



HEART OF STEELE

G.A. Hauser

HEART OF STEELE

G.A. HAUSER

*And introducing Michael Zephyr's short story
Above and Below the Surface*

HEART OF STEELE
Copyright © G.A. Hauser, 2010
ABOVE AND BELOW THE SURFACE
Copyright © Michael Zephyr, 2010
Cover art by Stephanie Vaughan
Edited by Stacey Rhodes
ISBN Trade paperback: 978-1-45053-135-1
The G.A. Hauser Collection

This is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or business establishments, events or locales is coincidental.

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

WARNING

This book contains material that maybe offensive to some: graphic language, homosexual relations, adult situations. Please store your books carefully where they cannot be accessed by underage readers.

First G.A. Hauser publication: February 2010

ABOUT THE E-BOOK YOU HAVE PURCHASED PLEASE READ

For anyone who is a true fan of my work, please respect my rights as an author and report any illegal downloads you find of my ebooks to me or the authorities.

Illegal downloads will ultimately harm me personally as a writer, and in the future there will inevitably be no more new GA Hauser novels. By stealing my work and pirating it, spreading it to the world of thieves, you will ultimately bring an end to the author you claim to enjoy.

For those of you who have purchased this book legally, I would like to personally thank you for your support. For those who have obtained it by illegal websites, I hope you get what's coming to you as well. Because you will, count on it.

Your non-refundable purchase of this e-book allows you to only ONE LEGAL copy for your own personal reading on your own personal computer or device. **You do not have resell or distribution rights without the prior written permission of both the publisher and the copyright owner of this book.** This book cannot be copied in any format, sold, or otherwise transferred from your computer to another through upload to a file sharing peer to peer program, for free or for a fee, or as a prize in any contest. Such action is illegal and in violation of the U.S. Copyright Law. Distribution of this e-book, in whole or in part, online, offline, in print or in any way or any other method currently known or yet to be invented, is forbidden. If you do not want this book anymore, you must delete it from your computer.

WARNING: "The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000." And a hex on you from the author.

Chapter One

Why on earth am I nervous?

After all, the guest they were expecting was a nineteen year old exchange student from Lombardy, Italy. She was due any minute. No big deal.

Rick Steele's two younger sisters, Connie and Rhonda, had made up the daybed in their room for Elia Gianni. It was as if they had a new doll to dress up or a playmate to whisper secrets to in the night.

Still, he was a little envious. He knew when his sisters were younger they had sleepovers when the giggling never stopped until the early hours of the morning. What did he expect from an immature thirteen year old and a Goth fifteen year old? *Not a lot.*

Nineteen, on summer break from Ohio State University, Rick was the man in the family. His mother, Jenny, had called him that ever since his dad left her for another woman. A much *younger* woman. Rick hated his dad and felt sorry for his mother. He did the best he could to help out, but he was in Columbus most of the time.

His mom, Jenny, called his father, 'Dick-the-dead-beat'. Dick lived in Arizona with some peroxide-blondetattoo-covered druggie, leaving Rick, his two sisters and mother to fend for themselves in Beavercreek, a suburb of Dayton.

Rick had no idea why his mother agreed with the Rotary Club to house this exchange student. Yes, his mom was very civic-minded and was involved in every women's business group Ohio offered, but she always seemed overwhelmed with too much to do. Being a full time mom *and dad* to them, paying all the bills, working two jobs, one as a teacher, one as a part-time tutor, Jenny had no free time on her hands except for a few weeks each summer.

Perhaps it was peer pressure from her teacher friends, or maybe it was Rhonda's idea. Rhonda with the dyed pink hair, black fingernail polish and nose ring. Wasn't it Rhonda who brought home all the brochures from Beavercreek High School? Whatever the reason, everyone in the house seemed thrilled to have someone as exotic as an Italian native in their modest three bedroom middle-class American home.

His sisters were still whispering about it in the bedroom they shared.

Rick stood by the doorway to see what they were up to. Pillow fluffing.

"Rick," Connie said, "she's coming any minute."

"I know. Geez, take a chill pill."

"She's so pretty." Rhonda held a folder which included Elia's tiny wallet-sized photograph. "Look." She held it up as if Rick hadn't already seen it. "I want her to teach me to speak Italian. It would be so cool."

Yes, Elia was gorgeous. Long, thick, brown hair, dark eyes, chiseled features, full lips. But Rick had no interest in women, so it didn't make any difference to him. He imagined sharing a little light conversation over dinner, then minding his own business.

"What time did Mom say the flight was arriving?" Rick checked his watch.

Heart of Steele

“Around six. She’s picking her up at the Dayton Airport.” Rhonda snapped her fingers. “Crap, I was supposed to get the barbeque grill going.”

“I’ll help.” Rick followed both his sisters into the kitchen. Seeing Rhonda’s midriff exposing her ‘muffin-top’, Rick cringed and wondered what poor Elia would think of them. Some typical American family? An AWOL dad, a pink haired, chubby Goth with more piercings than a loose-leaf binder, and a thirteen year old who still collected made in China plastic toy animals with eyes that were too big for their heads.

Rick exited the house through the sliding glass door to the deck in the backyard. The hot humid June air slapped him in the face in contrast to the cool interior air conditioning. They had an above ground swimming pool that was fifteen feet wide by thirty feet long and four feet deep, surrounded by an elevated deck.

Connie removed the metal grate as Rhonda shook the bag of charcoal into the bowl.

Rick heard the sound of a car door closing from the front of the house. “Is that them?”

“I don’t know.” Rhonda pushed the sooty charcoals into a mini hill in the center of the bowl.

“I’ll check.” Rick walked around the outside of the house to take a quick look. His mother’s Mazda was parked in the driveway and the trunk was open, obscuring the view to her and their new exchange student.

His mother was talking non-stop and sounded either upset or nervous. Rick knew his mother was slightly neurotic but hoped she wasn’t freaking the poor girl out.

Rick was about to say hello or offer to help with luggage when he stopped short. *Holy shit!*

“Rick,” his mother said as if she had been running out of air from all her chatter. “This is Elia!”

The way his mother said ‘Elia’ and pointed in panic, Rick felt his stomach churn.

“Hello.” Elia had a very thick accent, and held out his, yes, *his* hand in greeting.

“Hi.” Rick clasped the offered hand and went into meltdown. No. Elia Gianni was not a girl. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But his photo sure looked like he was.

“I know there’s been a mistake.” Jenny appeared about to have a coronary. “But I suppose it’s all right. I do think the girls will be disappointed though. Rick, open the door, dear.”

Rick headed to the front of their house, which was located in a cul-de-sac on a quiet street. The summer air had the scent of jasmine and his mother’s lilies which were planted everywhere along the house, the garage, and around the shed.

“Come in. Make yourself comfortable.” Rick propped the door open for Elia.

“*Grazie.*”

Elia held a small carry-on suitcase, hoisting it over the step and door frame. He wore skin-tight black slacks and a black short sleeve tee-shirt. Rick almost came at the sight of his tight ass. “How was the flight?”

“Long.” When Elia smiled, dimples appeared. Rick imagined licking them.

“I should make a phone call and let someone know,” Jenny said.

“Mom. Calm down.” Rick hated when his mother went manic.

“Mom?” Rhonda called from the back of the house.

Connie and Rhonda raced in. The minute they saw Elia they stopped short.

“You’re a guy,” Connie said.

Heart of Steele

“Yes. I am a guy.” Elia’s eyes shined with his perfect smile. “There is mistake. I no know why they think I am girl.”

“Mom,” Rick said, “Don’t worry about it.” *If you think I’m letting this guy leave, you’re nuts.*

“Let me call the Rotary exchange program. I have to at least tell them.” She waved her hands in a gesture of confusion and left the room.

“I’m Connie, and this is Rhonda,” Connie said as she and Rhonda stared at Elia.

Rick could tell laughter was close behind their shy smiles.

Connie said, “Well, we set up a bed in our room, but it looks like you’ll be staying with Rick.”

Rick’s cock went thick in his shorts.

“Yes. It look that way. I am so sorry. I feel terrible. I have no idea how this happen.” Elia shook his head.

“Don’t worry,” Rick said, “Why don’t I show you to my room? At least you can change your clothes. You can’t wear long pants in this heat.”

“Yes. *Grazie*. I am hot.”

“Would you like to shower?” Rick wanted to be near him, sit with him, talk to him, sleep in the same bed with him. *My God he’s the most fantastic man I have ever seen. And that accent? Holy shit!*

“I no want to be trouble. Should we wait for your mother’s phone call?” Elia looked down at his polished black leather shoes nervously.

“No. Come on.” Rick took one of Elia’s two bags and led the way. He stopped at his room and turned on the light. “Hang out in here for now.” He put the suitcase on his queen-sized bed. “There’s a bathroom with a shower right there.” Rick pointed to another door in the hall. “And we have a pool, so you can even swim if you’d like.”

“You are very nice. Yes. I like to swim. But I am slightly tired from the flight.”

“Oh. Sorry. Be my guest.” Rick gestured to his bed.

“I can rest here?”

“Yes. If you need anything, just ask. We were going to have a barbeque for dinner out on the deck. But you can lie down for a little while.”

“Yes. I would like.”

Rick caught a whiff of delicious cologne and masculine sweat as he passed Elia to the door. “I’ll check on you soon.”

Elia held Rick still with a hand on each of his arms, then kissed Rick on both cheeks. “*Grazie.*”

Oh, my God. I’m going to die.

Rick froze until Elia released him. Was this some kind of Italian thing? Or was the attraction mutual?

Awkward silence followed.

Rick felt his mouth water as Elia stared at him. The contact had ceased between them, but Rick couldn’t read anything concrete in Elia’s expression.

The pause became absurd.

“Uh.” Rick wanted to dig his hands into that luscious head of brown wavy hair. He had sex with a guy in the dorms at OSU, but the attraction he was feeling for this Italian stud was consuming.

Elia laughed. It was soft, sensual, and sent the goose bumps rising on Rick’s arms.

“Yes?” Elia tilted his head.

The sound was so sexy, Rick felt his cock pulsate.

“Rick?” his mother called from the hall.

“Um.” Rick cleared his throat. “Mom wants me. Go shower, change, nap. Anything you, uh...desire. Okay?”

Heart of Steele

“Okay,” Elia repeated with an American inflection.

Motherfucker! Rick was about to turn into liquid mush if he didn’t leave the room. He nodded like he was a lunatic, bobbing his head, backed out and closed the door.

“Rick.” Jenny tugged Rick down the hall. “I spoke to the woman at the Rotary, and she said as long as we don’t object—”

“Object? Why would we object?”

“Well, we all thought we were getting a female exchange student.”

“Mom.” Rick had no way of telling his mother how urgently he wanted Elia to stay. He was not out to her yet.

“Anyway,” she waved her hand in distraction, “I told them a promise was a promise. So we’ll keep him here. It’s not fair to the poor man to move him, or do anything to make him uncomfortable.”

“Yes. Exactly.” Rick felt more at ease.

“But he can’t stay with your sisters.”

“No.”

“Maybe we can push the day bed into—”

“Mom.”

“Yes?”

Rick felt his breath quicken and his heart race. “He can stay in my room.”

“There’s no room in there for the daybed. How are we—”

“Mom,” Rick said more sternly. “I have a queen bed. I don’t mind sharing it.”

She blinked.

Did I just admit I’m gay? Rick didn’t think he did that. But his mother wasn’t making him feel very sure of himself at the moment.

“Maybe we can buy one of those air mattresses.”

“Mom.”

“Or your sisters can share your bed and you and Elia can—”

“Mom.”

“What?” She combed her fingers through her short brown hair as if she were exasperated.

“Let him stay in my room.”

“Did you make sure it’s okay with him?”

“I’ll talk to him.” Rick tried to escape. This was more information than he was ready to share with his mother. *If you think I’m coming out now, you’re nuts.*

She gripped his arm, stopping him and drew him close to whisper. “Are you sure you don’t mind? It’s a terrible inconvenience for both of you.”

“Like I said, I’ll run it past him. Meanwhile, he’s showering and resting.” *In my bed. But I’ll assume you know that.*

“Mom?” Connie appeared in the hall. “Should I light the grill?”

