtesy phone in the lobby when she didn't get an answer the first time. She would wait for a while if he was out. She knew if she left now, she probably would lose the courage to come back.

She felt uncomfortable doing this. Not only was it unprofessional of her, it was not her place to run messages for her client. She had become too personally involved. If she thought Marshall would have a decent chance with another lawyer, she would back out of the case.

She heard a voice in French say, "Oui?"

She gripped the phone, "Mr. Farelli?"

"Oui," he replied again.

"I'm Natalie Tibault," she said in English. "I would like to speak to you if you don't mind. We have a mutual acquaintance."

"Yes, who?" His voice was deep and smooth with just the faintest accent.

"Well, I would prefer to conduct this conversation in person. May I come up?"

"I was just going out for dinner. Would you care to join me, Ms. Tibault?" He asked.

"Ah, yes. All right. I will wait in the lobby, near the front desk."

"Fine. I'll be right down," he said and closed the connection.

Natalie saw him in the distance as soon as he stepped off the elevator. One couldn't help noticing him. He wore a thigh length black leather jacket over a white cable knit sweater and a pair of navy dress pants. His black hair, which fell to his collar, was thick and shiny. He was tall, well over six feet, with broad shoulders and a muscular well-toned physique.

He smiled when she walked toward him, which almost knocked her sideways. To say he was a handsome man would have been a cry against nature. He was quite simply beautiful. She understood immediately what Marshall had seen in him.

They walked to a little restaurant down the street that made excellent Cambodian and Vietnamese food. On the way, they talked about the city. She asked him about Rome and his trip here. He was polite enough to wait until they were seated at the restaurant before he asked her what she wanted to talk to him about.

"Are you connected with the prosecution, Ms. Tibault?" He asked, raising an eyebrow.

The waiter came over and he asked her if she wanted wine. She said yes, and he ordered a bottle of very expensive red wine. She looked around her. It was a nice restaurant, intimate with dim lights.

"Ms. Tibault?" He looked at her, took his napkin from the table and placed it on his lap.

"No, Mr. Farelli, I'm not connected with the prosecution."

"Please, call me Angelo," he insisted as the waiter brought their wine.

They ordered food a few minutes later and Natalie knew the time had come to tell him who she was. "I guess I should tell you, Mr. Farelli, I'm Marshall Calletti's lawyer," she said, waiting for his reaction.

He took a long drink from his wine glass, letting it stay in his mouth for a minute before swallowing, then he sat his glass back down and looked at her. "I see."

His face was completely unreadable.

"I have some things to tell you but it would be better if we ate first."

"Are you afraid I'm going to have indigestion, Ms. Tibault?" He lifted an eyebrow and smiled faintly.

"I hope not," she managed, breathing a little easier. "Please call me Natalie."

He gave her a quick acknowledgement with his dark head. "All right, Natalie. Should you even be here with me tonight, given your role in this case?"

"Probably not."

"Then why are you?"

"I'm not here as his lawyer, I'm here as his..." She trailed off.

"Yes?" He persisted.

"Friend... I guess."

He gave her a curious look. "I see. Obviously you want something from me, Natalie, or you wouldn't have sought me out. What is it?"

"I don't want anything from you... not really." She moved around in her seat.

"I'm making you uncomfortable. I'm sorry," he said.

"Look, let me be honest with you. I'm here because my client begged me to come here and speak to you. It was against my better judgment but..." she paused.

"But," he interjected, "he managed to make your heart bleed for him."

It was the first hint of sarcasm she had heard from him. It rolled off his tongue quite smoothly.

"Are you insinuating I'm being manipulated by my own client, Mr. Farelli?"

"I'm not insinuating anything, Ms. Tibault."

The food came which abruptly cut the looming tension. They occupied themselves with their dinner, leaving most of it on their plates, speaking little. They didn't linger over coffee and they skipped dessert. Angelo insisted on paying for both of them and they left.

"Could we talk in your room?" Natalie asked when they arrived back at the hotel. She had come this far. She had to finish it now.

"Of course," he replied, with a stiff nod.

They rode together in the elevator, he looking straight ahead. She looked down at her hands.

Once inside his room, she sat in one of the chairs beside the table. He took the one opposite her after he had removed his coat.

They looked at each other for a moment.

"I came here because Marshall asked me to." She pulled her own coat around her tightly.

He remained silent for a second, then nodded. "I think you told me that already."

"He wanted me to give you a message and I..."

He stood up. "This meeting is over, Ms. Tibault. Thank you for your company at dinner. Don't take this personally, but I would really

appreciate it if you left.”

She stood up and looked at him. The pain showed in his dark eyes. “I have to say what I came here for, Angelo. I made a promise. Marshall wants you to know that he loves you and that he is sorry for all the pain he has caused you.”

He was quiet. For a minute, she thought he wasn’t going to answer, then he said, “What do you expect me to say?”

“I don’t expect you to say anything,” she shook her head. “I understand how it must—”

“You understand?” he echoed. “You understand what it feels like to have someone rip out your entire heart and almost take your life as well? You’ve been made a fool of by someone you were in love with... someone who intended to rob you and then leave you for dead? You understand how that feels, Ms. Tibault?”

Although his voice was perfectly calm, his black eyes were alive with anger.

She cleared her throat. “No. You’re right. I don’t know what that’s like. Marshall thought if you knew he really loved you, it would make it easier somehow. What he regrets most is how he hurt you and losing you. I think he regrets that most of all.”

“Does he?” he sneered.

“I know you can’t feel any pity for him but...”

“Pity?” he lifted an eyebrow.

She sighed. “He doesn’t belong in prison, Mr. Farelli. I think you know that.”

“Really? Then where does he belong, Ms. Tibault, on the streets where he can take some other poor sap for a ride? You seem to forget, I’m not his only victim... He did this kind of thing before, here in his own country.”

“He needs treatment.”

“Yes. He’s had a hard life,” he shook his head mockingly. “Of course, most of what he said to me were lies, so let’s give him the benefit of the doubt, hold his hand, wipe his brow and maybe he’ll become a fine upstanding citizen one day.”

She kept her tongue. She knew he had a right to feel that way. “I don’t think prison would do him any good, Mr. Farelli, and I’m going to do my best to make sure he doesn’t end up there. I think you should

know that he plans to testify against Hal Makin.”

“That doesn’t surprise me, Ms. Tibault. I would, too, if it meant a lighter sentence.”

She sighed. “It’s not just that.”

He gave her a caustic look. “Have you ever thrown up blood, Ms. Tibault, had such pain in your stomach you wished you were dead, gone into seizure and had six inch syringes of shit pumped into your muscles for days?”

She hung her head.

“Well, I have, and you know what? That was a picnic compared to what my heart felt like when he was finished with it.” He turned away and when he turned back, his eyes were filled with anguish. “I loved him,” he said suddenly, his voice filled with passion, “I loved this man with every fibre of my being and I believed he loved me. He tore my heart to shreds, he destroyed me and now I will end up spending my life alone, without love because I will never trust anyone again. If you want to tell him something, tell him that.”

Natalie was frozen to the spot. She wanted to touch him, but she didn’t.

“Tell him I still dream about him,” he whispered hoarsely, “still want him. Tell him to think about all the men I plan on having sex with in the future and let it torture him, because he may not have loved me but he certainly wanted me. That’s one thing he wasn’t able to fake.”

“I’m sorry,” was all she could say.

“You’re not going to tell him that, are you?” He demanded, turning to look out the window.

“No. If you want to hurt him, do it yourself. I came here to deliver a message. He says he loves you and I believe him. He says what he regrets most was hurting you and I believe that too.”

She waited. He turned around but he didn’t say anything.

His eyes were moist. After a minute, he said soberly, “It took a lot of courage for you to come here like this. I’m sorry if I . . .”

She shook her head. “The real evil one here is Hal Makin. Hal manipulated Marshall, but in the end Marshall led Hal into a trap, knowing that he’d be arrested too. He intended on telling you everything the day you left for the hospital, but it was too late. Did you know that? Did you know he told Cruz to call the doctor and that he

attacked Hal Makin in—”

He looked down.

She stopped. It was clear he didn't want to hear any of this.

“Does any of this make a difference to you?” She asked him softly.

He waited, then he said, “No. It's a little late in the game. He could have told me about what was going on at any time. He chose not to.”

“He's tried to kill himself several times in prison. Hal beat him up and put him in the hospital for two months because he set him up...because he's going to testify on that stand against him. He...”

“Stop,” he put up his hand.

She buttoned her coat. “I'm sorry. I've said far more than I was supposed to. Can we keep this meeting between the two of us, Mr. Farelli?”

He nodded at her. “Good evening, Ms. Tibault,” he said as she put her hand on the doorknob.

She hesitated, then turned to look at him. “I like you, Angelo. I feel as if I know you. I want to thank you for something.”

“What's that?” he asked, sinking onto the bed.

“Thank you for being the only one who ever truly loved him. He will always have that. You gave him that gift.”

He nodded.

She opened the door and left his room. Tears streamed down her face as she waited for the elevator.



## *Chapter 88*

She knew he was waiting for her to tell him about her visit with Angelo, but it had taken her the last few days to get her head together.

He came over to her as she walked in. He didn't smile. "Why have you made me wait? Did you want to torture me?"

She walked passed him without answering. He watched her for a moment. She kept her back to him.

"How dare you make me a party to this," she stated all of a sudden. "How dare you play it out before my eyes and make me watch it. It's like a train that was driven off the track and there are no goddamned survivors!"

He sighed. "But it was a beautiful ride while it lasted," Marshall whispered.

"Don't patronize me," she snapped, turning around to face him. "Don't ever play with me, Marshall. How could you make me do this? Why did you make me go see him at all?"

"Then you did. You did see him?" Marshall came closer to her. He had an anxious look on his face. "Tell me...tell me everything."

She sat down, not taking off her coat. Never before had she become this emotionally involved with a clients life. How had she gotten to this place? "I can't do this anymore, I won't do it. I want that understood."

He took her hand. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize that you were going to become so involved...that this was going to hurt you."

It was inevitable that she would become embroiled in all this because it was part of her defence, but she was being sucked into this vortex of loneliness and longing and it was eating away at her.

"I will not be your messenger. I am your lawyer." She met his eyes.

"I understand. Now please, Natalie, please tell me."

She sighed. "I went to the hotel and he was there. He came down to meet me and we went to dinner."

Marshall gripped the table. "How is he?"

"Good." She was going to add, gorgeous, but she thought it wasn't appropriate. She smiled faintly.

He smiled. "He's really well?"

"He's well, Marshall. He is a very charming man."

Marshall swallowed. "Yes. Did you tell him who you were right away?"

"Yes. We didn't talk until we went back to his room. We had some tense moments. I told him what you wanted me to and that was it."

Marshall winced. "What did he say?"

This was the hard part. "Do you really want to know?"

"Is it bad? He said he hated me right, he never wanted to see me again, he wished I was dead, right?"

"No," she shook her head. "He didn't say any of those things."

"Then, what?" He insisted.

She wasn't sure what part of it she should repeat, that's what had kept her from seeing Marshall the last couple of days.

"Please," he pleaded.

"He said he loved you." She didn't meet his eyes. "But I think he meant in the past tense, Marshall, not now."

He took in some breath. She knew he wanted to cry. He fought to hold back the tears. "I see," he managed.

"There's more. He said you tore out his heart and that he will never trust anyone again. He sees himself being alone the rest of his life."

Marshall nodded, unable to speak. He turned away from her, head down.

"Do you want to hear any more?"

He nodded his head.

"He told me he doesn't believe you ever loved him," Natalie said, pausing when she heard him groan with despair as if he had been punched hard in the gut, then she continued as he quieted. "The rest of it is too much even for me. I told him if he wanted you to hear it, then he could tell you himself."

He was quiet. He was bent over the chair, not saying anything. Then

he spoke very softly, his voice a mask. "Could you give me a minute alone?"

She got up and left him, saying she'd be back in twenty minutes. She walked the concrete corridor and got a coffee out of the vending machine. It tasted terrible, but then it suited her mood. She was devoting far too much time to this case. There was no reason for her to come up here every week. She was going to tell him they would meet once a month until a trial date was announced. She had to do this for her own well being.

Natalie finished her coffee and nodded to the guard who would let her back in the cell. She had told him what she thought was appropriate to tell him. None of it was a lie. He stood looking out the window when she came back in. He turned around when she spoke his name. "Is he still here in the city?"

"I have no idea. I suppose he will leave when the prosecutor's office is done with him."

Marshall looked around at the gray walls, then at her. "He said a lot of things, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did."

"But he never actually said he still loved me," Marshall sighed.