“Oh.” Jenny hurried behind Connie to the kitchen. “Let me think about how long Elia is going to rest. Where’s the chicken?”

“Marinating in the fridge.”

Once they left, Rick paused, looked back at his bedroom door and imagined sleeping in the same bed as that fantastic man. “And I thought this year’s summer break would be dull if I didn’t work.”

Elia stripped off his warm travel outfit, digging through his suitcase for shorts and a tank top. In just his briefs, his fresh clothing folded over his arm, he imagined a cool shower and a rest before dinner.

Heart of Steele

A wall of trophies caught his eye. Elia approached to have a better look. Golden statues of men wearing American football uniforms, oblong balls in their grasps, in running poses, or frozen in the midst of a pass, were on display. Each had the name ‘Richard E. Steele’ engraved on them. Football. Baseball. *Soccer?* “No!” Elia set his clothing on the bed and picked up the soccer trophy. His first love was soccer. AC Milan was his favorite team. But he had always heard Americans hated soccer.

“He is fantastic.” Elia replaced the trophy. He investigated small framed photos. Rick in a cap and gown, graduating from high school, his sisters and mother with him. *No papa? No. Divorce? Yes. Most likely.*

He was so excited to take his first trip abroad, when this opportunity came he snapped it up. The United States. Ohio? No. Not New York. Not California. Yes, well, he could not be choosy. He went where he was assigned.

How did they think he was a woman? Didn’t he check a box, *m or f? Silly people.*

Elia picked up Rick’s photo to inspect again. Blond, blue-eyed, American hero. *Yes, you are what I imagine when I think of an American man.* He thought he heard someone outside his door so he set the photo back.

Once again he picked up his clothing from the bed, along with a small toiletry kit and approached the door.

When he opened it, Rick was there. Instantly Rick’s cheeks grew rosy.

“I was just...uh, heading, uh...” Rick pointed back to the kitchen area.

“If you need something in room, not no go in because of me.”

Rick’s gaze moved downwards.

Elia peered in the same direction at his briefs and naked legs. Immediately he looked back at Rick for a reaction.

Rick looked lost. He said nothing, but kept staring.

"I play soccer too." Elia hoped his body was being admired.

"Soccer."

"Yes. Your sports trophies. I am so impressed."

Rick chewed his bottom lip.

"Do you have girlfriend?" Elia loved the way Rick kept staring at his lower half. It was making him hot. *This handsome fair-haired American man likes me?*

"No."

"Good. I no have girlfriend either."

Elia noticed Rhonda, the strange looking one with the pink hair and bulging belly, making her way down the hall.

"You need anything, Elia? There are plenty of towels in the bathroom for your shower. Help yourself."

Elia covered his crotch with his clothing. "Good. Yes."

"Rick?" Rhonda stared at her brother. "You okay?"

"Yes." Rick spun on his heels and walked away.

"I will shower now." Elia gestured to the door across the hall.

"Okay. Just let one of us know if you need anything."

"*Grazie*, yes, thank you." Elia smiled at her and closed himself into the bathroom, orienting himself with where things were.

You like me, pretty Rick? I hope so. Otherwise this exchange will be a boring ordeal.

Heart of Steele

Rick heard his mother and sisters in the kitchen talking. He couldn't make out the conversation, just the jumble of tones and inflection.

He stepped into his sisters' shared bedroom and looked at the tiny daybed they had made up with frill and lace. Next he picked up the folder on the dresser.

Elia most certainly appeared to be female in that small photo. But now that he knew he wasn't. *Growl! You sexy thing!*

"I can jack-off to this. Oh, yes, so easy now."

His mother's voice invaded his fantasy. "Rick? Shuck the corn, will ya?"

"Yeah, Ma." He shut the folder and left the room. Before he made it to the kitchen, the bathroom door opened. A cloud of moist steam wafted out from it. Rick stopped short.

"I thought I will nap, but I no feel so bad now."

"I always heard it's best to try and get into the local time zone as quickly as possible. Napping may screw it up."

"Yes. True. Perhaps a cup of espresso?"

Rick smiled. "Coffee. No espresso machine here."

"No? No espresso here?"

"I mean, in this house. We can get you one at a Starbucks or something."

"No. No go to trouble."

"Let me help you find some space in my closet for your clothing."

"Yes." Elia smiled.

Rick called down the hall to his mother, "I'll be right there."

"Okay!"

He entered his room and headed to the walk-in closet. After turning on a light, Rick took a handful of hangers off

the rack and pushed his own suits and shirts into a tighter wedge, creating a gap.

"Here." He handed Elia the hangers, then opened up a drawer of his dresser to make room there as well. When he was done he sat on his bed to watch him.

"Is enough. Perfect." Elia began unpacking.

"Uh..." Rick felt as if he was about to come out to this guy. It was nerve-wracking to discuss sleeping arrangements with a foreigner you've known for all of five minutes. "Elia."

"Yes, *Ree-ick*."

"Um. Because of this odd mix up, you know, with everyone thinking you're a girl..."

Elia chuckled, continuing to hang up his wardrobe.

"Well, do you mind bunking in here?"

Elia spun around. "I can no shove you out of own room. Is no right."

"No." Rick rubbed his face in agony. Without looking at him, he replied, "With me."

Dead silence followed. Rick had no choice but to see how badly Elia reacted. He was standing still, wearing white shorts and polo shirt, looking like a runway model, a hanger in his hand and his face a mask, unreadable to Rick.

"Look," Rick held up his hand. "I'm not gay or anything."

"No gay."

About to confirm that fallacy, Rick opened his lips. *Jesus... was that disappointment in what I said? Okay, shoot me.*

Elia gestured with his hand, trying to urge Rick to go on.

Rick looked back at the door to his room, stood and closed it. "Fuck."

Heart of Steele

“Fuck?” Elia appeared completely bewildered.

What am I supposed to do? If I tell you the truth and you're not gay, you'll run out of this house like it's on fire. If I say I'm not gay and we're in the same bed every night, I can't touch you if you are! Augh!

“I will sleep on floor. You no worry.” Elia resumed hanging up his clothing.

“No.” Rick closed the gap between them. “You will not sleep on the floor.”

Once Elia hung up another shirt, he faced Rick. “I will no touch you. You no be afraid.”

I want you to touch me! Rick hated this game. It was the same one he played with the guy he screwed in college. *Are you? Aren't you? Will I repulse you? Will you be hot for me? I hate this shit!*

“Rick?”

Shaken out of his stupor, Rick opened the bedroom door to his mother. “Is Elia napping or should we start dinner?”

Rick stepped back, allowing her to see Elia.

“I no nap. I try stay up.”

“Good. Rick, did you want to help out with the corn?”

“Yeah. Hang on. Oh, could you make a pot of coffee for him?”

She nodded and left.

They were alone again. Rick knew he had time for a more in depth discussion about sexual preference. *For Christ's sake, he's been here an hour.* “I’m going to help out in the kitchen.”

“Good. I be there soon to help too.”

“You’re the guest. You relax.”

“I like be good guest.”

At that soft smile, Rick melted. He gave Elia a wink and walked down the hall. *In my bed. Oh yes.*

"There's the corn." His mother pointed to a brown paper bag on the floor.

"Do you want me to peel them all?"

"Yes, please."

He picked the bag up and left the house through the sliding door to sit on the deck. Under the umbrella at the cast iron table and chair set, he began peeling the husks and silk off the sweet homegrown Ohio corn.

Rhonda poked at the hot coals while Connie kept her mother company in the kitchen making salad and apple pie.

"He's really cute."

Rick smiled but didn't make eye-contact with his sister. "You're fifteen."

"I can still look."

"No. You can't look until you're eighteen," Rick teased.

"Do you like him?"

Rick jerked his head up quickly. "What do you mean by that?"

She gave him a sly smile. "Never mind."

Crap. He never fucking dated. Maybe his mother was in denial but his sisters weren't completely stupid. "I like him."

"Is he gay?"

"Jesus, Rhonda!" Rick took a paranoid glance at the back sliding door.

"Still denying it?"

"Now? You have to have this discussion now?" Rick went into a cold sweat. He wanted to decide when and if this conversation occurred. And he sure as shit didn't want

Heart of Steele

to discuss this with his mother and sisters while a gorgeous Italian exchange student was about to sleep in his bed.

The back door opened and Elia stepped out. His hair was drying in full chocolate brown waves which framed his amazing sculpted cheekbones and square jaw.

“I can help?”

“Sure.” Rick set a couple of ears of corn on the table in front of him.

“Where put the...how you say?” Elia held up a piece of the husk.

Rick laughed. “In this bag.” He moved the brown paper sack between them. “Husks.”

“Husks.” Elia nodded, peeling back the silky covering on a large ear.

“You ever heard of corn-holing, Elia?” Rhonda stuck her tongue into her cheek.

“Get inside and see if Mom needs you,” Rick said, angry at her comment.

She smiled wickedly and entered the house.

“What is corn-holing?” Elia stacked the trimmed corn on the pile.

Rick wanted to kill his sister. “It’s a stupid game. You throw beanbags into a hole cut in a piece of wood.” *Yeah, that’s what it is here in Ohio, anyway.*

“I no hear of it.” Elia chuckled.

“I wouldn’t think you would.”

Rhonda opened the slider. “Do you need sugar or cream in your coffee, Elia?”

“Cream. Yes. *Grazie*. Thank you.”

“Coming right up.”

When Rhonda vanished Elia said, “You have nice family.”

G.A. Hauser

“Yes. They are for the most part.”

“Where is father?”

“He left us a couple of years ago.”

“I sorry. You still close with him?”

“No. I never speak to him.” Rick took the last ear of corn out of the bag and peeled it. When he peeked at Elia, Elia was busy with his own task.

“Here you go.” Rhonda set out a mug and a small spouted pitcher with milk in it.

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure. Though how you can drink hot coffee in this heat is beyond me.”

“Here.” Rick pointed to the pile of corn. “What do you want me to do with it?”

“Mom’s going to boil it.”

Rick stood.

“Hang on. Let me get another bag.” Rhonda went back inside again.

“What I can do to help?”

“Just relax.” Rick stayed Elia with a hand on his shoulder.

Rhonda returned with a plastic bag. Rick helped her fill it with the cleaned corn.

“Thanks.”

“Anything else I can do?” Rick asked.

“Not at the moment.”

Left alone with Elia again, Rick reclined in his chair. “What kind of things did you want to do while you were here visiting?”

“I no know. American things.” Elia smiled. “Like corn-holing.”

Heart of Steele

At the homo-erotic reference, Rick's cheeks went hot. "Fourth of July is next weekend. So, we can see some fireworks."

"Good." Elia sipped his coffee.

"I wish there was some sightseeing to do around here. Do you like baseball?"

"I never see a game. I no understand it. But I will go."

"The Cincinnati Reds play not far from here. I'll get tickets."

"*Buono.*"

Just staring at Elia was making Rick a perspiring mess. "Christ, it's hot." Rick pulled his shirt up over his head. The armpits and chest of his top were beginning to stain with his sweat. He tossed it over the back of his chair after he used it to wipe his face. Leaning his elbows on the table, Rick said, "Like Rhonda said, I don't know how you can drink—" He stopped short. Elia was gaping at him.

Suddenly Rick felt naked. He cupped his hands over his nipples in paranoia. "What? Did I do something that's lewd in Italy?"

"No! Oh, no! *Scusi. Per favore.* I am just enamored. You are, how you say? Well fit?"

"Enamored?" Rick's cock swelled and throbbed down the leg of his shorts.

Elia rubbed his face and muttered something in Italian Rick could never hope to translate.

"Sorry. So sorry." Elia stood, averting his eyes and waving his arms.

"Don't go." Rick hopped to his feet to stop Elia from leaving.

Elia's gaze darted to the mound in Rick's beige shorts.

Fuck! Why is this happening so quickly?

The sliding door opened and Jenny emerged with a platter of marinated chicken parts. "Hello, boys. Going somewhere?"

They both dropped down to their seats instantly.

"Do you like chicken, Elia?"

"Yes, Jenny." Elia's cheeks were still flushed.

"Good." She glanced back at him while she placed the food on the hot grill. "You two look overheated. Either go inside or take a dip."

"Dip?" Elia asked.

"The pool." Rick pointed his thumb over his shoulder at it.

"Ah." Elia nodded.

"Did Rick have a chance to ask you if you mind sleeping in his room, Elia?" Jenny finished arranging the chicken like a mosaic pattern on the crowded grill, and wiped her forehead with the back of her hand.

"Si. Yes. Is no problem."

"I feel terrible. We could try and get the twin mattress into the room and on the floor."

"Mom." *I want Elia in my bed. Shut up!* "It's no big deal."

Jenny addressed Elia directly. "You sure you don't mind sleeping in the same bed as my son? It's a terrible imposition on you."

"No. No imposition." Elia smiled.

"Are you sure? I think we can—"

"Mom." *I'm about to slap you.* "He said it's okay."

"How awkward." She put the platter on the table and her hands on her hips, the tongs jutting out of one hand. "I had no idea you were a boy. You'd think they'd make that clearer—"

"Mom?" Rick was seriously going to kill her.

Heart of Steele

"All right," she said. "As long as you're both okay about it, I'll drop it."

"Drop it." Rick shifted in his chair, now his legs were sweating and he knew the ass of his shorts was damp.

"Keep an eye on the chicken for a minute, will you, Rick?"

"Sure." Rick rose up and took the tongs from her as she entered the house again. "I'm sweating like a pig. The minute this chicken's done, I'm in the pool." Rick dabbed at his face.

"Is hot. Italy summers are same like this."

"Did you bring a swimsuit?" Rick pushed the chicken around the grill and it sputtered and sent smoke plumes into the humid air.

"Yes."

"Good." *You wet, in a bathing suit. Yes indeed.*

"It smell good. I am getting very hungry."

Rick found Elia standing right next to him. "What type of meat do you like?"

A devilish grin appeared on Elia's lips. "No matter. But I enjoy 'meat'. Do you?"

Rick's expression dropped. "Are we talking about chicken?"

Elia shrugged with the same expression of impishness.

"Are you—" before Rick got it out in the open, Rhonda joined them on the deck.

"Man, it's hot out here. Is the chicken done? Everything's on the table."

"No. I'm just turning it so it won't burn. The coals are too hot." Rick felt Rhonda and Elia staring at him. It was making him so nervous he began to run with perspiration from both the anxiety and the heat of the grill.

“Ew!” Rhonda said, “Don’t get your sweat on the food!”

As Rhonda rushed around for something to use to prevent the disaster of contamination she was obviously dreading, Rick saw Elia stripping off his own tank top.

Elia patted Rick’s face with it.

“You don’t have to do that, Elia,” Rhonda said, “Let me get a towel from inside.” She raced into the kitchen.

Rick closed his eyes and inhaled the fabric of Elia’s shirt like an intoxicating drug.

“I smell good?” Elia purred, “Better than roast chicken?”

“God yes.” Rick blinked and turned to Elia. “I’m joking.” He panicked. “Ma? The food’s almost done!” He poked into the meat to see if it was pink. It wasn’t.

“Put it on the platter!” Jenny replied from inside.

“It had raw chicken on it!” Rick said.

“Let me. Calm.” Elia picked up the platter and entered the house.

When he was left alone on the patio, Rick backed away from the boiling grill, hid behind the brick wall of the house and closed his eyes. The scent of Elia’s shirt would be forever engrained in his memory.

“There is no way to eat without feeling like...pig?” Elia held up his greasy hands.

Jenny smiled. “Don’t worry. We’re all sticky.”

Elia caught Rick’s eye.

Inside the house it was much cooler, yet neither of them had put on their shirts.

“This corn. Is so sweet. You add something?” Elia held up the half-eaten ear.

Heart of Steele

“No. That’s our local corn. It’s as sweet as sugar.” Rhonda took a few bites of her own.

“Very good. I am enjoying. This is very American meal.”

“I can’t imagine this being as good as the food you’re used to,” Rick said. “Coleslaw? Potato salad? Come on.”

“No. Is good. I no lie.” Elia licked his sticky finger and Connie handed him a paper napkin. “I make mess of myself.”

“No. Don’t worry.” Connie smiled.

“Are you boys swimming later?” Jenny asked.

“Are you up for it?” Rick used his napkin to wipe his face.

“I feel second wind. That how you say?” Elia tried to dab his gooey hands.

“Yes.” Rick chuckled. “Let me take that.” He stood and removed Elia’s empty plate.

“*Grazie*. I mean, thank you.” Elia admired Rick’s sleek, muscular, nearly hairless build. He loved blond men. Especially ones as muscular and athletic as Rick.

“Here.”

Rick handed him a wet cloth.

“Yes. Much easy.” Elia wiped his face and hands clean.

“Go relax,” Jenny said, “Let us wash up. Rick, get your bathing suit.”

“It’s not up to me, Ma.”

Elia connected to Rick’s sky blue eyes. *Mama mia. Devour me. Look at you. You are an American sportsman. My dream man.*

“Elia?” Rick asked. “You feel up for a swim?”

“*Si*. Yes. A dip would feel refreshing.”

“Go.” Jenny nudged Elia’s arm. You boys get changed.”

Rick stood near the hall, waiting.

When Elia joined him, Rick headed to their bedroom. “It’s not a very deep pool. We wanted a built-in, but this was all we could afford.”

“Is lovely. No worry.” Elia entered the bedroom and rooted out his black swimsuit. “I need go to change?”

“Not unless you feel self-conscious.”

Elia took a minute to translate the last phrase. *I’m embarrassed only if I get hard. What do I do?*

Rick kicked off his beige shorts revealing a pair of blue briefs. When they too dropped down Rick’s long, muscular legs, Elia felt his body go haywire. He couldn’t tear his stare away from Rick’s six-foot-two inch, solid, athletic build, not to mention the glimpse he got of a large flaccid cock and low hanging balls.

Elia met Rick’s eyes in the mirror above the dresser. Caught staring, Elia felt his face burning in a blush. *He will beat me now. He will see I am gay and this macho-man will kill me.*

Rick tucked himself into his bathing suit and turned to face Elia. “Are you shy? Do you want me to leave?”

A drip of sweat ran down Elia’s temple. It was impossible to stop his chest from rising and falling with his growing attraction. But mixed with that infatuation was a warning from his own family back in Italy.

If they know you are gay, they will hate you. Americans are known for their violence. You just stay silent and do not tell them. Can you do that for four weeks, Elia? Or must you be out everywhere you go? Use your head, and not the one between your legs for a change.

“I...I no mind.” He faced the wall and yanked down his shorts with his briefs. His cock sprang upwards

Heart of Steele

instantly. Elia jumped into his swimsuit and shoved his hard dick under the fabric. When he looked down at himself he was still exposed through the shiny black spandex. He covered his face and tried to calm down.

When he felt a touch on his shoulder, Elia spun around in panic, expecting to be leveled with a powerful athlete's punch.

"You okay? Look, buddy, if you're tired, just say so. Don't keep pushing yourself."

Inhaling deeply, Elia replied, "No. I keep going. Is only eight local time. I can no sleep now. It no make sense."

"You must be exhausted." Rick caressed Elia's hair.

The touch sent a mad rush of tingles over Elia's skin, directly to his dick, which began throbbing. Torn between attraction and terror, Elia whimpered before he could prevent it.

"Elia," Rick whispered affectionately.

"Maybe I am tired." His skin covered with chills when Rick said his name.

"Anything you want."

Elia finally found the courage to look into Rick's eyes. The sensation of warmth made Elia weak in the knees.

"Boys? The apple pie is ready. You want it now or after your swim?" Jenny said through the closed bedroom door.

Rick and Elia made more space between them. "After the swim, Ma."

"Okay, dear. There are towels on the deck."

"Thanks." Rick tilted his head to the door. "A quick dip?"

"Yes." Elia watched as Rick gave him a good head to toe once over, which Elia knew included his erection. No punch came. Instead, Rick smiled and headed to the hall.

As he made his way behind Rick down the hallway, Elia had to force himself not to stare at Rick's ass or the way he moved. He wanted to rid himself of his hard cock before he met up with the women.

Rick grinned like a fiend. He made his way past his mom and sisters who were fussing with the pie and the rest of the dishes. *Nice hard-on, Elia. Very nice indeed.*

Rick had a feeling he was dealing with a man of his own ilk, or at least a bi-curious man. Either way, it was cause for celebration.

Let the fun begin!

There were six steps that led to the deck. Rick shallow dove into the water, then stood, wiping the water out of his eyes.

Elia jumped in and surfaced next to him. "Is warm water?"

Rick swam to the side of the pool and checked the thermometer. "It's nearly eighty-eight degrees."

"No!"

"Yes. The heat lately has made it very warm."

"Is like bath!" Elia slicked back his hair. Wet, his mane was passed his shoulders.

"I know." Rick picked up a neon-green foam noodle and poked Elia with it.

Elia grabbed the opposite end and they played tug of war.

Using it like a rope, Rick advanced down the length and met up with Elia. He jerked the noodle free and wrapped it around Elia's shoulders, drawing him closer under the water.

"I like pool." Elia's eyes were on fire.

"I wish we had the house to ourselves."

Heart of Steele

“Oh? Why? What we do if did?”

Man! What would I do? Don't get me started.

This was flirting. No doubt. “I don't know. Maybe we could wrestle a little.”

“Wrestle.” Elia's white teeth showed as he laughed. “Why we can no wrestle now?”

Rick knew touching Elia would get him crazy, but it was too good of an invitation to pass up. He dropped under the water, looped his arms around Elia's thighs and bolted upwards, torpedoing him out of the water.

Elia's hilarity echoed off the wooden fencing that surrounded the pool, and the back of the brick home.

They took turns dunking each other, rough-housing and gasping for breath from laughing so hard.

“Having fun?”

Rick jolted to a halt to see Connie in her swimsuit watching.

“We were until you came,” Rick teased.

“Tough.” She climbed in and said, “Man, it's like bathwater.”

“See?” Elia pointed to Connie in agreement. “Water is warm.”

Connie splashed Rick. “Don't stop on my account.”

“Yeah, right.” Rick peeked back at Elia who was trying to sink the noodle.

Jenny stood on the deck. “How's the water?”

A chorus of, “Warm!” followed.

“Oh well. There's no shade here. You complain when it's too cold and when it's too hot.”

“Is fine.” Elisa waved his hand at her. “You come in?”

“No. I'm not showing my fat body in a swimsuit.”

“You no fat,” Elia replied. “American women too obsessed with skinny.”

Rick studied Elia. *Hmm. Maybe you’re not gay?*

“It’s nice of you to say, Elia, but I’ll pass. The pie is ready for you guys when you’re done in the pool.”

“Thanks, Mom.” Connie found a beach ball and threw it at Elia.

Rick watched as they volleyed it back and forth. He waded to the side of the pool and sat down, taking a break.

“You tired?” Elia held the ball and approached him.

“I should be asking you that.”

“I know. I think I will drop dead soon.” He threw the plastic rainbow colored ball back at Connie.

“Come on.” Rick reached out to him.

“No. You guys are done?” Connie said.

“Yeah. Sorry, sis. Poor Elia’s running on overdrive.” He hauled Elia out of the water. “Are you staying in?”

“Yeah. I’ll float around. Toss me the raft.”

After he handed Elia a towel, Rick skidded the raft over the surface of the water. “Catch ya later.”

He and Elia walked back to the house, wiping off the water as they went. They stood at the sliding door, rubbing down their legs.

“You wash first?” Elia asked.

I want to shower with you. “We have two showers. Three bathrooms, two with showers.”

“Good. We can shower same time.” Elia entered the house first with Rick close behind.

Yeah, that’s what I wish. “You have any room for apple pie?”

Elia rubbed his washboard abs. “No. Too much sweet corn and chicken.”

Heart of Steele

“Gotcha.” Rick winked. He removed fresh clothing from his drawers as Elia did the same. “I’ll meet you.”

“Okay.” Elia smiled.