"Well, no."

Marshall waved his hand at her. "Let it go now."

"He said a lot of things and..." she stopped, but she knew they had talked enough. "Marshall, I'm going to come up once a month until the date for the trial is set. Then we will meet more frequently. If you need something, call me. Leave a message."

"All right." Marshall watched her pick up her things. "I understand I'm just too sad to be around."

She looked up at him. "Is that what you think?"

"I...yes and I had no right to—"

She put up a hand. "Marshall, those two psychologists who evaluated you, well one of them will be coming up here next week to start treatment with you. I forgot to mention it, he's very good."

"Which one? They aren't very pretty to look at," he managed to smile. "Is that on purpose?"

She grinned. "Yeah... It's on purpose. I will keep on top of things, Marshall. Be good. And it's the bald one."

He nodded and lifted a hand to her. She left without saying goodbye. She felt as if she was being torn from something. She had grown too attached to him and her empathy had far surpassed what was considered healthy. A separation would be a good thing.

## Chapter 89

The winter slipped away and the spring arrived, and Marshall was taken out of solitary. Hal Makin had been moved to another prison pending his trial. This relieved his mind greatly.

He had a session with Dr. Matthews each week. Dr. Matthews talked a lot about the *inner child*. “Marshall,” he told him, “we must go back to the past so that we may find the inner child. He’s wounded and needs to heal.”

Marshall looked at him for a minute. “Personally, I’d rather leave him where he is, Doc.”

He nodded. “You never really felt loved growing up, did you?”

“Kind of hard when your mother tries to kill you with a kitchen knife,” Marshall winced.

“You have repressed a lot. I understand that, but in order to get better, you have to deal with the pain of your past.”

“If you’d had my childhood, Doc, you’d repress things, too.”

“You talk from your head, Marshall, not your heart. You need to reach down in and grab those feelings. The reason you are who you are today is due to how you felt as a child. You need to reconnect to those feelings, face them and then get rid of them so you can grow. Do you understand?”

Yeah, he understood fine. It all made sense, but he had no intention of going back to that dark place.

It was the same thing week after week. The doctor asked him questions and he avoided them.

Summer came, hot and furious, and Marshall was given kitchen duty. He didn’t associate at all with the other prisoners. He stayed out of places where he could get into trouble and so far no one had

bothered him.

Natalie came once a month to see him as she'd promised and they always had a good meeting. She was optimistic that everything would work out.

Angelo still was the first thing on his mind in the morning and the last thing on his mind every night. Even though he knew in his heart they would never be together again, it was the hope that one day he would forgive him which kept him alive.

## Chapter 90

Winter turned into a second spring, then into summer. The courts were backed up, but Natalie was sure a trial date would be announced soon.

Natalie tried to see Marshall as often as she could. He was continuing his education and trying to pass the time while he waited.

When she asked him how it was inside and if he was ever harassed or threatened, he would laugh. He'd say, "I don't need to worry about getting raped in the shower because my face is so ugly." Natalie would always feel bad when he talked about his appearance and she would ask him about his sessions with Dr. Matthews.

"I understand how Hal was able to manipulate me now, I guess," he sighed, fiddling with a piece of drawing paper one last August afternoon. He had begun sketching. He had a natural talent for it. He drew a picture of her once that blew her away. She put it up in her office.

"That's good," she said.

"Yeah, I guess. I also realize that Art also manipulated me in his own way. He was the one before Hal who was kind of my surrogate father. I still feel that we saved each other...or at least he saved me from sleeping on the streets and going hungry. Looking back, it seems I may have done more harm than good to him by supporting his habit. Anyway," he trailed off.

"I hear you've been reading a lot also," Natalie said.

"I really like history," he said. "I have been reading about South America. There was a lot of stuff I didn't realize when I was there. I'm reading about Italy and Portugal, the culture, the customs. It passes the time."

"Angelo is Portuguese, isn't he?" She commented casually.

"Half, maybe a quarter. His mother was Portuguese and Spanish mixed, and his father was Italian."

"Are his parents still alive?"

"No. I remember a story he told me once about his parents, a very sad story."

They looked at each other for a minute. The moment passed. They hadn't brought Angelo up for a while.

Marshall smiled. "Human beings are funny. Sometimes the greater your love is for someone, the more the odds are that you will never be together. It's as if the time you do spend together...well, it sounds stupid..."

"What?"

"It's as if there is a limit on how much passion and happiness you are allowed to experience in a life time. If you use it all up in a short time then, that's it. You don't get any more."

Natalie made a face. "I'd hate to think that's true."

Marshall shrugged. His face shadowed suddenly.

"Can I see your drawings," she indicated his sketch book which lay on the bed, "or are they private?"

He shrugged. "Go ahead, but don't laugh or be shocked."

She stood up and went to get it. She began to pull the pages back to see a drawing of the prison and prisoners, their expressions captioned by shadow and lines. Then toward the back, she found a face drawing of Angelo Farelli. He was smiling, his eyes bright and expressive. She turned the page again to see several more. He was riding a horse in one, and the next one showed him lying naked on a bed in a large room with a ceiling fan and rattan furniture. The breath caught in her throat.

"You're not shocked, are you?" He asked, coming up behind her. He traced the line of his body with his finger. "He was far more beautiful than that. I don't think I could truly capture all that beauty."

"This is private," she said softly, "maybe I..."

"No. Go on. I don't mind sharing him with you. You know me better than anyone, except for him, and I think that you can appreciate these far more than anyone else. Besides," he smiled faintly, "you know him."



“Not really. I met him but I . . .”

He turned the page for her. The next drawing showed him sitting up in bed. Marshall sat between his thighs, his head back on his chest, and the palms of his hands resting on his thighs. Angelo’s arms were around him casually and his lips were close to his cheek, but not touching it. The faces looked dreamy, their smiles soft and far away and around them was mist. They were in a private heaven where nothing could get to them.

She didn’t want to look at that anymore. She closed the book.

“What’s wrong?” Marshall asked. “You don’t like it?”

“It’s beautiful,” she said softly. It was just too beautiful. “But that one seemed so real, I felt as if I were an intruder.”

He took the book. “I draw from memory. I have many and as time passes, they are still as clear to me as if they happened yesterday. To draw them is to . . . I don’t know . . . express them, I suppose.”

She squeezed his shoulder. “I’m expecting an announcement soon, Marshall, and as soon as I hear—”

“Don’t worry Nat, I’m all right. You haven’t heard anything about him, have you? I mean . . .”

Natalie shook her head. “No.”

They said goodbye in the hallway and Marshall went to the weight room to work out. It relieved the tension and it was better than taking a lot of medication. He knew that as time wore on, the stress would increase. He just had to learn how to pace himself.

## Chapter 91

Robert seemed to be pleased when Angelo had been given his first story at the newspaper. It was a piece on homelessness in Rome and he spent his time interviewing street people.

Angelo didn't have as much time to see Robert. He knew he'd been a little distant since he'd returned from Montreal. Angelo had been seeing a lot of different men. He went to a bar after work called the Americano. It was an out of the way gay bar for Americans in Rome. He rarely left the bar alone.

Robert lectured him every time they met, interrogating him about safe sex and AIDS tests. It was getting old. They met for coffee one Saturday.

Angelo had shaved, and cut his hair short. He had bought himself a motorcycle. People told him he looked a little like a Bohemian with his faded jeans and wool anorak.

"So how's work?" Robert asked.

"Great. I'm finishing up that story on the homeless. It's going well."

They ordered coffee and Robert smiled at him. "So have you discovered that most of them want to be on the street?"

"No," he replied. "Most of them have no choice and they've adapted somehow, developed survival strategies." He took a sip of his coffee. "They are not much different than anyone else. We all arrange things in our life and our self conscience allows us to keep going."

"Care to elaborate?"

He sighed. "Read the article."

"I will." Politically, they were different. He knew Robert was more of a right wing conservative. They often had heated debates about things.

"Can I write my objections to your editor?" Robert teased.

"It's a free world," Angelo said flippantly.

"Are you feeling okay?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"You seem to be bed hopping. Not very safe."

Angelo sighed, putting down his coffee cup. "I was wondering when that subject would come up. You actually held off for twenty minutes this time. I'm not a child. I wish you would stop treating me like one."

"I think you are searching for something and you are not going to find it in empty sex, Angelo. As your doctor, I..."

"Stop it, Robert. You are my friend first, not my doctor. I'm not an idiot. I know what I'm doing. It's not your business who I sleep with. If you want to keep being my friend, stop this nagging."

He was angry.

Robert looked down. "It's only because I care."

"Well, care less," he replied.

"Since you came back from Montreal, you—"

"Oh for Christ's sakes," he snapped. "Will you forget about that?"

He lowered his voice some. "If I cooled it with you, it was because I wasn't ready for a commitment and I thought it best. It has nothing to do with Montreal...or let's be honest, nothing to do with how I feel about Marshall."

"So you admit you still feel something for him," Robert accused.

Angelo sighed deeply. "Leave it alone, Robert. Let it go."

"Maybe I could, if you could."

He looked up from his coffee cup and said, "I know I will get a call telling me I have to go back to Canada soon. They told me that it would be early fall maybe. My mind is on that. I can't help it, can I? How in the hell can I leave it alone when this is still going on?"

"I think you should have talked to someone, worked out—"

"Who? A shrink? You want me to pay a doctor to convince me that I don't feel what I feel?"

"Whatever in hell you do feel, Angelo, you certainly don't feel it for me!"

Angelo studied Robert's angry and disappointed face. Before he could say anything, he scraped back his chair and left the restaurant.

Some of the other clients looked at him for a second then returned to their own conversations. Angelo ran a hand through his hair and looked out the window. Nothing made sense anymore. It seemed the only thing he could trust was the basest of physical instincts. He could see arousal, he could see satisfaction because satisfaction was visual and the release was immediate but as for what he felt about anything or anyone, that was a different thing.

When he had come back from Montreal, he came back determined not to allow his emotions to rule his head. He had to be like that growing up. Although his father had been wonderful to him, he always felt as if something was missing. He thought for a long time that his mother had abandoned him, that she didn't care. He knew her family hated them, although he was never quite sure what they had done to deserve their hatred.

His father never told him his mother had died until he was almost twelve. Maybe he thought it was easier for him to think she was still alive, but it wasn't. His father kept a picture of her beside his bed and he knew sometimes he cried at night. He never understood how much he had loved her and how great the loss was until now. That sense of emptiness, the feeling of being completely alone even when you are surrounded by people, the knowledge that as he looked out the window onto the city streets, no one would come to find him, no one he would be truly happy to see.

He remembered the day his father had told him his mother was dead. He had told him the whole story, how her father had never thought he was good enough and how they had stolen her from him. He had explained about going back to get her and finding out she had died.

He had been so angry at his father that day, because he had let her go. He had let the Hernandez family win.

His father had showed him the faded letter his mother had written, saying she didn't love him and not to come after her but it didn't appease him. "If you knew she loved you, how could you ever have doubted her? You knew it was not true and yet you waited and waited to go after her and she died, she died waiting for you, missing you!"

Even then he didn't cry, although his father had. His father had fallen to his knees and had wept like a boy and all he had done was

glare at him. He had blamed him for his mother leaving. He had blamed him for everything back then.

But then over time, he came to realize that his father was human. His pride was wounded, his heart broken. He was a man, just a man with all the faults men have and as a result, he had lost her forever. He forgave his father, but he didn't believe his father ever forgave himself.

The waitress startled him suddenly, coming over to ask him if he wanted more coffee. He declined, paid her and left.

On the street, he paused to look up at the sky. It looked like a storm was coming. He was anxious, but for now all he could do was wait, wait to go back to Canada and put an end to this once and for all.

## Chapter 92

Natalie knew that Marshall had received the notice. His trial was set to begin in six weeks, on the twenty-first of November.

Natalie went up to the jail later that day to see how he had taken the news.

“Will Angelo need to be here soon?” Marshall asked her as they sat across the table from one another in the visiting room.

“Probably,” she sighed.

“It’s a long time to be away from home,” he said, narrowing his eyes.

“What’s wrong, Marshall?” Natalie asked him, noting that the walls in this room really needed a good coat of paint.

“Nothing, I’m just thinking about him.”

“It would be better if you would concentrate on yourself right now, and this trial,” she said, her voice holding just a hint of temper.

He fell silent.

She regretted her temper. “Is it better now?” she asked gently.

“Better? Do you mean, do I love him any less?”

She frowned.

“If anything, I love him even more. There is the rare time I don’t think about him. It’s like a cold you think is going away and you feel better for awhile, but then boom...there it is and it feels twice as bad as ever.” He paused, “Thinking about him sometimes is pleasant,” he smiled, “I won’t scandalize you with the details.”