Rick made his way to his mother’s bathroom, the one connected to her bedroom. He took off his wet suit and started the water in the shower. *You and I sleeping in the same bed? And you don’t think I’m going to try something, Mr. Gianni? Think again.*

“Have some pie.”

“Oh, God, Ma. I’m still stuffed.” Rick found his mother and Rhonda watching television in the den, each on recliners. A large matching beige faux suede sofa, a big screen television and coffee table filled the room, while a ceiling fan spun to keep the air conditioning circulating.

“Where’s Connie?” Jenny asked.

“In the pool.” Rick sat on the sofa, propping his feet up on the coffee table.

Rhonda said, “She’ll be mosquito food soon.”

It was nearing nine-thirty and just starting to dim outside.

“Hello?”

“In here, Elia,” Rick replied.

Elia poked his head in.

“Do you want some pie, Elia?” Jenny asked.

“No. Thank you.”

Rick patted the spot on the sofa next to him.

Elia dropped down heavily. “I am catching up to myself.”

“What?” Rhonda laughed.

“Tired.” Elia yawned. “What is local time?” He checked his watch and moaned. “Oh, is very late in Italy. Yes?”

“Two-thirty in Italy?” Rick didn’t think this man could be any more adorable than he was at that moment. His wet hair was slicked back behind his ears and a dark growth of beard had begun to show on his jaw. Luscious.

“Go to bed, Elia,” Jenny said sweetly. “You don’t have to force yourself to stay up.”

“Good to get in local time. I must or I be up at bad hour in morning.” He yawned again.

“Come here.” Rick had to do it, mother and sister in the room or not. He looped his arm around Elia’s shoulder and encouraged him to rest on his chest.

“I sleep here, you watch.” Elia cuddled.

“If you do, I’ll carry you to bed.” Rick checked his mom and sister’s expressions, just in case. They were smiling. *Good. Hey, I’m just being nice to the exchange student. Okay?*

The dampness from Elia’s hair soaked Rick’s t-shirt. He inhaled the shampoo from it and rubbed Elia’s arm gently. Within five minutes he felt Elia’s breathing deepen to slumber.

Jenny whispered, “He’s out like a light, Rick.”

Rhonda laughed.

“Poor guy,” Jenny said, “Get him to bed.”

The sound of the back sliding door opening and closing preceded Connie stepping into the room. “Man, the mosquitoes are bad this year.”

“Shh!” Jenny put her finger to her lips and pointed to Elia.

Connie spun around. “How cute is that?”

“Come on, buddy.” Rick shifted on the sofa.

Heart of Steele

Elia stirred.

Rick stood and helped Elia to stand, holding him around his waist. "Goodnight."

"Are you going to bed too, Rick?" Jenny asked.

"Yeah, I'm beat. See ya for breakfast."

"You sure you don't mind sharing your bed?"

Rick heard Rhonda's choke of sarcasm and ignored it. "No. It's fine. Goodnight."

As he practically carried Elia down the hall he heard Connie say, "Don't they make the cutest couple?"

Rick wanted to kill her.

Christ! Let me out myself when I'm ready? Sheesh!

"Come on, babe." He sat Elia on the bed and tugged his shirt off over his head.

Elia mumbled something in Italian. Rick knew he was out of it. He toppled Elia over and unzipped his shorts, sliding them down his legs. With some effort, Rick had him under the light sheets and sleeping again.

Once he washed up, Rick locked his bedroom door, then removed everything but his briefs as he stared at this amazing man in his bed. *Damn!*

He crawled in and hummed in bliss. "Christ, you smell good." Rick took a deep inhale of Elia into his lungs, snuffling his clean skin and hair. "Fuck. I'm hard as a rock. Wake up and be gay, will ya?"

Rick took his cock out of his briefs and jerked it a couple of times. "I can come just looking at you. Are you gay? Bi-curious? What?"

Ya got hard when you stared at me when we were in our bathing suits. So? Tell me! What should I do?

He knew how tired Elia was. It was a long day of traveling. Didn't they have time to experiment tomorrow?

Rick groaned in longing and propped up his head to stare, all the while playing with himself as he eyed this fabulous man.

Elia felt movement next to him. It was very dim in the room but not totally black. He took a minute to remember where he was. *Yes. In Ohio, America.*

The bed shook.

Elia opened his eyes. Rick was lying right beside him, on his back, on top of the sheets, with his cock exposed, masturbating. Stifling a choke of shock in his throat, Elia shifted on the pillow for a better look.

Rick stopped what he was doing and appeared petrified when they met eyes. "Shit."

"Is okay."

"I thought you were asleep. Shit."

"Why you no hear when I say is okay?"

"Because I'm embarrassed." Rick dragged the sheet to cover his crotch when the head of his dick poked out of his briefs.

"Embarrassed? We are men. We do what men do."

"I'm sorry. I know how tired you are."

"How I get in bed? You carry me?" Elia touched the thick blond hair on the side of Rick's head. "Rick?"

"Yes." Rick's breathing became raspy and he appeared to be trying not to pant.

"Is okay I touch you? Like this?" Elia petted Rick's hair again.

"Yes."

"I like color. Blond and blue. Always favorite."

"In..." Rick inhaled deeply. "In a man?"

Heart of Steele

Elia had to trust him. And in his gut he knew. Just knew. “Yes. Men. I like men. You hit me?”

“I’ll hit on you.” Rick smiled.

Elia chuckled. “You like men too?”

“Yes, I do. A whole lot.”

“You like me?” Elia cupped Rick’s head with the same hand he had been caressing him with.

“You’re incredibly hot.”

“I find you hot too.”

They paused, staring at each other.

Then, as if cut free from a leash, Rick landed on top of Elia, pinning him to the bed. Elia opened his mouth for Rick’s kiss. The minute their tongues touched, Elia moaned and spread his legs wide in invitation.

Rick began humping him, sucking at his mouth and digging his hands into Elia’s hair.

The passion consumed Elia. He’d had sex with a few men, and once with a woman. But never had he been handled this aggressively by a big, strong American man. It was his fantasy come true.

Rick parted from his lips. “You are so gorgeous. Elia, I can’t get over you.”

“Or I you. You are such big sports hero.”

Rick gulped loudly. “Are you a virgin?”

“No. I no virgin.”

The reply made Rick writhe on Elia’s body and moan deeply. Elia chuckled. “That make happy?”

“God, yeah.”

“You want fuck me?”

“Holy shit. You keep talking like that and I’ll cream.”

Elia broke up with laughter.

“Shh!” Rick tried to keep a straight face as he quieted him. “My family doesn’t know.”

“No!”

“Well, they may suspect, but...I haven’t told them.”

“Why no tell? You man, no boy.”

“Talk later.” Rick kissed him again.

That stiff tongue began fucking Elia’s mouth. He gripped Rick’s ass cheeks in both hands and jammed his cock up against Rick’s. “I need suck you,” Elia gasped between kisses.

“I’ll come. If you suck me, I’ll come.”

“You come twice then.”

Rick rolled off Elia quickly and threw his briefs over the side of the bed. Elia stripped as well, leaning up to admire Rick’s body. “So athletic.” He ran his hand from Rick’s jaw to his pubic hair. Rick stiffened on the bed and arched his back, his cock protruded like a long arced rod.

The minute Elia stroked Rick’s cock, Rick reached out to bring Elia’s mouth to his again. After the kiss, Elia laughed, “How do I suck if I kiss you, eh?”

“I can’t get enough of your mouth.”

Elia’s skin washed with chills. He met with Rick’s lips again and drew Rick’s tongue deeper inside his mouth, swirling his tongue around it, wanting to do the same to Rick’s cock.

Rick got the message and broke the kiss. “Suck it.”

Elia chuckled and worked his kisses down Rick’s neck, then chewed on one of his tiny pale nipples. Elia’s own cock was throbbing between his legs. He ran his hand over it and felt the sticky drops from the tip. Tracing his lips down Rick’s body to his treasure trail, Elia used his teeth and tongue to wind his way to the head of Rick’s cock. He held the base of Rick’s dick in his fingers and lapped at the oozing slit.

Heart of Steele

“Holy fuck.”

Elia wound his tongue around the mushroom shaped head to underneath, tickling the soft skin with the tip of his tongue.

“Oh God.”

Enjoying Rick’s sensual reaction, Elia straddled Rick’s thighs and lowered down to take all of Rick’s cock into his mouth. He held it there, sucking and feeling it throb.

“Elia...Elia...”

“Mm...” Elia answered, closing his eyes and gathering up Rick’s balls in his free hand. *Yes, beautiful. Perfect. You taste divine.*

“Fuck!”

Rick began thrusting his cock into Elia’s mouth. Elia loved it. He repositioned himself to take Rick’s cock deeper into his throat and dug his fingers beneath Rick’s balls to the root of his dick.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck...”

Elia caressed Rick’s rim and sucked down to the base, wiggling his tongue all over the hardened shaft in his mouth.

Rick began jerking his body on the bed and Elia tasted a blast of pre-cum.

Yes, that’s it, my beauty, that’s it.

“I’m coming. I’m coming...”

“Mmm!” Elia sucked fast and furious, massaging Rick’s heavy balls at the same time.

A stifled choke from Rick preceded the blast of cum. Elia’s mouth filled with it. He moaned in ecstasy and swallowed him down. Another pulsating blast throbbed Rick’s cock, and Elia gulped another mouthful.

“Ahhgaaad, ahhh...”

Slowly Elia sat up, stroking Rick's cock. Every time a dewy drop appeared he licked it off. "You are *delizioso*."

"Christ, you give good head. Fuck. I can't move."

Elia curled on top of Rick's chest. "You recover, my sweet."

"Holy crap. I don't think I've ever had a blowjob that good."

"No! How you can say that? You so all-American-sports boy. You can get anything."

"Not like that I can't. Whoa."

"Blond hair. I so like." Elia massaged Rick's pubic bush.

Rick laughed softly. "I'm wiped. Holy shit."

"You sleep then."

"Hell no. I'm satisfying you."

"Is okay."

"No, it ain't."

Rick rolled to his side and propped his head up in his hand so he could stare at Elia while he touched him. "Your turn to relax."

Elia lay flat on the bed, splayed out.

Rick combed his fingers through Elia's long silky hair.

"I sleep you do that."

"Don't worry." Rick sucked at one of Elia's tiny, dark nipples, nibbling the hard tip. As he lapped at it he pinched the other one between his fingers. When Elia hissed through his teeth, Rick felt his own dick respond.

Rick sat up, staring down at Elia's naked body. He wasn't overly muscular, but perfection with his narrow waist, dark alluring pubic hair and mocha colored cock and

Heart of Steele

balls. Elia had a lithe frame and refined features. A runway model, classic and smooth.

With his right hand Rick drew Elia's balls upwards around the base of his cock, loving his soft, heavy sack and the globes which moved easily when he manipulated them. Elia spread his thighs invitingly. And Rick went for that invitation.

He crouched between them and pushed Elia's legs open and backwards. When Elia's ass was exposed, Rick dove in.

An Italian expletive followed.

Rick sat up. "Is this okay?"

Elia panted, "Never have no one done that."

"No good?"

"No! Good!"

Rick smiled and lowered back down. He teased the puckered rim with his tongue. It was his turn to hear those wonderful obscene moans and groans. The mixture of English and Italian amused him.

He lapped inside Elia's thighs, chewing the hairless skin, working his way to his heavy balls. Each one he sucked inside his mouth, circling them with his tongue, savoring them. When he had given his testicles a good licking, Rick went back to that delightful rim. With long, wet tongue lashes, he ran up Elia's crack to his balls, until he was dripping with saliva.

Elia was squirming on the bed and gripping Rick's shoulders in iron fists.

When Rick made his way to Elia's erection, Rick was again fully aroused and hot to fuck. Rick pointed Elia's cock towards his mouth and sucked him down to the base, using his slick spit to slide in and out of Elia's ass.

Elia hissed out in Italian the same phrase again and again. Each time with more urgency.

Rick finally asked, "What are you telling me to do?"

"Fuck me! Now!"

"Oh. Why didn't you say so?" Rick reached into his nightstand for a condom and lubrication.

As he prepared, Elia held his own knees to open his body up and rocked anxiously on the bed.