She patted his hand... She knew it must be terribly lonely for him in here.

“But most of the time, I just think about how it all ended. It’s hard.”

“But you’ve done so well. Finishing your high school will look good to the court and with all that reading, your vocabulary has really improved.”

“I never knew I liked to read so much.”

She got up, and leaned down to hug him. “We have a lot of work to do, Marshall, in the next few weeks.”

He hugged her back. “I know. I have faith in you, Nat. I know it’s all going to be okay.”

## Chapter 93

Angelo left Rome without telling anyone except his editor. He would continue to work while he was in Canada and send things through email. He brought along his laptop. His editor asked him to do a story on the Italian community in Montreal while he was there. He thought it was an excellent idea.

He checked into the same hotel as before, then went out and bought a bottle of whiskey at the corner liquor store. He came back, sat up his laptop and sent an email to Robert telling him he was in Montreal. He hadn't heard anything from him in over a month, not since he'd stormed out of the cafe in Rome. He hated that he might lose him as a friend, but it was beyond his control.

He had to get through this. He unscrewed the cap on the bottle and drank deeply from it. He didn't realize he had drunk half of it until he woke up the next morning with his face on the desk. His stomach was killing him. He had to stop drinking so much.



## Chapter 94

Two weeks went by and Marshall was being questioned over and over by Natalie, details of things that were getting quite tedious.

He longed to know about Angelo, if she'd seen him but she refused to talk about him, which frustrated him.

"Come on, Natalie. Just tell me," he pleaded.

"No!" She replied. "He is a material witness for the prosecution. I have no business seeing him. Marshall, forget about Angelo right now. We have to concentrate on your defence."

"I'm going to be in the courtroom with Hal, aren't I, Nat?" Marshall asked her.

"Yes, but don't worry," she replied, "He won't be able to hurt you anymore."

"Will I see Angelo?" Marshall asked.

She sighed, "Yes, but you won't be allowed to speak to him."

Marshall nodded.

"Let's go over some of the questions you may be asked. You must be careful not to implicate yourself when you are asked questions about Hal."

He nodded and pulled out a cigarette. "Ok, I'm listening."

## Chapter 95

The day of the trial finally began. Marshall was brought in by the prison guards. He kept his face turned to the front, not daring to turn around. He didn't want to look to the right, either, where he could see Hal sitting beside his own lawyer at the opposite end of the table.

Natalie told him not to be nervous. He was a wreck.

He wondered if Angelo was somewhere in the courtroom, or if he would come in later on. He didn't know how he would face any of the men he had seduced and robbed. He kept his head down.

Hal seemed relatively unaffected by all these people. The newspapers described him as "a man without remorse." At times, he was even laughing in the courtroom.

None of these men on the stand could identify Hal. They had never seen him, but they all gave vivid descriptions of Marshall, referring to him as "boyish", "cute", "sweet", with curly dark hair. When asked to point him out, they had no trouble doing so.

He was "a real pro" one said, a man in his fifties who was now a defrocked priest.

"What do you mean by that?" The lawyer asked him.

"Well, he told me he loved me and, boy, could he make you believe it, both in bed and out."

When Angelo finally was admitted to the courtroom, Marshall was very aware of it, although he hadn't dared look at him. He couldn't believe how self conscious he felt, not only because of his face but because Angelo was hearing all these horrible things he had done. The sense of shame overwhelmed him.

He kept his head down, not looking at anyone, which annoyed Natalie. She told him to look at the jury, but he couldn't do that, either.

He was especially careful not to show his face to Angelo. He didn't dare look at him.

When the last witness stepped down, they took a recess. The guard came and handcuffed him again. He was escorted out one door off the side and Hal was taken out the other way.

"Can't they leave these handcuffs off?" Marshall asked Natalie.

"No. They won't do that."

"I can't look at him," Marshall exclaimed. "He's there, though. I can feel him."

"You look guilty." Natalie told him irritably. "I'd send you up for life if I was on that jury. Forget about him and fight for your life. What are you going to do once you get up on that stand, Marshall?"

He sighed. "I'll have to look at him. He'll have to see me. Can you tell him about...my face?"

"I already mentioned it to him. I'll tell him again."

"I don't want him to be shocked."

"I'll take care of it. Will you look at the jury then?"

"I'll try."

Natalie left the room and walked down the corridor. Angelo Farelli had to be around somewhere. They were only recessing for an hour.

She saw him sitting all alone at the end of the hallway, one of those horrible vending machine coffees in his hand.

She probably really shouldn't be talking to him, but she did know him. "Hi," she said.

He nodded. "Hello."

"How are you doing?" she asked.

"Just wonderful, you?" he said softly with a tone of harshness to his voice.

"It's difficult, isn't it?"

"Yes. You know when I read those guys testimony, I found myself saying, poor deluded assholes, but then I realized that I was one of those poor deluded assholes. It was quite a wake up call."

She bit her lip. "Except," she whispered, "he really loved you."

"So you say," he replied deeply, looking away.

"I have to warn you about something...it's about Marshall."

He laughed. "Really? What now?"

"He doesn't want you to see his face and it's preventing him from

looking at the jury. I need him to look up. I did mention this to you before when we met at your hotel but you weren't really open to...well...anyway, he asked me to tell you about what happened to his face."

Angelo sat up and met her eyes. "I remember something about it. Tell me again."

"Hal knifed him in prison. He spent two months in the hospital. His face is a mess. Don't be shocked."

He folded his arms across his chest and nodded.

She'd begun walking away, when she heard him say her name.

She paused and looked back at him.

He waved his hand at her. "Nothing," he muttered, and sat back down.

## Chapter 96

In the weeks following, the authorities in Brazil, along with the local Montreal police gave testimony.

Angelo found the details of Marta and Cruz's murders very hard to sit through. Twice he left the courtroom to splash cold water on his face.

Marshall's face did not shock him when he finally caught a glimpse of it, but it did make him sad and very angry. He had discovered one thing during the few weeks he had spent in that courtroom, he hated Hal Makin more than he had ever hated anyone in his life.

When he saw Hal Makin smile as the police described the remains of the two bodies they had found in the barn, he actually had to restrain himself from getting out of his seat and ringing his neck.

Marshall did not turn around and make eye contact with him at all, which he was thankful for. Hal however was a different story. Often, when his lawyer wasn't watching him, he would turn around and look him straight in the eye. Once, he even winked at him.

When the weekend came, Angelo was relieved to get back to his laptop and work. He bought another bottle of whiskey and drank himself to sleep again. He told himself he would lay off the booze altogether when this was all over. But now wasn't the time for sobriety.

Robert emailed him often and asked him how he was.

He didn't give him too many details.

He said he would see him when he got home, and Angelo wrote that he was looking forward to it. They chatted together, using instant messaging for awhile, discussing where they would have dinner and a bunch of things that were totally irrelevant, then signed off.

Angelo finished the bottle and passed out on top of the bed.

## Chapter 97

Natalie was pleased with the improvement in Marshall's behaviour in the courtroom. Although when they were alone, he confessed to her how difficult he was finding it. "It's hard not to look at him," Marshall told her. "I think I need to see him react to my face. I know it makes no sense but...oh God, Natalie," his voice broke. "I love him still, I ache just knowing he is in that room, hearing all those horrible things I've done. When is it going to stop?"

She had no answer for him, except to tell him to concentrate on the task at hand. He had a few weeks yet until she put him on the stand. He had to be strong.

The following Monday at ten, he was brought down the hall of the courthouse... Hal was right in front of him suddenly, grinning.

"Hi, pretty," he whispered. "Wonder what lover boy thinks of your face. Must give him nightmares."

Natalie, who stood beside him, put a hand on his arm. "Don't pay any attention, Marshall, that's what he wants."

"You can't play me anymore, Hal," he met his eyes without flinching as they waited for the doors to open.

He laughed. "Too bad about you and him. The more I look at him sitting in that courtroom, the more I regret not taking some time to get to know him better. I might even be inclined to pay him a visit one night when I get out of here...just to..." he winked. "You were pretty selfish keeping him all to yourself. I figure you have no advantage over me any longer. Damn, you are just as ugly as I am now!" He threw back his head and howled with laughter as the guard pulled him into the courtroom.

Marshall's face locked into a mask of hate. Natalie nudged him.

“Lose the face. You are letting him get to you. He knows how.”  
He relaxed and tried to smile. “You’re right. I’m okay.”

## Chapter 98

Psychologists for both sides testified most of the week, some for the defence, and others for the prosecution. The experts Natalie had hired both said the same thing. Marshall had been manipulated by Hal Makin who had a classic sociopath personality. He had isolated Marshall, making sure he felt that Hal was the only one who would love and take care of him. Then he was able to get Marshall to do anything he wanted

One of the psychologists for the defence said on the stand, “Marshall Calletti is a neurotic with many complexes and high anxiety. He fits the classic profile of a child who was abused and neglected when he was young and then had to survive on the streets at an early age. He never had a childhood and, as a result, he was in desperate need of love from someone who represented a father figure. He never emotionally and psychologically grew into an adult.”

“So you are saying,” Natalie added, “that Marshall Calletti was like a child in some ways and as a result he could be manipulated as a child in exchange for love and affection.”

“That’s right,” he agreed.

“So all it took was the right combination, a personality like Hal Makin teamed with one like my client’s...well, there was no question of what one could make the other do.”

“That’s right.”

“Thank you, Doctor. No further questions.”

The prosecution ripped her witness’s testimony to shreds just like she suspected. But in the end it was what impressed the jury that mattered.

On the day Angelo was supposed to testify, Natalie spent two hours



with Marshall before they were due in court. Most of the time, she just sat there saying nothing but she knew he was filled with many different emotions.

Outside the window, the voices of gay rights activists chanted for justice.

"If it helps, don't look at him," she said softly.

He took a breath. "I dread this more than anything. I just know I'm not going to be able to..."

"You can and you will," she said, standing when the guards came in to lead him into the courtroom. "I will be right beside you."

He nodded.

When the lawyer on the other side of the room said, "I call Angelo Farelli to the stand," every muscle in his body tensed. He heard his amplified footsteps as he walked to the front of the room, and finally he looked up to see him step up to the stand.

He was dressed in a blue suit and a white shirt, which he wore with an open collar, no tie. His hair was neatly tied back and his face looked tense as he was sworn in. Marshall couldn't help thinking how good he looked. The last time he had seen him, he'd been dying. He lowered his head again and nailed his teeth together in his jaw, bracing himself.

"Mr. Farelli, can you state your full name and occupation for the record, please?" the lawyer said, standing in front of him.

"Angelo Farelli. I'm a reporter for a newspaper in Rome."

Marshall smiled. He knew Angelo had majored in journalism when he was at the university.

"Could you tell the court about your first meeting with the defendant?"

"Yes. It was in August two years ago. I was the owner of a coffee plantation in Brazil and Marshall Calletti and Hal Makin were hired on as workers."

The testimony continued with the details of how Marshall came to the house, and how he took him in because he believed he was need of protection from Hal Makin.

"But now you know that was a lie, don't you Mr. Farelli?" The lawyer boomed.

He hesitated. "I...no...I mean, I'm not sure it was a lie exactly."

The lawyer was taken aback. . .

Natalie looked up from her papers.

"He did trick you, mislead you, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did, but I don't believe that he was completely lying to me. I think there was some truth in what he said. He just didn't know it at the time."

"I don't understand."

"One night, I had to break up a fight between the two of them. Makin was beating up on Calletti. It couldn't have been staged, because they had no idea that I would be out there at that time of night."

"Let's go further, shall we? As time went on, did you not become Marshall's lover?"

"I did," he said.

"Did he seduce you?"

For a second, Angelo didn't reply.

"Mr. Farelli?"

"I think it was a mutual seduction."

"Did he or did he not try to poison you? Did he not keep his meetings with Hal Makin secret from you, Mr. Farelli?" The prosecutor's voice grew in volume.

"Yes," he said.

"No further questions."

Natalie stood up now, encouraged. "Mr. Farelli, do you believe that Marshall was acting of his own free will? Do you believe he wanted to harm you?"

He hesitated, then said, "No."

Marshall looked up at him, astonished.

The room erupted in a hum of noise. The judge slammed down his hammer. "Quiet or I will clear this room. Go on, Ms. Tibault."

"Did you believe him when Marshall Calletti said he loved you?"

"Yes."

"Did you love him?"

"Yes," he replied.

Marshall closed his eyes, fighting the urge to get up and run out of the room.