"You are so beautiful, Elia."

"*Si. Bello...* now fuck me."

Rick smiled wryly and placed the head of his cock on Elia's lubricated rim. He pushed his dick-head in and paused, letting Elia get used to it.

When Elia gripped Rick's body and jammed his hips upwards, causing Rick's cock to penetrate him to the hilt, Rick gasped and steadied himself on the bed. "Holy fuck!"

"Push!"

Rick began thrusting his hips with more determination. As he propped himself up over Elia's body, Elia gripped his own cock in both hands and began fisting himself furiously.

"Motherfucker." Rick felt his body prepare for takeoff number two as he watched Elia's expression turn from lust to euphoria and his hands become a blur of motion.

Elia's body tensed around Rick's cock and his seed erupted out of him spraying his chest and stomach. Rick jammed inside Elia quick and hard, coming for a second time, one more intense and richer than the first. "Oh! God!" *I could screw this man all my fucking life!*

They grunted and humped like animals until the sensations subsided. Rick collapsed on top of Elia, unable to catch his breath, both of them drenched in sweat and spunk.

"*Ree-ick, Ree-ick...*"

Rick smiled. He loved the way Elia said his name. *Re'ak. Re'ak.* "Yes, babe?"

Heart of Steele

“I am no move. I am...oh, how you say?” he moaned.

“I know.”

“I can no move. No.”

Rick had to move, unfortunately. “Stay there.” He pulled out, holding the base of the rubber.

“Stay here? I no can move.”

On wobbling legs, Rick stood, removed the rubber and peeked out into the hall. He raced to the bathroom, disposed of the garbage, grabbed a wet cloth and a towel and sprinted back.

With care, Rick cleaned the mess off of Elia, then himself. Once they were both tended, Rick cradled Elia in his arms and kissed his hair. In seconds he was fast asleep.

Chapter Two

“Rick? Honey?”

Rick heard his name from a far off place.

“Elia? Rick? Are you awake?”

His mother’s voice began to bring Rick to the waking world. He opened his eyes and found Elia coiled around him, sound asleep on his chest.

“Rick?”

“What, Ma?” Rick tried to reply quietly.

“What time do you want breakfast?”

“What time is it?” Rick tried to read his digital clock but he didn’t want to move.

“Almost eleven.”

“Eleven?”

At his exclamation, Elia stirred awake.

“Yes, dear.”

Rick heard her jiggle the door handle and was glad his door had a lock.

“Is Elia still sleeping?”

Rick and Elia exchanged stares. “No, Ma, he’s awake now.”

“I just didn’t know how long to let you sleep.”

Heart of Steele

"It's okay." Rick smiled and brushed Elia's long hair back from his face.

"Should I make something for you?"

"Give us a few minutes."

"Okay, sweetie."

Her padding footfalls were heard receding down the hall.

"Morning." Rick smiled.

"*Buongiorno.*"

"Sleep well?"

"Like a *bambino.*"

Rick felt the poke of a stiff cock. "You were amazing last night."

"Me? No. You amaze me."

Rick cupped his face tenderly. "I can get used to you in my bed."

Elia smiled shyly. "Is only four weeks. Get used to fast."

"Four. Glorious. Weeks." Rick ground his hard-on against Elia's.

"Your mother. She must know." Elia toyed with Rick's nipple.

"I don't know if she suspects, but we've never discussed it openly."

"Why? My family knows. Are you afraid?"

"A little."

Elia scooted back and held their cocks together in his hand, side by side. "How can this be afraid? Eh? Look how beautiful."

Rick leaned up to have a peek. "Wow. I'll say."

"I make them spurt, yes?"

"Yes!" Rick propped his head up on the pillow.

Elia used both hands to press their lengths together, then he began pumping them.

“Nice.” Rick moved his hips in time with the rhythm of Elia’s hands.

“It no take me much.”

“Me neither.” Rick closed his eyes and clasped both his hands around Elia’s to join in.

“Now. Now.” Elia panted, jerking off faster.

“Now.” Rick barely choked out the word and came. Both their sperm coated Rick’s skin in streaming ribbons.

“Hey, big brother?” His sister’s voice came through the door.

“Not now, Rhonda.” Rick caught his breath as Elia slowed down his fisting.

“What the hell you guys doing in there? It’s almost lunch time. Are you ever coming out of the bedroom?”

“Rhonda, go away.”

“We be out soon. No worry.” Elia laughed.

“Wow.” Rhonda said from the other side of the door, “Must be good.”

“Shut up, sis.” Rick chuckled.

“She know?” Elia shrugged.

“Yeah. She does.” Rick peered down at his messy chest. “Damn, that’s nice to wake up to.”

“Is nicer than by self.”

“Yes. Much nicer.” Rick reached for the towel he had left on the floor from earlier and wiped off his skin.

Elia pecked his lips. “We must make start the day.”

“Yup. Go shower. Meet me for breakfast.”

“*Buono.*”

Rick once again used his mother’s bathroom to shower, dressing in a light pair of cotton shorts and a US

Heart of Steele

Air Force t-shirt he'd picked up at an on line website for Wright Paterson Air Force Base.

When he entered the kitchen his mother and two sisters were staring at him strangely. While he poured two cups of coffee, he asked, "What?"

"Just tell them," Rhonda said.

"Rhonda!" Rick admonished and blushed.

"Rick, they know." Rhonda made a face at him.

"If they know, why do I need to tell them?" Rick couldn't even imagine peeking at his mother at the moment. "Change the subject." He put milk into both cups and set them on the kitchen table. Sitting down, sipping his, he found them all staring again. "Lay off."

"Are you gay?" Jenny asked. She did not look pleased.

"Do I really have to have this conversation?"

"*Buongiorno!*" Elia entered the room and stopped short. "I come into something?"

"No." Rick held up his coffee. "Have a seat."

"*Grazie, bello.*" Elia relaxed in the chair beside him and sipped the cup. "Good. Strong. I like."

Rick paused and grew angry at his family's blank expressions. "People!" he said, "Hello?"

Jenny broke her trance. "What would you like for breakfast, Elia?"

"No go to trouble."

"It's no trouble." She opened the refrigerator.

"We already had breakfast," Connie said, "hours ago!"

"Mom?" Rick asked, "You want me to make something? You don't have to."

"I said I don't mind."

"I hear what you're saying but your tone isn't agreeing with you." Rick caught Elia's concerned expression.

“Just tell her!” Rhonda repeated.

“I go?” Elia made a move to leave the room.

“No.” Rick held his arm. “You don’t need to go anywhere.”

“This is getting ridiculous.” Rhonda rolled her eyes. “Hello, yourself, Rick. What are we stupid? The walls in this house are thin. Duh.”

Rick felt the blood drain from his face and forced himself to look at his mother. She appeared pinched.

“*Mama mia*.” Elia rubbed his eyes. “*Per favore*. I make mess for family? I no mean to.”

“You?” Rick replied. “Don’t you dare blame yourself.”

“Who do we blame, Rick?” Jenny glared at him.

Rick gestured to his mother and said to Rhonda, “Happy now?”

“Me? You guys were humping all night. Don’t blame me.”

Elia seemed about to crawl under the table.

“Jesus. Doesn’t anyone around here have any manners?” Rick was about to die. Not this way. He didn’t want it to come out like this. It was to be a quiet, fireside chat. A smile and a hug of reassurance, not his mouthy fifteen year old sister accusing him of humping the exchange student who was supposed to be a girl but turned out to be the most beautiful nineteen year old man Rick had ever seen in his life.

“Manners?” Jenny gave him a look of disbelief.

“Oh!” Elia moaned, “*Scusi!* What I have done? No. I so to blame.” He stood up. “I make fight. No. Please.”

Elia ran out of the room before Rick could prevent it.

Rick rose up and felt like breaking something. He was infuriated. “Fine! You want it like this? Here you go. I’m

Heart of Steele

gay, Ma! Okay? There. I'm out. Fuck you all." He raced after Elia and found him packing frantically.

"What the hell are you doing?" Rick stopped him.

"I make fight. I out you. No."

"Baby." Rick folded Elia into his arms and rocked him. "It's long overdue. You helped me."

"No. No be stupid. No. I make mess."

"Stop. Please. You're not going anywhere. Isn't it bad enough we only have four weeks?"

Elia stopped struggling and met Rick's gaze. "Four weeks."

Rick nodded and hated the way Elia's eyes were watering from his guilt. "That's it."

"Rick?" Jenny called through the door.

Rick whispered to Elia, "You okay?"

Elia bit his lip and nodded.

"Come in, Mom." He released Elia and faced his mother.

"Why did you wait so long to tell me?"

"I go?" Elia pointed to his own chest.

"No." Rick held his hand and sat with Elia on his bed, then he reached out his free hand for his mother.

She was reluctant at first but sat on the opposite side as Elia, next to Rick.

"I kept trying to find the right time." Rick squeezed Elia's hand. "But because Dad left I kept feeling like I had to be the 'man' of the family. I didn't know if you could handle me being a gay man."

"How long have you felt this way?"

"All my life."

Jenny's eyes appeared to lose their focus.

“Mom. All my life. Honest. I just tried to find the right way to tell you. It never felt right.”

“Elia?”

“Si? Yes, Jenny?”

“Do your parents know about you?”

“Yes. They do. I sorry.”

Rick gripped his hand tighter. “You have nothing to be sorry about.”

“I make say things to family you no ready.”

“No. You helped me finally say it.” Rick looked back at his mother. “Hate me now?”

“No. I can never hate you. But I wish you weren’t living a lie for the last God-knows-how-many-years.”

“I was twelve when I had my first gay experience.” Rick smiled. “Seven years ago.”

“Twelve?” Jenny gasped.

“Yup.”

“Oh, Rick. That was too young and too long to keep a secret like that.”

“Sorry, Mom.” He shrugged.

There was a pause.

“What now?” Rick asked. “If you think Elia’s going anywhere, you’re wrong.”

“He doesn’t have to leave. You’re both adults. If what you’re doing is consensual, I have no opinion.”

“No, Mom, you do. It’s your house.”

Elia moaned in sympathy.

Rick kissed his hand in comfort.

Jenny asked, “You two are already this close? In one day?”

Smiling, Rick turned to look at Elia. “Are we?”

Heart of Steele

"I embarrassed to say. I lay heart out? Is that way American men do?" Elia's eyes sparkled with his smile.

"No. American men don't do it that way." Rick winked.

"Then no expect me to. No. I play hard to buy."

"Hard to get." Rick laughed.

Jenny started laughing as well. "The two of you. Unbelievable."

"You making pancakes or what?" Rick asked.

Jenny stood off the bed, kissed Rick on the cheek, and then gave Elia a kiss as well.

When she left, Rick smiled at Elia. "Looks like I'm out."

With a gesture of exaggeration, Elia wiped his brow with his arm and said, "Phew!"

"It's your fault. You made me come too hard." Rick stood and brought Elia with him down the hall.

"Me? You the one with the 'Ahhgaadd!' And 'Holy fuck!' You make me blush."

Rick drew him into his arms and embraced him. "I don't think four weeks is going to be enough of you."

"It must do for now. We both go back to university in fall, yes? And this is the time I pick for exchange."

"Yes." Rick pecked his lips and held his hand as they returned to the family.

When he entered the kitchen he could smell bacon cooking. He met three sets of eyes again, but this time they were all smiling at him.

Chapter Three

Late afternoon, the temperature outside soared to the low nineties. Rick wanted time alone with Elia. He knew his family was enjoying Elia's company, but Rick felt self-conscious to ask Elia the questions he wanted answers to. Like about his previous sexual experience, or gay life in Italy, or how he liked to have sex. Exclusively bottom? Top? Either?

At the moment Elia was teaching Rhonda Italian words and Rick was about to scream he was so bored.

"*Piscina.*"

"Peesena."

"No. *Piscina,*" Elia repeated, holding up his right hand as if he were conducting an orchestra.

"Peeseena," Rhonda said.

"Oh, come on!" Rick began thinking his sister was stupid. "Piscina! Come on, Rhonda, what's so hard about that?"

"Shut up!" she snapped.