"If I told you that Marshall Calletti tried to kill himself several times in prison when he thought he had killed you, would you—"

"Irrelevant, Your Honour," the lawyer for the prosecution stood up. "I object to this line of questioning."

"Are you going somewhere with this, Ms. Tibault, or are you writing a soap opera?"

The court laughed.

"I am, Your Honour, with the court's patience. I am trying to show that Marshall Calletti genuinely loved this man. In fact, he still does love this man and as a result would never intentionally harm him."

"Continue," the judge said.

"Answer the question, Mr. Farelli. What is your reaction to that fact?"

"That he tried to kill himself in prison?"

"Yes."

"I...well, it is common isn't it? I assume he felt guilty."

"Guilt, but not love?"

He remained silent. Marshall looked up at him again. Angelo looked so sad.

"Mr. Farelli, tell the court when you discovered that Mr. Calletti was poisoning you..."

"I don't know. It just dawned on me. I felt terrible and I called my friend who is a doctor and described my symptoms. He said it sounded like arsenic and to come to him right away. I knew that only Marshall could have done it because we cooked together and..." he paused, "he often poured a glass of wine for me after dinner."

"I see."

"And how did you feel when you discovered this?"

"How do you think?" he demanded. "I was angry, hurt and really sick. I couldn't believe he would do this and..." He stopped.

"Mr. Farelli," the judge leaned over, "would you like to stop, take a break?"

"Just give me a couple of minutes," he said. "I'll be fine."

"Five minutes," the judge said, "Remember, Mr. Farelli, you are still under oath."

After he had left the room, Marshall motioned to Natalie. She came over to him and leaned down next to his ear.

"Stop torturing him!" Marshall told her angrily in a hushed voice.

"Marshall, I have no choice. Don't worry, he can take it," she

whispered.

"Maybe he can," Marshall muttered, "but I don't know if I can."

She rubbed his shoulder. "Hold on. His testimony so far is good. He threw the prosecution for a loop with his refusal to say you had acted of your own free will."

"He's helping our case then."

"He's telling the truth," she replied. "He's being honest and that can only help us."

When he came back, Natalie approached him again. "Can you tell the court what you decided to do once you realized that you were being poisoned?"

"I had my doctor contact a police officer we knew in Sao Paulo. We decided to set them up. My notary called Marshall and told him I was dead."

"And you had already signed over your property to him in your will?"

"Yes," he replied.

"So they walked into a trap and they were arrested. Can I ask you to look at my client here in this courthouse today and tell me what you feel when you look at him Mr. Farelli. You are under oath."

Angelo looked at him. "I feel sorry for him, I guess, although I don't know why."

"And what about Hal Makin, do you feel sorry for him too, Mr. Farelli?"

"No. I hate Hal Makin."

Again a sound grew in the courtroom that the judge quieted almost immediately.

"No more questions, Mr. Farelli. You may step down."

He did so and walked directly out of the courtroom.

They recessed until the next day.

On the way back to the prison, Marshall was silent as Natalie sat beside him. Finally he turned to her and said, "He doesn't hate me."

"No. He doesn't hate you."

"He pities me. Maybe that's worst."

## *Chapter 99*

The following afternoon, Angelo had a meeting with the prosecutor, Mr. Seguin. He waited patiently in his office for almost a half hour before he arrived. He walked in, looking rushed, two other men with him.

“Mr. Farelli,” Seguin reached over and shook his hand. “These are my associates, Mr. Robitaille and Mr. Wells.”

They briefly shook his hand in turn, then sat down.

“Mr. Farelli,” Paul Seguin began, “We asked you here today because we have to tell you that personally we were disappointed with your testimony. We really believe it might have hurt the prosecutions case.”

Angelo leaned forward. “I don’t understand.”

“I’m sure you want to see those two behind bars as much as we do, but your hesitation to make Marshall Calletti totally responsible for his actions—” the one called Robitaille began.

“If you have some unresolved personal issue Mr. Farelli,” Seguin stated, “then we could have worked around it, but we should have known that at the onset.”

He stared blankly at them. “I myself am disappointed,” he said, “disappointed to hear that you want me to commit perjury on the stand.” He looked Seguin in the eye. “I never insinuated that Marshall Calletti was not guilty. The defence attorney asked me if I thought Marshall Calletti was acting alone. He wasn’t. He was afraid and intimidated by Makin. I think I already expressed that to you in our meetings.”

Angelo stood up. “If you want someone to lie on the stand so you can win this case, well I’m afraid you have me confused with someone

else. When can I go home?"

"I would like you to be here when Marshall Calletti takes the stand. We may need to put you on the stand again," Seguin said, shaking his head. He looked up at him. "I thought you wanted justice, Mr. Farelli?"

"Yes," he nodded, "I do want justice, but I think our idea of what justice is, differ somewhat... I will not lie to condemn anyone to a life in prison. I can not change what happened to me. It's over. The main goal now I should think is to save others from suffering the same fate. One is a murderer, one is a con man. There is some degree of difference there, isn't there?" He lifted an eyebrow.

"You don't understand, Mr. Farelli," Seguin said, waving his hand, "It's complicated."

Angelo's mouth twisted. "Really? Umm...well apparently too complicated for me. I will see you in court tomorrow," he nodded to the other two and left.

He was angry as he walked out of that office and onto the slushy Montreal streets. How dare he patronize him, pretend he was not intelligent enough to figure out what was going on here. He read the papers. Not only had Makin and Marshall caused an international incident with the Colombian drug lord involvement, but the gay community was up in arms, demanding society show support and nail these guys to the wall.

It was far more political than anyone realized. Angelo sat in his hotel room thinking about it for hours. At eight o'clock the next morning, he called Natalie Tibault's office.

He got her answering machine. "Ms. Tibault," he said in French, "we need to talk today before court. Meet me at my hotel at noon if you get this message."

\* \* \* \*

Natalie couldn't believe it when she heard his voice. She was with Marshall going over his testimony when Anne paged her.

She listened to his voice on her answering machine in shock. She played it twice, and then phoned his hotel asking for his room. He answered almost immediately.

"Mr. Farelli?"

"Ms. Tibault," he replied. "I need to see you."

"It's tight. I'm going over my client's testimony and—"

"Ms. Tibault. You are going to lose. We need to talk," he insisted.

"I'll be there in an hour."

He hung up.

She came back in to Marshall and met his eyes. "I have to go for awhile. I will see you at the courthouse," she said and ran off before he could ask her any questions.

He opened the door to her room and whisked her inside the minute she arrived. She met his eyes. "This better be important. I'm not supposed to be here with you."

She took off her coat. "What did you mean I was going to lose?"

"Ms. Tibault, I know politics and I know the power of the media. There is pressure on Seguin and his boys to nail your client to the wall right along with Hal Makin."

"I understand it's political, Mr. Farrell. The truth should—"

"No one cares about the truth," he said. "I was tongue lashed yesterday for my testimony. They are not going to accept that Marshall was manipulated by Hal."

"After Marshall testifies, the jury will—"

Angelo shook his head. "No. You are going to lose."

"Why should I trust you on this, and why all of a sudden are you willing to help me?" She demanded.

"Because it was suggested to me that I lie on the stand and I won't do that. I came here to testify to what happened and that's all. I'm not doing this for Marshall. I'm doing this for myself. I won't be a pawn in anyone's political game."

"What do you suggest?"

"Call me as a witness."

Her eyes widened. "Call you as a...what? I...really...you...you would do this? Seguin is going to shit!"

He shrugged, as if he cared less. "You need to ask me some specific things that will demonstrate very clearly how Marshall was under Hal's domination."

"All right."

"Things the court would have never wise heard. Anyway," he threw up his hands, "in the end it doesn't matter because when I testify on

Marshall's behalf, it will blow the prosecutions' case out of the water."

She shook her head in disbelief, "You don't know what you're doing for Marshall."

"I told you," he insisted, meeting her eyes intensely, "I'm not doing this for Marshall. Now, we have an hour before we have to leave, let's go over what I consider is important in terms of demonstrating that Marshall was under Hal's domination."

She took out paper and a pen and went to sit at the desk. "Let's get started. We haven't much time."



## Chapter 100

Natalie walked into the courtroom just before the trial was to begin. Marshall looked grateful to see her. "I'm nervous about my testimony."

"You won't be testifying today," she told him, patting his arm.

He watched her take her papers out of her briefcase and arrange them in front of her.

"What? Why not?" He asked.

"You'll see."

The judge entered and they rose as the case was announced.

"All right, Ms. Tibault. I believe you would like to call a witness."

"Yes, Your Honour," she said. "I would like to call Angelo Farelli to the stand."

Hal Makin's lawyer glanced over at her suspiciously. Seguin and his two associates were on their feet. "This is an outrage!"

Suddenly, everyone in the courtroom was out of control.

The judge demanded silence. "Will all three counsels approach the bench, please?"

Makin's lawyer was the first to speak at the bench. "I have no prior knowledge of this. I forbid it. It could be damaging to my client."

Seguin glared at her. "What in hell kind of stunt is this, Nat? You can't call my star witness!"

"Explain yourself, Ms. Tibault," the judge said.

"Mr. Farelli asked me to call him to the stand. He told me this morning. He has a right to speak and to whom ever he chooses and he chose me."

The judge slammed his hammer down on the bench again to quiet the court. "Court is in recess until tomorrow morning at nine," he

bellowed. Then he looked at the three lawyers. "In my chambers," he boomed. "And Ms. Tibault, bring Mr. Farelli with you."

Natalie nodded and motioned to Angelo who watched the scene with interest. He got up and came toward her.

## Chapter 101

Marshall and Hal were taken out of the courtroom and sat on opposite sides of the hallway. They were close enough to eyeball one another.

Hal sneered at him and said in a voice just low enough to be out of earshot of the two guards standing by, "So you were supposed to tell the court your sad story today, eh? What happened, chicken out?"

Marshall ignored him, glancing at the guards.

"Your boyfriend is going to ride in on a big horse and save you?" He laughed. "Highly fucking unlikely."

"Shut up over there," a guard instructed, hearing Hal talking.

Hal winked at Marshall and gave him a lecherous smile. "He could always fuck you with a bag over your head I suppose, if he got desperate enough."

Marshall made a lunge for him, handcuffs and all. He landed on him full force with all his body weight, then banged his head as hard as he could against his.

Two guards pulled him off as blood ran down Hal's head. He laughed at him as Marshall was dragged kicking and screaming into one of the rooms by two other guards who were telling him to "Quiet to fuck down!"

Blood ran down Marshall's forehead and into his eyes. Someone came in with peroxide and patted at the gash and wiped the blood away.

"Keep those two apart!" One of the guards growled to the other.

Marshall sat back in his chair and sighed. Hal was right. Angelo would never want him like this. He was tired and he had a headache from where he banged his head against Hal's, but it had been worth it.

He tried to figure out why Angelo was suddenly testifying for the defence. What was all the commotion about? He wished Natalie would come and talk to him. She hadn't even warned him about this, although she had known Angelo would take the stand again today, but for their side.

They came to transport him back to the prison. The armoured car with the bullet proof windows sat outside. She didn't come back. He looked all around for her on the way out, but she was nowhere in sight.

## Chapter 102

Natalie sat lingering over wine at a restaurant on the Main at nine that night. Angelo Farelli sat opposite from her, distracted. It had been a rough day. They had spent almost three hours in the judge's chambers and, after a heated debate, the judge had agreed to allow Natalie to call Angelo Farelli as a witness.

At that point, Paul Seguin had marched out and Hal Makin's lawyer had threatened to call for a mistrial on behalf of his client.

Natalie looked at him lazily and smiled. "It was you that turned the judge around today, you know," she slurred, swallowing some more wine.

He lifted an eyebrow. "How's that?"

She laughed. "You hardly said a word during it all and then," she shook her head, "you stood up and said, 'may I say something?' You could have heard a pin drop when you spoke. It was so simple, yet it made so much sense. You said something like, 'I want to know why anyone interested in justice would want to silence truth. Isn't that what we are doing here?'"

"Do I sound like that?"

Natalie laughed, meeting his eyes. "Well, maybe not exactly. But these guys have gotten so far away from the concept of truth and justice since they left law school, you'd think you were talking Greek. The judge listened," she pointed a finger. "He really heard and that's why you'll be on that stand tomorrow."

"You give me far too much credit, Ms. Tibault," he muttered, draining his glass.

She gave him a sly smile. "I don't think so."

Natalie was pretty high when they left the restaurant. Angelo

pointed to her car and said, "I don't think you should drive, Natalie. Why don't you take a cab?"

"But I can't leave my car here," she protested.

"The hotel is just down the street. Give me your keys, I will drive it to the underground parking lot at the hotel and come by and pick you up in the morning."