Rubbing his eyes, Rick asked Elia, "You want to take a break from your Italian lesson and get out of here?"

"I no mind. Is okay to do what you do."

"Where are we going?" Connie asked excitedly.

Heart of Steele

"*You* are going nowhere. I'm taking Elia out." Rick stood.

"Out?" his mother echoed.

"Yes. We've been cooped up in here all day." Rick tucked his t-shirt into his shorts.

"How long will you be gone?" Jenny asked.

"I don't know. It depends on what we do." Rick beckoned Elia to the hallway.

"Call me if you're going to be out later than dinner," Jenny said.

"We won't be home for dinner." Rick touched Elia's back as he stood near.

"Not fair!" Connie whined, "How come he gets to go out?"

"He'll be here for four weeks," Rick replied. "Will ya calm down?" He nudged Elia to go.

"Bye!" Elia waved.

The three women shouted 'bye' back.

Stopping at his bedroom to grab his wallet, cell phone, and keys, Rick nodded for Elia to go out the front door. When he closed it behind him, Rick asked, "Are they driving you crazy already?"

"No. No crazy. Is okay." Elia laughed.

"My truck is parked on the street." Rick pointed to his black Dodge Ram.

"Is yours?"

"Yeah. It's a few years old. I didn't pay very much for it." Rick used the key fob to open the locks.

"Is so big!"

Rick chuckled as he climbed into the driver's side.

"I need step-up to get in." Elia made a face of amazement as he closed the passenger's door. "Petroleum is cheap in America, yes?"

"Not anymore." Rick started the ignition, turned off the CD music, and rolled down the windows waiting for the air-conditioning to blow cool air. After he buckled in, he held his hand over the vent.

"Is still cheaper than Europe. You no complain, Rick." Elia put his hand on Rick's thigh and shook his leg playfully.

Giving the quiet cul-de-sac a quick glance, Rick leaned over the wide bench seat and held the back of Elia's head, digging his hands through his long hair. "Get over here." He met Elia's lips and kissed him aggressively, forcing his tongue into Elia's mouth.

Elia moaned and fought against the seatbelt to get closer, his hand cupping over Rick's crotch, massaging his balls.

Rick was about to unfasten his seatbelt and attack Elia on the front seat of his truck. He parted from his mouth and gazed into Elia's dark eyes. For what seemed like a long moment, they stared at each other. Rick's impulse was to get wild, pump up the heat, but he couldn't.

Spotting a neighbor leaving their house, Rick put the truck in drive and closed the windows, letting the air-conditioning cool off the cab.

"You so sexy."

"You too. You make me nuts." Rick glanced down as Elia's fingers ran up and down his thigh. "Christ, I want a blowjob now. Ya got me so fucking hard."

"I give? Is okay?"

"Probably not. I can wait." Rick didn't want to.

"Where we go?" Elia sat correctly in the seat and leaned his elbow on the passenger door's armrest.

Heart of Steele

"The Greene. It's the only decent place around here. Columbus is much bigger. I wish I had you in my college dorm and not here in crappy Beavercreek."

Elia laughed. "What is 'The Greene'? Is park?"

"No. It's an outdoor shopping mall. You'll see. They have nice restaurants there. I'll take you out for a good meal."

"You no have do that."

"I want to." Rick rubbed Elia's thigh this time.

Once Rick turned onto Indian Ripple Road, he asked, "Okay, now that we're away from my family, tell me more about yourself."

"What want know?"

Rick paused at the traffic light over I-675. "If you're tired of the inquisition, just say so. I know my sisters already nailed you with a ton of questions."

"Inquisition." Elia chuckled. "You funny man."

"I know you have three older sisters."

"Is true, *si*."

"That you are from Monza in the Lombardy region and all your family lives there."

"*Si. Monscia*."

"That you love AC Milan." Rick headed through the signal when it changed.

"You know all of me."

"There's the mall." Rick pointed.

"So close? We could walk?"

"No. It's not that close. And it's too hot."

"Americans and their cars. A love affair? Yes?"

Rick gave Elia a sly smile. "Yeah."

Once he had parked in the jammed-packed lot, Rick led the way to the outdoor, 'Euro-style' shopping center.

“Is nice.”

“Yeah, sure. It’s all there is here.”

“No. How you say that?”

“Because it’s true.” Rick already felt overheated. “It’s after five and it’s still too hot.”

“Is warm, but is the same in my country. Is summer.” Elia shrugged.

Live music was coming from the center courtyard. Rick followed the sound to a fountain surrounded by benches and restaurants.

“There’s a shady spot.” Rick made his way to a recently vacated bench. He rested on the wooden seat and put his arm on the back, behind Elia.

Children were in bathing suits, screaming and laughing as water shot out of holes in the cement fountain.

“This is nice.”

“Stop being so polite.” Rick dabbed at a drop of sweat rolling down his temple, wishing he could take off his shirt and jump in the fountain.

“Why you no think I no like this?”

“Because. Dayton sucks.”

“It no suck because I with you.”

When Elia placed his hand on Rick’s knee, Rick panicked and jerked his leg away. “Not here.”

Elia retracted his hand slowly to his own lap.

They sat in silence, listening to the band play Simon and Garfunkel classics.

“I sorry. I know I should no touch you in public place.”

“It’s okay.” Rick shifted his bottom on the hard bench. “Do you want to shop anywhere? There are a lot of stores here.”

“Soon. I enjoy this. Is nice.”

Heart of Steele

"I was thinking of taking you to Brios," Rick said, "That place right there." He pointed across the courtyard. "Italian food."

"*Buono*."

"*Buono*." Rick agreed.

After a mother pushing a stroller walked by, Rick leaned closer to Elia to ask, "So, uh, have you had a lot of gay sex?"

Elia chuckled. "What is 'a lot'?"

"I don't know." Rick assumed he did.

"I have had one relationship with man, older."

"Oh?"

"He was married. Very bad. It did not last when I found out about wife, yes?"

"How much older?" Rick lowered his voice as more people walked by.

"Thirty. So, almost twice my age. But good news was I learn from him. So not all loss."

Getting slightly aroused, Rick shifted his position on the bench.

"What about you? Sexy American sports star? You had 'a lot', yes?"

"I wish. No. I really had my best experience in college, at OSU."

"O.S.U.?"

"Ohio State University."

Nodding, Elia said, "Yes. Yes. Ohio State. American Football team Buckeyes."

Rick blinked. "I'm impressed."

"I like American football. I no understand too well, but is enjoyable. Baseball I no know at all. What is rules?"

Rick leaned his elbows on his knees, slouching over his lap as he gazed at the spraying water spouts and screaming kids. "There are too many to tell you now. I'll get us tickets to see the Reds."

"I will no know what I am seeing." Elia laughed.

"When we have time back home, I'll tell you more about it. It's easier when you can diagram it."

"So complex? I need diagram?"

"Kind of." Rick stood. "Let's eat."

Elia followed Rick to the restaurant. "They have al fresco dining?"

"Yes, but it's too hot for me. Do you mind?"

"No. Is okay."

Elia stood by as Rick took the lead, telling the hostess, "A table for two, please." While Rick followed her, Elia noticed several diners were staring at him. He was amazed how many large people were in the room, and he was the only one with long black hair. Did they know he was a foreigner? If he wasn't with a big, brawny man, he would feel slightly intimidated. He wasn't getting glares or sneers, just blank stares.

"*Grazie*," Elia said as he took his seat.

"*Prego*," the hostess replied.

Elia's jaw dropped. He asked her in Italian, "You speak Italian?"

"A little," she replied in Italian, showing him how much between her fingers symbolically.

"*Molto buono, seniorina*."

"Uh oh. I'm in trouble now." Rick laughed.

"Don't worry," the hostess said, "That's pretty much my repertoire." She handed them menus. "Your waiter will be with you shortly."

Heart of Steele

“Bene, grazie.”

When she left, Rick leaned against Elia’s shoulder. They were adjacent to each other at a table for four. “How did you learn to speak English so well?”

“I learn in school, and I practice with friends. I speak well?”

“Uh, yeah.” Rick glanced around quickly. “I can’t speak a word of Italian. Or any other language for that matter.”

“Is normal for Americans. Yes?”

“Do we seem really crass to you?” Rick looked uncomfortable as he scanned the other tables.

Elia didn’t know how to answer him. “Crass? You mean...what crass?”

“Rough. Stupid.”

“I no think you stupid, Rick. No.”

“Never mind.” Rick picked up the menu.

Hiding behind his own, Elia whispered to Rick, “I look like foreigner?”

Rick leaned back to take a look at him, as if judging. “No. Not necessarily. You’re just really good looking.”

Elia felt his cheeks heat up. “Now I want touch you.”

“Later,” Rick said out of the side of his mouth. “What looks good?” He read the menu.

“You. You look good. Good enough to eat.”

“Stop. Down boy.”

Elia laughed heartily and decided what to get with Rick offering suggestions.

Once the waiter took their order, bringing them each a drink and crispy bread in a basket, Elia raised his glass of red wine. “To you and my good luck in find you.”

Rick blushed, much to Elia's delight and tapped his beer glass against Elia's stemware.

Elia took a sip of the wine and set the glass down. "What do you learn in school?"

Tilting his head at first, Rick replied, "Oh. My major."

"Major," Elia had to think about the word. "Military?"

"You are so damn cute." Rick adjusted his cloth napkin on his lap. "No. Not the military. Though I did think of enlisting in the Air Force. There's a base—" Rick pointed over his shoulder in a direction.

"No!" Elia couldn't bear the thought of Rick seeing combat. "No. You no do that. No." He shook his head adamantly.

"You kind of like me, don't you?"

"*Si*. I like you. You no go to war. *Capisce?*"

Rick leaned his chin in his palm and gave Elia a star-struck look. "I'm learning civil engineering at the U."

"*Bene*. No air force, no army..." Elia wagged his finger at Rick.

"Do you care about me that much?" Rick sat back quickly as the waiter brought their appetizers.

Elia waited for the waiter to leave before he replied. "I play hard to buy. I no tell you." He winked.

"Get. Hard to get."

"*Scuzi!* Ah. Hard to 'get'. I no know why I no remember that." He picked up one of the topped pieces of bruschetta. "It look very nice." Taking a bite, Elia nodded. "Good."

Rick used his thumb to wipe something off Elia's chin for him. "Good."

Elia immediately dabbed his mouth with his napkin, blushing from Rick's touch. "If they know we're couple, are we going to get...uh...how you say?"

Heart of Steele

“I don’t want anyone to know we’re a couple. I don’t want us to look gay.”

“Why you touch face? You do that to your boy friends? Is okay?” Elia’s stomach fluttered nervously. The stories of gay men getting beaten in America scared him.

“No. I don’t do that to my guy friends.” Rick appeared embarrassed. “I shouldn’t have done it to you. I just couldn’t resist.”

“I no mind. I just not big like you. I no fight well.” Elia resumed eating.

“No one’s going to touch you.” Rick scanned the surroundings but Elia didn’t think it appear anyone was interested in them.

“I’d kill them first.”

Elia laughed uncomfortably. “Violent man! Shame on you.”

“Just in defense. I’m not a violent guy.” Rick stuffed a large chunk of bruschetta in his mouth.

“Si. You very sweet. Like sugar.” Elia melted in the embrace of Rick’s sky blue eyes.

After he swallowed, Rick leaned close. “I can’t wait to get you in bed again.”

Elia’s dick swelled in anticipation as he admired the size of Rick’s deltoids and biceps in his tight t-shirt. “More, ‘ahhgaaad?’” he teased.

When Rick closed his eyes and grabbed his own groin, as if trying to quell his sexual appetite, Elia almost jumped on his lap and molested him. He waited as Rick gained control of himself, inhaling deeply and opening his eyes. Elia said, “I give you nice thick cock?”

“Jesus. You’re killing me, Elia.” Rick’s cheeks turned red and his forehead dewy with perspiration. He used his napkin to wipe his face and tucked it back on his lap.

“Killing good this time. *Si?*” Elia grinned mischievously.

“*Si.*” Rick sucked down his beer to the bottom.