She giggled. "Okay. Let me call a taxi from the hotel then."

He nodded as she fished in her purse for her car keys. Their fingers touched as she handed them to him, and for some reason that contact gave her a rush of pleasure.

He drove out of the parking lot onto the street. She glanced at him. *Handsome. Umm. More than handsome...hot...so male...so sexy, a hunk.* His hair looked just a little messy as if he had just finished making love, and she knew it would be soft to touch. His cheeks were a little flushed from the wine. In fact, she bet his lips tasted like wine. Hadn't Marshall told her his lips tasted like wine or was it honey?

His hands lay casually on the wheel, strong and very capable hands, man's hands but elegant.

"Don't you people drive on the wrong side of the road in Italy?" she joked, tearing her eyes away from him.

He stopped at a light. "No, you people drive on the wrong side of the road," he smiled.

"Ah, cute, very cute," she touched his forearm.

"Don't worry, Natalie, my father was a professional driver, he taught me to drive when I was nine. You are perfectly safe."

"Yes, I'm safe with your hands on the wheel," she said. "What about with your hands off the wheel?"

He threw her a quick glance, his expression registering surprise.

It suddenly dawned on her what she had said. "I'm...I don't know what...came over me." She was embarrassed. "I was out of line. I'm sorry."

He drove into the underground parking lot, told the man at the station his name and room number and the gate was raised. He parked the car without any comment.

She placed a hand on his arm again as he went to get out. "Aren't you going to say anything?"

"No," he said and got out, closing and locking the door.

Inside the hotel lobby, he said, "I'll call you a taxi, Natalie."

"Wait," she said.

He turned around and looked at her. "Natalie, you're drunk, and I am only slightly less drunk than you. So let's say goodnight."

She grinned. "Are you afraid?"

He shook his dark head and gave her a slow smile. "No. I'm not afraid."

"You're just not interested," she stated, meeting his eyes.

He gazed at her... "You are a beautiful woman, Natalie," he said "but you are also a lawyer of high standards. You wouldn't approve of yourself in the morning."

"True," she nodded, "but tonight I wouldn't give a damn, would I?"

He threw his head back and laughed. "Right now, probably not. I'll get that cab."

She watched him walk across the lobby. The woman at the front desk watched him walk across the lobby as well. Damn, she thought and grinned. Why in hell did she decide to go to law school?

As they waited for the cab, she looked at him and said, "You know, I've never slept with you, but I feel like I have. I know you intimately."

He smiled faintly. "Really."

"Yes, reeeely," she murmured, reaching up and touching his hair. "Marshall told me that you make love like an angel and your lips taste like wine."

He looked uncomfortable.

She withdrew her hand. "Are you embarrassed?"

"No."

"Are you a good lover, Angelo?" She looked up at him, clutching the labels of his black leather coat.

He smiled down at her. "Well, I'm not my own best judge, Natalie, now am I?"

She swung a little off his labels, lifting one foot then the other. "No. I'd have to help you."

"Your taxi is here," he lifted an eyebrow, indicating the cab.

"Damn," she said as he led her outside to the car. He opened the door and helped her in.

"See you tomorrow," he told her, shutting the door.

## Chapter 103

At seven the next morning, Marshall was sent for by the warden. “What happened yesterday?” He demanded sternly, throwing the report down on his desk from one of the guards.

Marshall stood in front him. He met his eyes. “Hal Makin said something horrible to me, so I rushed him.”

“Umm... was that smart?”

“Is he dead?” Marshall quipped.

“No.”

“Well, then it was a waste of time.”

The warden shook his greying head.

“Look at my face,” Marshall told him. “Compared to what he did to me, warden, I’d say he got off pretty easy, wouldn’t you?”

There was a pause, and then the warden said, “I won’t reprimand you this time, Calletti, but next time, you’ll be punished.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.”

“All right, now prepare yourself, they will be taking you to the courthouse shortly. And Calletti,” he said, “behave yourself or you and I will be seeing a lot more of each other.”

Marshall nodded and left.



## Chapter 104

Natalie had one hell of a hangover when Angelo arrived the next morning to pick her up.

He went to give her the keys, but she shook her head. "You drive."

He smiled, getting behind the wheel. He wore a light blue sweater under his black leather coat today, and a pair of jeans. Her sobriety didn't lessen the attraction she felt for him.

They drove toward the courthouse in heavy traffic and each sound made her head ache even more. "Can you stop at the coffee place? Just go through the drive through. You want something, it's on me," she said, digging some loonies out of her brief case.

He put up his hand. "I'll get it."

Angelo ordered coffee and a couple of Danishes. They pulled over in the parking lot and prepared their coffee. Natalie took hers black. He added some milk.

"In Italy, the pastries well..." he smiled.

"I can imagine what this tastes like to you," she laughed slightly.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked, opening the window.

"No. Go ahead. I didn't know you smoked."

"I don't," he replied.

She gave him a strange look.

"That's the same look Marshall gave me when he first saw me smoke a cigarette," he laughed a little.

It was the first time she had ever heard him mention Marshall in this way.

"Really?"

"Umm. He told me he gave up smoking, but it was tough. He could never smoke just one when he had the taste."

"You don't have an addictive personality," she commented.

He narrowed his brow. "I don't know about that."

"Are you addicted to anything?" She asked, sipping her coffee.

He laughed. "Maybe."

"What? You're not fat so it's not food. You don't drink all the day long so it's not booze, it's not cigarettes...so..." she made her voice go comically sultry, "must be sex."

"That's it," he said, snapping his fingers, "I knew there was something. And lately you can add booze, although I hope it won't be a lingering addiction."

She gave him a sympathetic glance.

Angelo lit his cigarette.

She felt as if she had known him for years, sitting here beside him in the car in a comfortable silence, drinking her coffee. He was not a pretentious man. He said what he meant and that was that.

"You really did love him, didn't you?" She said suddenly, although she wasn't sure what had prompted her to ask him that. She finished her Danish and wiped her hands on a napkin.

He met her eyes and said very simply, "Yes, I did."

"The first time I met you, you gave me the impression you still did. Were you telling me the truth?"

"Why in hell would I lie about that? There are two things in this life I never joke about, Natalie, love and death. There is something quite foolish about playing with either of those things."

She wanted to hug him. Instead, she nodded. "Wise. Are you over him now?"

"What difference does it make?" He took a drag on his cigarette and blew it out the window.

He never mentioned last night, although she remembered every detail. He was too much of a gentleman for that, and she was grateful to him for sparing her the embarrassment. She knew she would have spent the night with him if he had given her the least bit of encouragement. She knew that he knew it too.

She finished her coffee and he threw his half-smoked cigarette out the window and drained his own cup.

He started the engine and pulled out of the parking lot. They arrived at the courthouse a half hour before the court was due in session.

She went to find Marshall who sat in the room off the hallway in the back waiting. The guard who stood outside the door nodded at her as she walked into the room.

Marshall looked up as she came in. "Natalie!" He was happy to see her. "What happened yesterday?"

She put down her briefcase and shrugged out of her coat. "We were stuck in the judge's chambers most of the day. Sorry about that. They will allow Angelo's testimony today."

"Is that good?"

"That's excellent. I've spoken to Paul Seguin and we've reached a deal. Given the sudden turn of events, he's agreed to concentrate his efforts on going after Hal Makin."

"Why is Angelo trying to help me?" Marshall asked, looking up at her.

She walked over to the window. "Angelo is a real straight shooter, Marshall. He's the kind of man who believes in honesty and truth. When he realized that the prosecution was not going to allow him to tell the whole story, he felt that wasn't right."

Marshall narrowed his eyes as he listened to her speak. "You sound like you have gotten to know him pretty well."

Natalie turned from the window. "We've talked."

"I'm jealous," Marshall told her, giving her an awkward smile.

"He's a wonderful man. I can understand why you fell in love with him. I feel as if I've known him for years. He is very easy to be with."

Marshall felt extremely uncomfortable suddenly. "Natalie?"

She seemed distracted as she shuffled through papers. "Yes?" she said, looking up.

"Be careful, you sound as if you're hooked," he said it jokingly, but it didn't feel at all funny to him. She had access to him. He had none. He was a stranger in a strange country. He never did ask Angelo about women. He didn't know if he had ever had one or not. The subject never came up.

"You didn't sleep with him, did you?" He tossed suddenly, his voice strained. The question lingered in the air between them uneasily for a few minutes.

"What kind of a question is that, Marshall?" she asked but she didn't look at him. My God, how close she had come. She wondered if

she could have looked Marshall in the eye today if... "Besides," she cleared her throat, "he's gay...isn't he?" She looked up as if she wanted an answer.

"Yes." Marshall replied. "He...I never asked if...as far as I know."

"Umm...well there is nothing to worry about," she said curtly. Then she put some papers back in her briefcase and snapped it shut. "Well, sit back and relax today. I won't be putting you on the stand just yet. See you in court," she lifted a hand and walked out, closing the door behind her.

Marshall sighed and bit his lip. He didn't think Angelo was bisexual. They'd never talked about former lovers, had never compared or anything like that. It hadn't been important. Who cared who they had been with before? When they were in bed together, there was no reason to think about anyone else. Of course Angelo must have had lovers before him. Of that, there was no doubt but how many or of what sex, he had no idea.

They had never even discussed coming out stories. Even that was still a mystery to him. They had been so consumed with each other that there had been no room for the past. They had lived in the moment and every moment had been filled with passion. Either they were making love or anticipating the moment when they would be making love or savouring the aftermath. Even now it made his pulses race just thinking about it, the look in his eyes, the way he touched him.

He couldn't blame Natalie for being attracted to him. He just couldn't stand the thought of her making love to him. He couldn't stand the thought of anyone making love to him, although he was certain someone had during the last two years. Someone had taken off his clothes, ran their hands and their lips over his naked flesh, felt the pressure of his mouth on their mouth. He closed his eyes. He took out his mental photo album filled with pictures of the wild earth shattering sex that had driven them both to the brink of complete satiation and exhaustion. At night, these images stimulated him sexually for hours. Finally, he would bring himself to release with such force, it would shake his entire body and render him wet and trembling.

Natalie wouldn't take that from him by insinuating there was something between her and Angelo. It was all he had left of him and he would guard it jealously.

## Chapter 105

A guard took him down the hall toward the courtroom. This was his life now, courtrooms, prisons, lawyers and psychologists. He was twenty-three years old, soon to be twenty-four and he felt fifty.

He took his seat behind the table beside Natalie, rose when the judge entered and ignored Hal at the other end. He heard Natalie say Angelo's full name as she stood up, saw him walk up and take the stand, swearing to tell the truth. He looked at him today. He wore a sweater in a beautiful shade of blue.

Natalie walked up to where he sat and looked at him. "Mr. Farelli," she said, "can you tell the court why you wanted to testify for the defence today?"

"Yes. I felt that I wasn't able to say everything I needed to. I told Mr. Seguin I wanted to address a few things but he told me these things were not relevant."

"But you believe they are relevant, Mr. Farelli?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Can you explain this to the court, please," Natalie said.

"I know that Marshall told me a lot of lies so that he could get close to me. But I also know that Marshall had a strange relationship with Hal Makin. There was the fight I broke up when they first arrived, and then Cruz, my supervisor, told me that Marshall had been meeting with Hal and he was often upset after the meeting. Marshall had told me about his past, the abuse, the fact that he'd been a prostitute on the streets. These things he didn't lie about. I really don't believe that Marshall intended to kill me."

Paul Seguin stood up. "Objection. There is nothing of any value here. It's all conjecture and hearsay. Of course, Marshall was meeting

with Hal Makin. They were plotting a murder.”

Marshall sighed. He never intended to hurt Angelo.

“Are you finished, Ms. Tibault?” the judge asked.

“No, Your Honour. I have just a few more questions.”

“Go ahead,” he said. “But stick to the facts.”

She nodded. “Mr. Farelli, let me ask you one more thing and I want you to be honest with the court.”

“All right.”

“Marshall Calletti, my client poisoned you slowly with arsenic and when you finally sought medical attention, you came very close to losing your life, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” he said.

Marshall closed his eyes.

“And the medical treatment you received at the hospital in Brazil, it was very painful.”

“Yes, it was.”

“And you had a seizure on the table in the emergency when they began your treatment. Would I be correct in saying that?”

“Yes,” he replied.

Paul Seguin sat quietly listening. He didn’t continue to object. Natalie breathed a sigh of relief

“Then given all the pain you suffered, do you truly believe in your heart that Marshall Calletti is a murderer?”

“No, I do not,” he said, shaking his head... “I think in the end, Marshall tried to save my life. He was pounding on my door before I left. At that point, I believe he would have told me everything.”