Stuffed on fine food and refreshing ale, Rick strolled the busy avenues of The Greene with Elia by his side. Yes, the urge to hold Elia’s hand was strong, but he would never do it. He grew up here, went to Beaver Creek High, and played sports here at the ‘Y’. It was bad enough Elia was so pretty. If one of his old school buddies spotted them together, Rick would get teased mercilessly.

“Ice cream?” Rick pointed to the Marble Top ice cream shop.

Elia gave him a pained look and rubbed his belly.

“Yeah. I’m too full too. I figured I’d ask.” Rick gestured grandly to the stores. “Tempted?”

“Before I go home I shop. The dollar is weak against the euro. Very good for me.”

“The dollar sucks against all the other currencies. Our economy is in the toilet.”

“Yes. Europe going through hard times too. We are economy-global.” Elia shrugged. “What can you do but your best?”

“I wish I had you at my room at college. I hate the idea of us going back to my mom’s house and having everyone descend on you. I want you to myself, in my bedroom where we can hang out. I know the minute we walk through the door you’re going to be entertaining my sisters again.”

“We make excuse. I need nap. I am feeling lag still? No?”

“Yeah. Sure.” Rick laughed. He doubted they’d buy that excuse.

“In truck?”

Heart of Steele

At the idea, Rick perked up. “Yes!” He had a canopy, but no soft liner inside the bed. The more he thought about it, the more he reconsidered. “No. Not in the truck. It’ll suck rolling around on metal.” He checked the time. It was nearing eight. “May as well go home.”

Elia nodded, brushing their shoulders together as they walked to the parking lot.

“Dude!”

Rick spun around to the sound of a voice close by. He watched one of his old high-school classmates, Earl Bowen, catching up to them in the overflowing parking lot.

“Steele! My man!” He held his hand up for a high-five. “Who’s your girlfriend?”

Rick felt his heart stop. “He’s not a girl, you moron.”

Earl did a double-take, which Rick interpreted as he really did think Elia was a girl from behind.

Looking at Elia’s shapely, but clearly unshaven legs, Rick wondered if Earl was insane, or just hadn’t bothered seeing if his assumptions were correct before he opened his mouth.

“Sorry, man!” Earl laughed loudly. “The hair threw me.”

“Earl, this is an exchange student from Italy, Elia. He’s staying with us for a few weeks.”

Elia held out his hand. “Hello,” he said slowly, as if trying to sound American.

Still appearing slightly surprised, Earl shook Elia’s hand like Elia was repugnant, retracting his own and stuffing it into his camouflage shorts. “How’s OSU? You know U-D is better kick-ass football than the stupid Buckeyes. They suck. What a bunch of hype.”

Hearing Earl talk, looking at his shaved head, the tattoo on his neck of something demonic, (Rick didn’t know what the hell the blue ink depicted and didn’t care), his

baggy sloppy clothing, and his bad skin and teeth, Rick wondered if Earl was the epitome of the ‘ugly American’ in Elia’s eyes.

Next to Earl, Elia appeared refined, groomed, downright classy, while Earl Bowen looked like an audience member of a Jeff Foxworthy comedy act. Or worse, the character in one of Foxworthy’s red-neck jokes. Did he actually hang out with that hick in high-school?

“School is fine. We were headed back to my mom’s. She’s expecting us.” Rick played up looking at his watch.

“How long did you say this foreign guy is staying?” Earl pointed a rude hitch-hiker thumb at Elia, as if Elia couldn’t hear or understand every word he said.

“When the hell did you become such a dick?” Rick shook his head and removed his truck keys from his pocket. “Come on.” He touched Elia’s arm, urging him to keep walking.

“What the fuck did I do, Steele? You’re the one that’s a dick.” Earl gave Rick the middle finger.

“Learn some tact, will ya?” Rick kept coaxing Elia away from Earl. “Christ, you give Americans a bad name!”

“What the hell did I do? Fuck you, asshole!”

Rick didn’t answer. Earl’s rudeness got under his skin. He wanted Elia to have a good visit, a warm view of the States to bring back to Italy. *Ha. Not here. Not in hick-ville.* Using the key fob, Rick unlocked the truck and walked to the driver’s side. As he did he muttered under his breath, “Please God, tell me I was never like that.”

In silence they belted themselves in and Rick started the engine, rolling down the windows as the heat gave way to a cooler night. “I’m sorry.”

Elia met his eyes. “Why? What happen? I no understand why you grew so upset.”

“He was rude to you.” Rick clasped Elia’s hand.

Heart of Steele

“I did not feel insulted. What he do?”

Rick thought twice about telling Elia Earl had called him a ‘foreigner’ and acted as if he didn’t exist or was stupid. “Never mind. Earl and I seemed to have something in common in high-school. I don’t feel that way now.” He released Elia’s hand, put the truck into reverse and backed out of the spot.

“You grew up. He did not?”

“Yeah. Something like that.”

“I feel very safe with you.” Elia rubbed Rick’s thigh. “I know no one touch me badly here.”

“No. No way. No one’s even going to *speak* to you badly here.”

“You my American Hero. I like it.” Elia’s massaging grew more erotic.

Rick grasped Elia’s hand and kissed it, holding it on his leg as he drove. “And you’re my Italian stud.”

Elia chuckled, squeezing Rick’s hand tighter.

Chapter Four

“‘Bout time!” Connie said as Rick entered the den with Elia.

“How was dinner?” Jenny asked, lowering the volume on the television.

“Good.” Rick toed off his shoes and removed his shirt which was sticking to him he was so hot.

“Where did you go?” Rhonda repainted her black fingernail polish as she sat on the floor.

“Brio’s.” Rick dropped down on the sofa, tossing his t-shirt on the arm next to him. He patted the cushions beside him.

“Did you enjoy it, Elia?” Jenny asked.

“Yes. It very good.” Elia joined Rick on the sofa, removing his shoes and neatly placing them under the coffee table.

“Bet the food in Italy is to die for,” Rhonda said, using the same color polish for her toenails.

“Yes. The food in Italy is very good.” Elia slouched on the sofa, resting his head on Rick’s shoulder.

Rick repositioned so his arm was behind Elia and Elia could rest on his chest. *Yeah, I like him. So what? You all know.* Rick felt defiant. He only had this man for four weeks.

Heart of Steele

It appeared his mother flinched just enough for Rick to notice. Connie and Rhonda grinned at each other wickedly.

“Tired, Elia?” Rhonda sounded slightly sarcastic to Rick. More like, ‘Need an excuse to go to bed with my brother, Elia?’

“I still lagged a *leetle*. I be better tomorrow.” He yawned.

“I assume you’ll want to take Elia to the fireworks display, Rick.”

“I want to go!” Connie whined like a toddler.

It made Rick cringe. “Christ, Connie, grow up. You’re thirteen, not five.”

“Hey! Mom!” she protested.

“We’ll all go. I don’t see why we can’t go as a family.” Jenny stared at the television.

“Do you, Rick?” Rhonda capped the black nail polish and grinned at him. “Or do you want to have Elia all to yourself for his entire visit?”

“I want him for myself. What do you think?” Rick teased. He heard Elia chuckle, then take of sniff of Rick’s armpit.

“Do I stink?” Rick asked.

“Ew!” Connie’s nose crinkled in disgust.

“No. You no stink. You smell nice.”

“His pits?” Rhonda stretched out her legs, wiggling her toes. “Gross.”

“Girls?” Jenny turned up the volume, as if trying to end the conversation.

Rick stared at the TV but wasn’t watching. He was listening to Elia breathe, feeling his soft exhaled puff on his chest. It was making his cock twitch. “I saw Earl Bowen at the Greene.” Rick ran his fingers through Elia’s long locks. “When the hell did he turn into such a redneck?”

“Richard!” Jenny scolded.

“He did,” Rick said. “I swear, he looks and acts like a dumb hick. Was I like that?”

“Still are.” Rhonda smirked.

“I have to tell ya, Ma. When I graduate from the U, I’m not staying in Ohio.”

Elia sat up to look him in the eye while his mother made a sound in her throat that was either regret or disbelief.

Rick stared at Elia as he stared back at him with his fabulously thick eyelashes framing equally sensual dark brown irises. As if answering Elia’s unspoken question, Rick laughed and said, “No. I’m not staying in the mid-west after I graduate.”

“Where you go?”

“LA? New York? I have to get out of here.”

“Richard!” Jenny used that name repeatedly when she was upset with him.

“Come on, Ma. Do you really want me hanging out in this dump of a state when I have fifty to choose from?” Rick connected to Elia’s eyes again, tucking his long hair behind his ear affectionately. “Want me to move to Lombardy?”

Elia held his stomach and had a hearty laugh. “*Si! Buono!* Yes. You come to my country and I show you good time.”

Rick joined Elia’s laughter, then realized no one else found it funny. He stared at his mother. “Will you relax? I can’t live in Europe.”

“Why not?” Connie asked.

“Because. Unless I have an extended visa for a job or something, I’ll be kicked out in six months.”

Elia settled back on Rick’s shoulder again.

Heart of Steele

"You're not moving to Italy," Jenny stated as if it were fact.

"Fine. I'm still not staying in Ohio."

When Jenny stood and left the room, Rhonda said, "Great. Make her cry why don't ya? It's bad enough you told her you were gay."

"Shut up." Rick felt Elia cringe against him.

"Are you going to talk to her?" Rhonda pointed in the direction their mother had taken.

Rick laid his head on the back of the couch and breathed deeply. *What did she think? I'd stay here all my life?*

He heard someone sniffing. When he looked up he found Connie wiping her eyes.

"Come on!" Rick grew upset. "You guys are pissing me off."

"Dad left. So?" Rhonda stood up, taking her nail polish with her. "Go. See if we care." She walked out of the room. Connie raced out behind her, wiping at her eyes.

Rick was stunned. Casual conversation had turned out to be an emotional bombshell.

Elia faced him, placing his palm on Rick's naked pectoral muscle as if bracing himself to sit upright. "They *luff* you, Rick. They no want see you go."

"They couldn't imagine I'd stay here after college. I never led my mom to believe that. She knows I'm not happy here. If I didn't get a sports scholarship at the U, I'd already be gone."

"You go talk." Elia nudged him.

Rick glanced down at Elia's hand as it pressed over his nipple. Instead of racing out of the room, Rick held Elia by his shoulders and drew him closer, hoping for a kiss. When Elia closed his eyes, those dark lashes coming together like a thick brush, Rick's cock throbbed and his temperature

rose. With the television blaring its ubiquitous commercial interruptions in the background, Rick pressed his lips against Elia's. Elia opened his mouth for Rick's eager tongue, using the hand that was bracing him upright, to massage Rick's chest and pinch his nipple.

Hungry for sex, Rick stood, hauling Elia with him. When they were vertical, Rick wrapped his arms around Elia's waist, picked him up off his feet and sucked at his mouth and tongue. "I need to fuck you," Rick hissed between their lips.

"*Bello mio...*" Elia crooned in a groan.

"Now." Rick set Elia down and gripped his hand, making his way to his room. He'd deal with his family tomorrow. Not now. He was too horny now.

Before he made it inside his bedroom, Rhonda met him in the hall to scowl at him. Rick resisted the urge to tell her to mind her own business and closed Elia into his room with him.

Through the door Rhonda said, "Goodnight, Elia," as sarcastically as she could.

"Good-night, Rhonda." Elia stared at Rick in confusion. "Is okay I say that?"

"Sure." Rick locked the door and scooped Elia into his arms. "'been waiting for this all afternoon."

Elia chuckled sensually and licked Rick's chin with the tip of his tongue.

It set Rick on fire. He ground his crotch into Elia's. "You like top or bottom?"

"Bottom mean, you in me?"

"Yes."

"Bottom. You?"

"Top....grrr...perfect." Rick picked Elia up off the floor. Elia wrapped his legs around Rick's hips and kissed him. Swaying, holding Elia's tight ass, rolling their tongues

Heart of Steele

around each others' mouths, Rick humped Elia, creating hot friction. "I want to do this naked."

Elia purred, making the skin on the back of Rick's neck tingle.