Marshall opened his eyes. A single tear rolled down his cheek as he looked at him. For the first time, Angelo looked back for a second, then away again.

“Do you believe that Marshall Calletti would benefit from doing prison time?”

“I believe that Marshall has a lot of problems he needs to work out, but I don’t believe that prison is the place for him to do that.”

“Are you finished, Ms. Tibault?” the judge asked her.

“Yes,” she said, sitting down. She squeezed Marshall’s arm as she did.

Paul Seguin stood up. “Mr. Farelli. I think you are trying to tell this

court that Marshall Calletti was a victim of Hal Makin, as well.”

“To some extent, yes,” Angelo said. “I don’t believe that Marshall would have done any of this without Hal Makin.”

Hal Makin’s lawyer objected at this time. Several lawyers scrambled up in front of the judge all of a sudden.

Angelo Farelli was allowed to step down.

They took a recess, then Hal Makin’s lawyer questioned Angelo. Marshall bit his lip so hard during the questioning his mouth was filled with blood near the end of it.

Makin’s lawyer was brutal, determined that his client would not take all the responsibility for the crimes that had been committed.

Angelo held his own, insisted that Hal Makin was the real criminal. At the end, it didn’t look good for his client’s case...

It was only two days before Christmas and the judge told the court they would recess until the sixth of January at one in the afternoon. They would begin with Makin’s lawyer, finishing his cross examination of Angelo Farelli. Marshall wouldn’t take the stand until after the New Year. The trial was already nearing its sixth week. The judge instructed the jury not to discuss the case and dismissed them.

Outside the courtroom, Natalie waited for Paul Seguin to come out. When he did, she smiled at him and said, “Thank you.”

“For what?” He asked, lifting an eyebrow.

“For honouring our agreement, for not going after my client in there.”

“What choice did I have?” He inquired, then smiled faintly. “Anyway, I’ve been watching Hal Makin for weeks and I hate the slimy little bastard. I don’t think he has a conscience.”

She was about to agree when Tom Crosbie, Hal Makin’s lawyer barrelled toward them.

“Just what I expected,” he accused, pointing a finger at them. “You’re not going to get away with this. I know the game. You’re ganging up on my client.”

“Not at all,” Paul Seguin replied smugly.

“You lost your star witness, so you know your case against Marshall Calletti is going to sink like a stone. You want to win that bad, Seguin?”

“I want justice,” he replied, meeting his eyes.

“Horse shit,” Crosbie shook his head. “When in hell have you ever been interested in that, Seguin?”

“Since I met your client, Crosbie,” Seguin replied, taking Natalie’s arm and moving down the hall with her, leaving Crosbie swearing and cursing after them.



## Chapter 106

Angelo was glad for the break. He needed to do some research on the Italian community in Montreal. He spent most of the next day in one of the big municipal libraries. He phoned Robert and told him he wouldn't be home for the holiday. He was tired as it was, and it would only tire him more to go home, then come back again. Besides, he needed to catch up on his own work. That night, he was sitting on the bed going over the statistics he had found on Italian immigration to Montreal in the last century, when there was a knock at the door.

He got up and opened it, surprised to see Natalie.

"Hey," she said, smiling.

He opened the door, "What are you doing here?"

"I've got no life," she replied. "It's the day before Christmas Eve and I wanted to invite you to dinner."

"Now?" he said, smiling.

"Now. What is all this stuff?" she asked, walking over to the bed and picking up papers.

It was a quarter to nine and he was hungry. "Statistics of Italian Immigration. I'm writing an article."

"Ah. But not tonight," she said, steering him over to the closet. "Get your coat. Dinner is on me."

"Well in that case," he flashed a smile, and they left the room.

## Chapter 107

Marshall found the Christmas season very long. He was anxious to get back to court and get everything over with. He also knew that if Angelo did not go back to Italy for the holidays, chances were he was somewhere in the city.

Natalie didn't come to see him on Christmas Day but he didn't expect her to... She had to have some time to herself. He was practically the only one who didn't receive any cards or visitors over the holidays. Many of the inmates in Bordeaux were out on Christmas Day, having been given day passes. The majority of inmates were only in for weekends or at nighttime anyway. They left for work in the mornings and came back again at night. Others were like him, waiting for their trial to begin.

He had begun to talk to some of the other inmates but only on a very casual basis. Many asked him what happened to his face but he didn't explain. Everyone knew who he was because it was all in the news. He saw his picture once, before his face was cut up and he cried looking at it.

A doctor told him at the prison that they could eventually fix his face, but it would cost a lot of money and he wouldn't look the same. It was something for the future maybe, if he ever got out of here. He could find a good job and have it done little by little until he felt normal again. Yet he had never felt normal, except maybe when he was making love with Angelo.

Angelo. He closed his eyes. Two Christmases had gone by since they'd been together in Rome. It seemed like yesterday.

## Chapter 108

The days went by. Natalie spent as much time as she could with Angelo. She invited him to Christmas dinner and they went skating together and to the movies. They laughed a lot. He was so much fun to be with. When she wasn't with him, she was thinking about him and it made her smile.

New Years Eve came and she invited him to a party Anne and her husband gave. It was a nice party with twenty or so people, dancing and a late supper.

When Natalie said she was bringing someone, Anne was excited. It had been a long time since Natalie had been interested in anyone.

When she showed up at the door with Angelo Farelli, Anne was speechless. It was her husband Jack who saved her, stepping in and introducing himself.

Natalie watched how easily Angelo mixed with people. He was a natural conversationalist and people gravitated toward him. He looked very handsome in a navy suit and light peach coloured shirt he wore open at the neck.

Natalie teased him about being allergic to ties and he gave her one of his smiles that made him look almost boyish, although there was nothing boyish about him.

Anne came up beside her, looking over to where Angelo Farelli stood talking to two of her female guests. Anne waved a hand in front of her face and spoke to her in a hushed voice, "Natalie, have you lost your mind? What is wrong with you? When you said you were seeing someone, I had no idea..."

Natalie met her eyes and took a sip of her champagne. "We're just friends."

"Friends?" Anne's eyes widened. "No woman could just be friends with a man like that."

"We get along well. He's funny and I like being with him. I think he likes being with me, too."

"He's going to break your heart, Nat. He's gay."

"I'm not sure of that."

"You are kidding yourself," Anne said.

"He could be bisexual, you know."

"Did you ask him? And what about Marshall?"

Natalie's face changed. "Marshall and Angelo are finished. Angelo is never going to...it's over whatever they had. Marshall doesn't need to know anything about this. This is separate. We don't discuss Marshall."

Anne's eyes widened. "Over? Is it?" Anne asked. "What about when the trial is over and he goes home? Are you going with him?"

"I'm not thinking that far ahead."

"Are you in love with him?"

"I...I...no," Natalie laughed. "We're friends, that's all. Stop fretting."

Anne nodded. "What do you think about the case, is it going to go our way?"

Natalie smiled. "Yes. I feel it in my bones and it's all because of Angelo's testimony."

## Chapter 109

It was almost four in the morning and they were still sitting in the all night doughnut place drinking coffee.

"Aren't you tired?" Angelo asked Natalie.

"I am," she agreed with a smile. "It was such a perfect evening. I don't want it to end."

He had kissed her briefly on the mouth to welcome in the New Years. It was a silly little kiss, nothing passionate about it, but it still lingered on her lips somehow.

"How is your article coming?" She asked him as he smoked a cigarette and looked at the snow falling softly outside.

He laughed. "Article? What article? You have kept me occupied all week."

She grinned. "Oh."

"Yeah, oh. You're going to talk to my editor and explain when I miss my deadline," he teased.

"Is he cute?"

"Nope."

She laughed, then sobered as she fingered her napkin. "Angelo," she said.

"Natalie," he teased. "What?"

"I feel so...so close to you...is that crazy?"

"No." He shook his head. "I feel close to you, too, for some reason."

"I guess I knew you even before I met you. Does that make sense?" She met his eyes.

He nodded. "I think you told me that about a dozen times," he laughed.

She grinned. "Marshall described you to me, things you said and did. When we met, it kind of completed the picture."

"Umm."

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Will you be honest with me?"

"Why wouldn't I?" he shrugged.

"Have you ever...are you...have you...well..."

"You want to know if I've ever had sex with a woman?"

He'd said it so easily.

"Yes. I guess I'm curious."

He took a breath. "If I say no, you would think maybe you could bring out the heterosexual in me. And if I say yes, it will make you think that we can be lovers."

She was stunned. She looked down at the table. "Well I...no...I..."

He reached over and lifted her chin with his fingers. "Natalie, over these few days that we've been together, I have become very fond of you. And the thought of sleeping with you has crossed my mind, if you want to know."

"I sense a *but*," she reached out and stroked his hand.

He smiled at her and withdrew it. "I'm really gay, honestly. I could make love to you. I'd enjoy it, but not in the same way I enjoy sex with a man. It would be a very selfish thing for me to do."

"Why would it be selfish? I'm an adult. If I want you..."

"Because," he told her, meeting her eyes, "it wouldn't mean the same thing to me."

"I don't understand," she shook her head.

"You are a beautiful woman, Natalie," he told her. "You deserve a man who is completely turned on by you. Maybe I could give you what you want physically, but I could never give you what you want emotionally and it would end up hurting our friendship."

Tears stung her eyes.

"See, I've hurt you already."

She shook her head. "Tell me something else."

He smiled. "What?"

"How do you feel about Marshall now?"

"Why do you keep asking me that question?" He said, throwing up his hands. "I already told you that it's irrelevant. Do you want me to still be in love with him?"

"No. Maybe," she replied, standing up and putting on her coat. She found it hard being here now.

He put on his, too. They walked out together into a silent city. The sun was coming up. She took his arm. It was cold. She moved closer to him. "I just want someone to be happy," she said, tears running down her cheeks.

He stopped and pulled her against him. She sobbed into his shoulder for a minute.

"I'm sorry," she said, moving away.

He licked his lips, then said slowly, "I loved him once with everything I had in me," he admitted. "I never thought I could love someone so much."

"Why? What made you love him so much?" she sniffed.

"I don't know." He shook his dark head. "He needed me and I suppose that appealed to me. He made me feel like I was everything to him, his entire world." His voice was so calm suddenly and it echoed on the cold air of the still dawn. "I felt consumed by him. I felt that when he touched me, I melted into him like we were one person."

She closed her eyes for a minute. They stopped, looking out over the city from a bridge.

"When I found out he had betrayed me, it was like my entire world had gone dark. I didn't care about anything anymore and it left me with this empty place inside me."

"Even now?"

"Even now. No matter what I do, who I sleep with, I just can't seem to fill it."

"Why don't you forgive him? He still loves you."

He shook his head. "I can't do that. There is this other part of me that could never trust him again. His betrayal...well, I don't think I could ever get passed it."

"You'll feel differently in time," Natalie said, hugging his arm to her as they moved on again.

"Maybe," he said. "Natalie, you need to find someone like that for you."

She nodded. "Easy to say."

They stopped in front of his hotel. He kissed her on top of the head. "He's out there," he told her.

She smiled at him.

"Can you drive?"

"I'm not drunk. Angelo, I think we should...well, I think I will let you work on your article for awhile. We'll have dinner next week or something."

He nodded and touched her cheek with his gloved hand. "See you soon, Natalie," he said and raised a hand to her as she got into her car.

She watched him disappear into the door of the hotel, lowered her head and cried.



## Chapter 110

Something about Natalie seemed different. Marshall sensed it as soon as she walked into the recreation room.

"Happy New Year," she said.

"Happy New Year," he said. "Did you have a good holiday?"

"Yes. Thanks," she replied, then busied herself opening her briefcase. "We should get down to work."

"Did you see Angelo over the holidays?"

She slammed shut her briefcase, the sound echoing throughout the room. "Why would you think that?"

He stiffened. "I'm sorry...I...just wondered if..."

"What in hell difference does it make, Marshall? You're not going to see him. He's not going to come here."

Marshall paled.

She marched over to the window. "It's over for you. It was over the minute he knew what you were trying to do to him. You blew it, okay? So stop this incessant whining about him!"

He went over and sat down in the chair, speechless.

"What did I do to make you hate me?" he asked her suddenly, his voice barely audible. He folded his hands and looked down at the floor.

"Oh God," she whispered, putting her hand to her mouth, "Marshall, I don't hate you...I..."

"Then how could you say such horrible things?" he demanded, standing up. The hurt had turned to anger.

"Maybe I want you to face...reality," she said gently, lowering her hand.

"Reality? These walls here...the bars on my cell, I think that just

might be reality enough, don't you? How in the hell much more reality do you want me to deal with?"

"This case...since I first became involved in this case," she said, as if to herself, "it's been nothing but heartache for me. I don't understand how I became so involved with the both of you and now...I..."

"What do you mean...with the..." he hesitated, "what do you mean by the both of us?"

He came closer when she didn't respond. "Answer me. You've been with him over the holidays, haven't you? Haven't you?" he demanded.

She nodded. "But it's not what you think."

"Not what I think? I have no right to think anything. Isn't that what you just told me a few minutes ago, Natalie? I blew it, you said, it's over. I tried to kill the man I love and he knows it so damn...he hates me now."

"He doesn't hate you," she shook her head.

"And you decide to move right in, is that it? While I sit here rotting in jail, you try and seduce Angelo. After I poured out my heart to you, confessed everything, told you intimate details about—"

"That's it!" she cried. "You made me fall in love with him before I even knew him. What do you want from me? I'm human, goddamn it. You seduced me with your words and I felt as if I knew him intimately before I even set eyes on him." Tears fell from her eyes.

She paced the room a few times as Marshall stood frozen. "You're the one who insisted I go and meet him at his hotel. You used me, you used me as your messenger and now you blame me for how I feel."

She went and sat down on the sofa, her body turned away from him. In a low voice, she said, "If it's any consolation to you, nothing happened. He doesn't want me. We've stopped seeing each other."

Marshall lowered his head. He ran a hand through his hair. "You're right, Natalie. This is all my fault. I had no right to..." He paused. "I pushed our relationship past what was acceptable. You are my lawyer, I..."

She looked at him. "I'm also your friend, Marshall. At least I'd like to think we're friends. Maybe we're not supposed to be, but I think I was the only one you had to talk to. I was overcompensating, trying to

right a wrong that happened with a client I had years ago. I never meant to hurt you.”

“I know.” Marshall walked over and put his hand on her shoulder. “I’m ready to go over my testimony now, Natalie. We’re going to win this thing. I’m not going to jail.”

She smiled, sniffed some, then nodded in determination. “That’s my boy,” she said.

\* \* \* \*

Angelo testified for three more days. Finally, Marshall took the stand. For four days Marshall talked about his relationship with Hal Makin. He told the court about the abuse, both verbal and physical. He talked about how he had used him and how he had made him feel no one else in the world would care about him.

Natalie asked Marshall to tell the court about his childhood. He talked about his father’s drinking, the violence and how his mother locked him in a closet, sometimes for days. To escape the abuse, he ran away from home only to encounter another abuser, a pimp who lived off him to feed his drug addiction.

People cried in the courtroom.

Marshall looked at Angelo the entire time he spoke. Sometimes, when it was really quiet in the room, it felt like he was talking only to him.

Finally, it was over. Marshall came down off the stand, feeling as if he’d been put through an emotional wringer. Natalie told him she was proud of him.

“You did that all on your own,” she said.

He smiled, thinking that he wasn’t alone. Angelo had been with him.

The next few days were reserved for closing statements. Then came the worst part, the jury was excused to deliberate. All they could do now was wait.

## Chapter 111

When the court finally let out, Angelo went to Little Italy to set up interviews with first generation Italian-Canadians. He was grateful he had work to do. The last few days in that courtroom had taken its toll on him. He couldn't wait to finish up his research and get to hell out of this city.

Natalie spent every day with Marshall, waiting. They went over things together, trying to find clues to help them predict how it would go. They both knew however that it was out of their hands.

Two days after the jury was released to abdicate, Natalie received a page at the prison. She went to the phone outside the security area and checked her message. It was Angelo at the hotel.

"Angelo," she said, "did you hear something?"

"No," he said. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to give you a start. I was wondering if Marshall could call me at the hotel."

She put out her hand and braced herself against the wall. "What?"

"Would it be violating some rule or something?"

"No, but..."

"Give him the number and tell him to call me. He does have calling rights, doesn't he?"

"Yes, but Angelo, are you sure you want to do this?"

"I need to do this. Just tell him as soon as possible, before the verdict is handed down."

"All right."

She hung up, stunned he would request such a thing.

"Marshall," she said as she walked in, "have you used your ten minutes this week for the phone?"

"No. Why?"

She walked over to him, and put a hand on his shoulder. "That was Angelo. He would like you to call him now at the hotel."

He hand shook as he reached out to her. "Really?"

She took it and gave it a gentle squeeze. "Yes. He said that he wants to talk to you before the verdict is in."

Marshall stood up. She scribbled down the number for him. "Ask for room 610."

He held onto her hand for a moment, then walked down the hall toward the phone.

He dialled the number. When the desk clerk answered, he asked for room 610. The phone rang once, twice. He almost hung up. Then he heard his voice. "Hello?"

He tried to catch his breath. He held back tears.

"Marshall?"

"Yeah, it's me." He closed his eyes and put his head on top on the phone for a minute.

"Marshall?"

"I'm here."

"Don't talk, just listen."

"Yes..." he managed.

"I forgive you for what you did."

Angelo heard a broken sob, then silence.

"Don't cry. Don't waste any more tears over this. Make your life what you want it to be, Marshall. No matter how the verdict goes, stop listening to those voices in your head. They can't hurt you anymore. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you."

"I have to let it go, so I can get on with my life too."

"I love you, Angelo. I suppose there is no chance that--"

"Marshall, if things had turned out differently," his voice faltered some, he cleared his throat, "you would have been...the love of my life." The last four words were barely audible.

The phone went dead.

Marshall stood there for a few minutes. He wiped his tears and hid his face so no one would see. Natalie tried to speak to him in the corridor, but he brushed by her and walked away.

A half hour later, she found herself outside Angelo's hotel. She

hesitated for a minute, then gravitated into the lobby.

When he opened the door to his room, she looked passed him to see his suitcase lay open on the bed. A quarter of a bottle of whiskey stood on the night stand.

She walked into the room. "You were going to leave and not tell me?"

He shrugged.

She picked up the bottle and took a swig of the liquor. She made a face. "Don't you even care about the verdict?"

"No," he said.

He put some clothes in the suitcase, then sat down and lit a cigarette.

She sunk in the chair across from him. "When does your plane leave?"

"It's a redeye at midnight."

"So you're booked?"

"Yes."

He looked away.

"Marshall wouldn't speak to anyone after he got off the phone with you."

"Really?" he said, but he still didn't look at her.

"Will you regret leaving in the years to come?"

He looked at her. "Why in the hell..." he paused, narrowing those black eyes.

"You're leaving your heart here."

"I didn't make him that way, Natalie," he said softly. "This world did this to him, people's indifference and cruelty... What in hell do you want me to do?"

She swallowed. "Hal told him no one would ever love him. I guess you're going to drive that home to him."

He stood up, his eyes blazing. "Don't you dare lay that trip on me! I just forgave him so that he can go on. Isn't that enough?"

She wasn't surprised at his outburst. She bit her lip. "I'm sorry. I was out of line."

He calmed immediately. "Me, too," he echoed. He walked over to her, and pulled her up out of her chair. He took her hands in his. "I can't save him, Natalie. He has to want to save himself." He looked her

in the eyes.

She nodded mutely, a sensation of sadness washing over her.

He released her.

“You’ll keep in touch?”

“Sure,” he said, but she knew he wouldn’t.

“Want a ride to the airport?” She didn’t want to say goodbye.

He shook his head. “No. Thanks.” He kissed her on both sides of the cheek. “Take care of yourself, Natalie.”

“You, too,” she replied, touching his face with her hand for a moment.

She walked to the door and he returned to his packing. She watched him for a moment.

He put his suitcase on the floor. Then he met her eyes and whispered, “In answer to your question, Natalie, I never stopped.”

His words settled over her. She mouthed the words, “Thank you,” before she left him.

## Chapter 112

Robert was waiting for Angelo when he arrived at Leonardo Da Vinci Airport in Rome. He threw his arms around him and hugged him. Angelo returned the hug.

"You didn't have to come to meet me," Angelo told him.

Robert smiled sadly. "I missed you."

They walked outside to where Robert had parked his car. When Angelo didn't say anything, Robert said, "Well, at least tell me what the verdict was. I've been too busy to watch the news."

"I can't do that," Angelo replied, looking out the window.

"Why not?" Robert asked him, narrowing his eyes.

"Because I don't know."

"You left before the verdict was in?"

"Yes." He knew his voice sounded impatient.

Robert got the message that he didn't feel like talking. He gave his full attention over to the road.

They drove down to Viale Giulio Cesare. Suddenly, the reflection of St. Peters Church and the Trevi Fountain flashed before his eyes. The car came to a stop at the traffic light and Angelo watched the people as they poured out of the Ottaviano from an underground exit, hurrying like they always did to God knows where. Nearby, the tourists were still scattered on the Spanish steps like a mountain of flies, and the con artists still wandered Navona Square. Everything was exactly the way it was before he left. Nothing had changed at all.



## Chapter 113

The verdict was handed down five days after Angelo had gone back to Rome... Hal Makin was sentenced to life for three counts of murder, one count of attempted murder, one count of unlawful confinement, several counts of fraud and several counts of blackmail.

Marshall held his breath as the judge told him to rise. He was found guilty of one count of conspiring to murder and several counts of blackmail, fraud and prostitution.

"Marshall Calletti," the judge said, "this court is inclined to be lenient in your case. In light of Mr. Farelli's testimony, and given your willingness to testify against Hal Makin, your attempt to save lives, and your good record in Bordeaux, the court feels that with the proper treatment, you may one day be rehabilitated enough to serve as a responsible citizen in this society. Therefore, I remand you over to the Perdue psychiatric facility where you are to be committed for a period of no less than three years. Is there anything you wish to say to the court before you are taken from this place?"

"Thank you," was all he said.

Natalie hugged Marshall briefly just before a guard came to handcuff him again and to take him outside.

"I'm glad they took me out the back way," Marshall said nervously. "Listen to that crowd out in front. I wouldn't know what to say to those reporters."

Natalie patted his arm while the guard stood watchful nearby. They were in a vacant parking lot, waiting for a prison vehicle to come and take Marshall to the hospital.

"Natalie, maybe I shouldn't be so thrilled about going to a nuthouse."

“Marshall,” she said, trying to reassure him, “it’s better than prison. If you work hard on your treatment, you could be out in three years. And it won’t be as dangerous as prison. I’ll come visit you.”

He nodded solemnly.

“You have a future now, Marshall,” she told him.

“I owe it all to you,” he said.

“You owe it to yourself,” she replied, just as a prison vehicle drove into a parking lot. Two guards got out and walked over to where they stood. One of them nodded at Marshall.

“Could you say goodbye to Angelo for me?” He said, casting her a nervous glance before they began to lead him off.

“Sure,” she replied, looking down at the ground. She didn’t have the heart to tell him he had already left.

He looked back at her. “He told me that he forgives me. Can you imagine what that feels like? I can finally breathe again.”

She nodded.

“Come and see me,” he called out over his shoulder before they urged him into the vehicle.

“I will,” she managed to say weakly but he didn’t hear her. She saw him peering out at her through the barred window, trying not to cry.

## Chapter 114

Five years later:

It was Jason who showed Natalie the headline. He came home for supper Friday night and handed her the newspaper and pointed to the article. "Thought this might interest you," he said. The caption read, "Angelo Farelli to receive prize for his book, *Italians in Montreal: Culture and Assimilation*."

Natalie was sitting on the sofa when he handed it to her. She jumped up and went over to the table, spreading out the paper. "My God, he's coming here. He's receiving the prize at the community centre tomorrow afternoon in Little Italy." She looked at Jason.

He frowned.

She laughed and walked over to him. "You're not jealous, are you?"

She had met Jason in a coffee shop a few weeks after Marshall's trial had come to a close. She had been exhausted, immersed in a new case, and miserable.

He had been sitting at the table next to her. Then he'd spoke to her. At first she had been cool to him, but as time went on, she'd weakened and found he was actually a very nice guy. They'd agreed to meet for dinner and, within a week, she had completely unburdened herself to him. She'd told him about Marshall and Angelo and how deeply she'd become involved with both of them.

"Not jealous," he said as she absently pushed some of his yellow blond hair away from his forehead.

She forced herself to meet his eyes. "You sound like it," she murmured.

"Remember, I know how you felt about Angelo Farelli at one time," he moved away from her.

She sighed. "Ancient history. And if you're so jealous of a man I haven't even heard a peep from in five years," she grinned, "why show me the paper?"

"It's for Marshall, not you," he told her, perching on the edge of the sofa. After a second, he said, "Do you think he knows?"

"He knows about the book," she shrugged. "I don't know if he's seen the paper today or not."

Jason looked at her. "Are you going to tell him?"

"Of course I'm going to tell him," she returned easily, then paused. "Do you think I should?"

He threw up his hands. "I don't know. Part of me says you should let sleeping dogs lie. He's got his life together now. Would it do any good to..." Jason sucked in some air. "He's probably going to see it anyway. He's always reading the Arts and Entertainment section. Are you going?"

"To the book signing?"

"Yeah," he asked, rubbing his thigh lazily.

"I don't know." She sat down at the kitchen table for a minute. Jason turned on the television.

It had been a long road for Marshall. She had watched him struggle in that hospital over the first two years. Sometimes she would show up and he wouldn't even know her. He'd fall into these dark places that took him months to crawl out of... Now, he was living his life, working in an art supply store and trying to sell his paintings on the side. To let him know Angelo would be here in Montreal might be a mistake.

Not that he'd ever forgotten him. Although he didn't bring him up much, he kept his book on his night stand beside the bed. And all his paintings contained scenes of Brazil.

She got on the phone and dialled the store where Marshall worked. If he saw it after the fact and she didn't tell him, she'd feel guilty. She couldn't protect him forever. He had the right to make up his own mind.

"Picasso Art Supplies, may I help you?" Marshall replied in French.

"Marshall, it's Nat."

"You have the paper around, the English one?"

"Somewhere, why?"

"Turn to page three, read it and then call me back. Wait until there are no customers in the store."

"Why? What is it?"

"Just do it. Call me back."

She hung up.

\* \* \* \*

Marshall went looking for the paper. He found a copy all folded up in the bathroom on the floor. His boss was in this morning and was probably reading it on the toilet.

He brought the paper out front with him. He thumbed through it, arriving at page three and then read the headline. His hand shook as he brought the paper up closer to his face. He read it a second time, having a hard time breathing suddenly.

*Mr. Farelli, a native of Rome and now a resident of Los Angeles, will be at the Italian Community Centre, Wednesday at two p.m. to receive the award and read an excerpt from his book. A book signing will follow the presentation. Admission will be charged and proceeds will go to the Italian-Canadian Youth Association. Angelo Farelli is the acclaimed author of a fascinating book on Italian immigration to Montreal in the early part of this century. Unlike other books detailing the influx of the Italians to Montreal, Farelli integrates statistics with real life stories filled with both triumph and tragedy.*

Marshall put down the paper. He leaned back against the wall. Angelo was coming to Montreal. He would be in Little Italy tomorrow, the place where he grew up as a boy. Maybe he was already here.

When the phone rang again, he picked it up without speaking. Thank goodness it was Natalie. "Did you find the paper? Marshall, you there?"

"Yes." He clutched the phone. "Jesus," he said.

"Do you want me to come over?"

"No."

"What do you think?"

"I don't know right now. I feel like someone just punched me."

"Are you going to go, Marshall?" Natalie sucked in some air.

"Damn right I'm going to go." Passion and conviction steeled his voice. "I'm calling my boss right now and tell her I can't come in tomorrow. You have to come with me."

"I can't," she said. "I've decided not to."

"Because of Jason?" He asked softly.

"No, because of me," she replied.

"All right."

He called his boss and told her he would need the afternoon off tomorrow. She agreed without any questions. He had never taken a day off since he'd begun working almost two years ago so he knew there would be no problem.

When nine o'clock came, he locked up and got into his ninety-seven Spirit. He always sighed with relief whenever it started. He stopped by Natalie's at nine-thirty.

"Hey," she said when he rang the bell.

They went into the kitchen. "Where's Jason?" He asked.

"Out playing pool with his brother."

Marshall noticed Natalie had Angelo's book sitting on the table. He walked over and picked it up. He turned it over in his hand. There was a picture of him on the back. "He hasn't aged a day. His hair is shorter and he's got a bit of a shadow. Sexy on him, isn't it?" He smiled, as she automatically went to the coffee machine and poured him a cup.

He thanked her and sat down with it.

She regarded him thoughtfully, "Honey, are you sure you really want to do this?"

He looked up at her suddenly, putting down the book. "Don't you think it's a sign?"

She pursed her lips. "I don't know. I know you never stopped..."

He took a sip of his coffee, looking straight ahead.

"Marshall," she continued gently, sitting beside him now, "I don't want to dash your hopes but..."

"Nat," he looked at her. "Have you ever wanted something so much, you thought you'd be willing to do just about anything to get it?"

She bit her lip. "Maybe."

"It's not a coincidence that he's coming here. Natalie, I've never stopped thinking about him, never stopped believing that one day we could be together. If I'm dreaming then..."

“What if he doesn’t want to see you, Marshall? What if his life is better now and he’s put all that stuff behind him?”

“He’s the love of my life. There will never be any other. The me I can offer him now is better. I know that I can make him happy.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt, that’s all. You might not survive it if he...”

Marshall shook his head. “I have to try.”

Natalie sighed. “He didn’t keep in touch with me, Marshall. What if you are the last person he wants to see? What if he is with someone else?”

Marshall closed his eyes. “I can’t let this opportunity go, Nat. I have to take the chance,” he insisted.

## Chapter 115

He hardly slept that night. All he could think of was that moment when he would finally see him again, look into those eyes. At twelve-thirty in the afternoon, he got into the shower. He shaved, and changed his clothes several times. Finally, he opted for a navy blue suit and white shirt. It was the nicest thing he had. He didn't eat anything.

At two o'clock, he sat in the parking lot of the community centre in Little Italy and watched the people go in.

Inside, Angelo stood near the podium speaking to the director of the Italian Community Centre. People had begun to spill in and take their seats. The director was very excited to meet him. He had shaken his hand about ten times already. Angelo was surprised at the number of people.

Angelo was smiling, looking very handsome in his black pants and red silk shirt. The director of the centre introduced him in Italian, but said most of the ceremony would be in English to accommodate the non-Italians in the audience.

Marshall moved to the middle of the room and grabbed a vacant seat on the isle. It was close to a packed house.

When he saw Angelo up front, his heart began to pound in his chest. He was smiling, laughing when the director said, "Among the Italians in this community, Angelo Farelli is as popular as a rock star. Not only does his book portray an accurate picture of the influx of our people to this community, he has captured the heart and soul of this community."

The audience clapped.

"Before I introduce Mr. Farelli, I would like to read you my favourite passage from the book, if you would permit me. Then you can



listen to the man you really came to hear speak.”

People laughed.

He picked up the book, opening it to a place he had marked. He began, “Angelo Farelli writes the following in reference to our community. ‘Nowhere have I seen a place that captures the spirit of Italy like this one. The heart, the voice and the warmth of Little Italy feels exactly like the homeland. If I close my eyes, I can almost smell Rome and taste its sweet fruit. In spite of the hardships of the past, this community has risen from nothing to stand firmly on its own two feet. It has contributed immensely to the economy and culture of Montreal. And through the senses which speak to me of home, is something distinctly Canadian about them. They are truly unique. This author can only look at them with amazement and say, *Bravo!*’”

People applauded. People got to their feet.

Marshall smiled, as he stood up, bursting with pride.

After the crowd quieted, Angelo was presented with the award, which he accepted with a humble “Thank you.”

Then he moved up to the podium. Before he spoke, Marshall noticed he paused to smile down at the man who sat in the front row.

The man smiled back, mouthing something to him that Marshall couldn’t catch.

As Angelo began to speak, Marshall’s eyes were riveted to the man who sat gazing up admiringly at Angelo. And he wasn’t the only one staring at him. He drew quite a few curious glances from the people around him. Not only was he the only African American, he was clearly one of the best-looking men in the room.

Angelo said how honoured he was to accept the award, as Marshall tried to tear his eyes away from the gorgeous man with ebony skin.

“I never realized I had such a fan club here,” Angelo remarked dryly, which earned him a resounding applause. “I would like to dedicate this to all the Italians who came here in the first wave of immigration, the brave ones. This is for them!” He held it up to another round of applause.

The director invited people to come up to get their books signed.

Marshall looked down at the book in his hand. He stood up. Angelo sat behind a table, which had been set up for him. People

began to get in line.

He swallowed, his palms wet. He filed in behind a woman with a large straw hat. She dropped the book she held on the floor once and Marshall picked it up for her. She thanked him.

People were taking their time, gabbing away in Italian with Angelo and giving him specific instructions as to what they wanted him to put in their books. Marshall could hear them from where he stood.

What was he was going to say? *Hello, Angelo, I miss you so much. I never stopped loving you and...* No. He couldn't say that. He sighed. Or he could just say, *Hi, how are you doing? Do you want to have a drink while you're here so that we could...could do what...relive old times?* That would be a mistake. Maybe he could just say *Hello Angelo, I knew you were going to be here so thought I'd stop by*, and leave the rest up to him.

He was being pushed forward. The woman with the straw hat was trying to see around the two people in front of her. Marshall could see Angelo clearly now. The tall handsome man with the black skin stood by his side. He leaned down to say something in his ear. Angelo paused from writing in one of his books and looked up at him. He smiled.

Marshall swallowed something painful. He gripped the book tightly in his hand. He didn't realize someone was speaking to him until he felt a tap on his shoulder.

Marshall blinked at the young man standing beside him.

He looked at him and then up to the front as he felt the line move forward. His feet were not moving. He could hear Angelo's voice, deep, sincere, laced with that faint Italian accent. He bit into his lip, the scene blurring in front of his eyes.

The woman in the straw hat turned around to complain about the person in front of her.

The young man who had tapped him on the shoulder was speaking to him. Perhaps he had been speaking to him before but he didn't hear him. "Are you in line?" he asked him, indicating the huge gap he had left between himself and the woman with the big hat.

Marshall cast another glance at Angelo, smiling, laughing and looking up at the handsome man at his side. "Ah...no," he said abruptly, moving aside to give him his spot. "You can have my place."

He didn't notice the way people looked at him as he hurried out of

the hall. He didn't even realize that he was running until he turned around to see that the community centre was far behind him.

He eventually stopped to rest in a small park. Squinting up through the sunshine, he took a seat on a bench. Feeling out of breath, he watched the children playing nearby. He sighed, wiping absently at the tears that had almost dried on his face.

No matter how painful, a true and powerful love had no choice but to rise above selfishness. Once, he had been given a precious gift, the chance to start over again. Could there be any higher testimony of love than that?

He stood up. He lightly kissed the picture of the man on the back of the book and laid it gently on the bench... He began to walk. Someone spoke his name. He knew that voice. It was like his own breath, deep, with that twinge of an accent. He squeezed his eyes shut. He didn't even realize he was still moving until a hand settled on his shoulder. "Please, Marshall."

He shuddered, sucked in some breath and willed himself to turn around, to look into those eyes. Helpless. Those eyes rendered him weak. He shook all over. The love he had for this man soared through him and seared his soul. All he could do was look at him. He couldn't speak.

"Why did you run away?"

"I...I...you've suffered enough. It's time to..."

"To what?"

"Let you go on with your life...without reminders. It was selfish for me to come here, to want to...to see you again."

He pursed his lips as if he was considering Marshall's words...

"Are you happy?"

"I...should be," he said.

Marshall nodded. "The man who is with you, is he..."

"He was. We're friends now."

"You look well. And I'm happy your books are..." He looked down. It was too much, standing here with him. "I should go. I should let you get back to your—"

"Wait," he reached out and touched his arm.

Marshall looked up into his eyes. How could he have made such a mess of things? He'd found the only thing in his life that had ever

mattered and he'd tried to destroy it. Tears streamed down his face. "I...I've changed."

"So have I."

"Could you ever...could you ever," he gulped the hot tears, "trust me again...love me again?"

"Loving you is not a problem," he said, shaking his head. "God knows I've tried not to. Me loving you makes no sense...in fact," he smiled faintly, "it can be fatal."

Marshall's sobbing mixed with laughter. He wiped at his eyes. "Maybe we could start over? Be friends?"

"Maybe," he nodded. "I should get back now."

Marshall's gaze settled on Angelo's mouth. He could still taste his kiss.

Angelo reached in his pocket, took out a pen and a card. "My number at the hotel." He scribbled it on the card. "I'm here for a week. If you want to have a drink, maybe we could talk? Call me tomorrow."

Silent tears flowed down Marshall's cheeks. He took the card, a smile spreading across his face. "I...I'll call you."

"Okay." He raised his hand. "See you, Marshall." He looked at him for a long moment then turned and walked away.

Marshall watched him until he had disappeared from view. There was no guarantee that Angelo would give him a second chance, but he'd settle for friendship for the time being. And if it took an eternity to win back his heart, he was willing to wait.

## *About the Author*

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!

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