Rick walked backwards so he could see their reflection in the mirror on his dresser. "God, yeah. Get naked." He set Elia on his feet and stripped off his clothing, kicking it aside. While he watched Elia get undressed, Rick searched blindly in his nightstand for a rubber and the lube. He couldn't take his eyes off of Elia as his body was revealed. Seeing Elia's dark cock spring out of his briefs over the hair on his low abdomen, and his well-groomed, black pubic hair, made Rick's cock throb in anticipation.

Rick was so eager to get in him, he jerked on his own dick a few times at the urgency.

Elia knelt in front of him, taking his cock into his mouth.

About to tell Elia he'd come if he sucked him, Rick spun to the mirror to watch Elia perform. Rick never imagined a lover like this. Seeing Elia enjoying his actions, his eyes closed, his perfect profile and long exquisite hair, Rick was edging his orgasm, coming close and biting back his desire to come. He pinched the base of his dick to prevent it.

Elia released his suction on Rick's cock and pushed his face into his balls, running his mouth over Rick's sack. Rick closed his eyes and held the base of his dick tighter to stop the impending climax.

While Elia was busy between his thighs, Rick quickly tore open the condom package and rolled it on. He threw the foil on the dresser and shot a blob of gel into his palm, coating himself. "Get up here. Now."

Elia wiped his mouth and stood. He took a leap and held onto Rick's body by his legs as he aimed Rick's cock towards his ass.

Rick allowed Elia to guide him, holding Elia up and staring in the mirror as he did. When Elia pushed the head of Rick's cock inside his rim, Rick shivered with pleasure. Forcing his eyes to stay open, Rick turned sideways, then faced Elia's back to the mirror, looking for the best viewing angle.

His cock was slowly submerged into Elia's body. The moment he had complete penetration, Elia held onto Rick by his neck and shoulders, beginning to pump his hips.

Rick instantly dripped with perspiration, using his strength to bounce Elia up and down, staring at Elia's erection between them and the mirror's delightful show.

"You okay?"

"Si, you no worry."

Rick increased his effort, arching his back and slamming his hips upwards into Elia. Elia gasped and threw back his head.

Assuming Elia would tell him if he wanted him to stop, Rick kept alternating his view from Elia's fabulous genitals against his body, to the mirror and the total picture of the action.

Rick wanted more friction and thrust. He carried Elia to the foot of the bed and knelt down slowly. When Elia dropped back on the mattress, Rick, on his knees on the floor, hammered into this Italian treat. Both Elia's hands gripped his own cock.

"No. I want to suck it." Rick panted, sweat running down his face and chest.

Elia released his grasp and spread his arms across the bed.

He couldn't hold off any longer. Rick tucked his arms around Elia's thighs and got a tight grip on him, then he went into overdrive. Piston-fucking Elia, watching his expressions of ecstasy and hearing his deep moans, Rick

Heart of Steele

couldn't keep up the wire-walking act of holding onto the edge. He had to come.

Though he wanted to scream, 'Ahhhgaad!' at the top of his lungs, he clamped his jaw together and came, burrowing his cock as deep as it would go. Balls deep.

His dick throbbed and the pleasure was so intense, Rick nearly swooned from it. Riding the wave of bliss, Rick thrust inside a few more times, then pulled out, choking for air he was so exhausted.

Elia sprang upright and smoothed both his hands over Rick's swollen pectoral muscles, slick with his sweat, and muttered what Rick imagined was Italian expletives. As Elia pinched Rick's erect nipples, he licked the rolling drops of perspiration off Rick's neck.

It gave Rick the moment he needed to catch his breath. He wiped at his face to rid the moisture on it and felt Elia removing the spent condom for him.

His breathing returning to normal, Rick gripped Elia's arms and forced him back to the bed. When Elia relaxed, Rick held his dick in both hands and lapped at the oozing tip. Elia groaned and his hips jerked upright.

Rick enveloped him to the base, holding his dick in his mouth, breathing heavily through his nose. He felt Elia's fingers digging through his hair to his scalp, encouraging him to continue.

Rick sucked hard, drawing from the tip to the base, holding Elia's hot balls, rubbing the root of his cock and into his ass.

A blast of pre-cum hit Rick's tongue. He moaned and used one hand to grip the base of Elia's cock and worked him like mad, sucking, lapping his tongue up and down Elia's delicious length inside his mouth, and probing between his legs.

Elia gasped and gripped the bedding in his fists. He thrust inside Rick's mouth and filled it with his cum. Rick moaned and swallowed, milking and prolonging the climax for Elia. More creamy sperm coated his tongue. He sucked until he couldn't coax any more out of Elia and then released his grip on him, sitting on his heels and resting his forehead on Elia's thigh.

"*Bello mio*...ohhh," Elia whimpered, "You have empty me."

It was an effort, but Rick laughed. "I can't move."

"No. No me either. No move. Ah, I am dead. *Morto*."

Rick managed to sit up, staring at Elia. "Let's wash up." He stood and hauled Elia to his feet. Tossing Elia his shorts, Rick slipped on his, gathered the spent condom and wrapper, and opened his bedroom door. No one was in the hall. He signaled Elia to hurry and they closed themselves into the bathroom.

"I need to shower. I'm sweating like a pig." Rick pushed back the shower door and turned on the water. "Wanna join me?"

"I should. Yes." Elia dropped his shorts to the floor, stepping out of them.

Rick spun Elia like a dancer into his embrace, dipping him low to kiss.

Elia's eyes sprang open in surprise. "Romance!"

"You bring it out in me." Rick righted him, sticking his hand under the showerhead to feel the temperature. Gesturing for Elia to go first, Rick followed him in, sliding the glass door behind him.

Rick watched Elia wet down and his cock became interested once more.

A female exchange student who ended up being a man. A man who ended up being a gay man. And lust turning into something deeper. Rick never expected to fall in love

Heart of Steele

with a student from Lombardy, Italy, named Elia Gianni,
but then again, love never hits you when you expect it.

Chapter Five

Was it what Elia had anticipated? Life in the United States was lazy and unmotivated. They ate a big breakfast, too much for Elia to consume in one sitting, floated in the pool as the thermometer once again neared ninety, and lounged on the deck eating at noon instead of two or three, dinner at five instead of eight, sleeping at eleven instead of one.

The saving grace for Elia was Rick. Blue-eyed, blond muscle man, Rick. Lying in his arms to sleep, opening his body for his force and pleasure, seeing his sexy smiles and feeling his strength as he picked him up off his feet like a damsel in distress.

This is life in America. Soft and full of too much television and not enough culture or art or physical activity. The food was heavy and too bland for his liking, and dinner was so early, Elia was hungry again before bed.

No one walked anywhere. Everything was done in and out of the motor cars. The food shopping was in a sterile enclosed grocery store. No open-air markets or specialty shops. One big mega-metropolis for all your needs. Elia was not impressed.

Rick reminded him, "This is Ohio. Middle-America. It's not the same in other places. Why do you think I want to move?"

Heart of Steele

No. Not the same. New York. Los Angeles. They were world class cities. Where was he? Dayton? No one from Europe plans a holiday in Ohio.

“Mom, don’t forget the mosquito repellent,” Rhonda said.

“I’ve got it.” Jenny packed a burlap bag with a Buckeyes’ logo on it for their Fourth of July evening. “Connie, bring a sweater.”

“Ma...”

“It may turn cool and rainy. Go get it.”

Rick tucked his shirt into his jeans. “They predict rain. We always have rain on the fourth.”

Elia chuckled as he leaned against the doorway, watching the preparation.

Walking behind him, Rick hugged him, squeezing him against his body. “Why do you always smell good?”

“I do?” Elia reached up to caress his hair.

Rick peeked at his mother. She was trying to ignore them. He chewed on Elia’s neck hungrily.

“Boys.” She obviously couldn’t handle too much show of affection. As if kissing and neck chewing was taboo.

“What’s wrong?” Rick didn’t release Elia. “Can’t I snuggle?”

“I don’t want Connie to see you.”

Connie piped up from the hall, holding her jacket. “I don’t mind.”

“See?” Rick said, “She doesn’t mind.” He rocked Elia in his arms.

“She’s thirteen and I don’t want her to see two men touching like that.”

“Geez!” Rick replied. “What’s with the homophobic attitude?”

Elia tried to make a gap between them, Rick assumed, to keep his mother happy. Rick wanted no part of her ignorance. He didn't release Elia, holding him close.

"Are you going to embarrass me at the fireworks?" Jenny asked.

"Yeah. I'm going to suck his cock in public."

Jenny shot him a furious look and Connie choked. "Please watch what you say in front of your sister."

"Mom, relax. No. I'm not going to touch Elia at the fireworks. Give me a break." He nuzzled into Elia's hair. "But I can hug him in my own house."

Jenny shouldered the burlap sack and left the room.

"Man, you sure are pissing Mom off since Elia came." Connie shook her head.

"That's her problem." Rick kissed Elia's earlobe.

"I'm outta here." Connie followed her mother.

"We go?" Elia asked.

"I'm driving us separately."

"You should no anger your mother. She was nice enough to invite me."

"Are you kidding me? I only have three weeks left of you. You think I'm going to miss an opportunity to hug you? Kiss you?" Rick ran his hands down Elia's chest to his pants. "Touch you?" he whispered.

Elia's weight pressed against his chest as he gave in.

"Are you coming?" Jenny called from the front door.

"Not yet," Rick hissed into Elia's ear, then replied to his mother, "I'll meet you there."

The door slammed shut, shaking the house.

"She so angry at you!"

"She's always pissed off about something. She'll live." Rick massaged Elia's crotch through his pants.

Heart of Steele

“When fireworks start?”

“Ten. They’re way early. We have time.”

“Why they go so early?” Elia reached both his hands into Rick’s hair, pushing his hard-on into Rick’s hands.

“To get a good spot to put the chairs and blanket.” Rick traced where Elia grew hard in his slacks, gnawing on his neck under his hair again. “Now I want to fuck you.”

Elia moaned sensually, spreading his legs.

Rick dug one hand into Elia’s pants, rooting out his dick. When he found it, he drew it upright to stroke. “You get me so fucking hot!” Rick humped Elia’s ass as he fondled him.

“Fuck me.”

A charge of fire raced over Rick. He spun Elia around, picked him up over his shoulder and carried him to his bedroom. “A quickie.” Rick stripped off his bottom half of clothing, finding the items he needed in the nightstand. When he spun around, Elia was also naked from the waist down, massaging his own balls.

Rick jacked off for a moment, watching him. “I could spurt.”

“Spurt.”

A few more pumps and Rick knew he would spray Elia with his spunk he was so close to coming.

Elia widened his straddle, raised up his shirt, and kept touching himself; his cock, his balls, and his ass.

Rick stood over him and fisted his dick while he stared at Elia’s actions. “Jack off.”

Immediately Elia complied, using one hand on his shaft, the other on his balls and ass. Rick salivated at the sight. He aimed his dick at Elia’s and came, coating his sack, knuckles, and pubic hair with creamy ribbons of cum. Elia closed his eyes and shot a load onto his stomach. As he milked his own cock, Rick leaned down to have a taste. He

took a lick and moaned. "Fuck the fireworks. I want to screw you all night."

"No. I can no do. I must think of family."

"I know. Just kidding." Rick reached to help Elia to his feet. They washed in the bathroom sink and put their clothes back on.

"Are you ready for this?" Rick picked up his keys from the dresser.

"Ready? How you mean?" Elia brushed his hair hastily at the dresser mirror.

"It's a mob. Traffic, noise and a huge crowd."

"Is okay." Elia tossed the brush down and smiled.

"Last hug." Rick embraced him, crushing him in his arms.

"No say 'last'. Never 'last'."

Rick felt a stab to his chest at the image of Elia leaving, but pushed it out of his mind. That was three weeks away. *Don't think about it.* "Come on, babe. Time for a real American holiday tradition."

Laughing, Elia held Rick's hand until they left the house and headed to his truck.

Elia had never seen so many big people in his life. As Rick used his mobile phone to call Rhonda for directions on where they had set their blanket, Elia stared at enormous individuals drinking soda from paper cups the size of milk cartons, eating fast food and sugar, and winced at shirtless men with less than flattering physiques.

"There they are." Rick shut off his phone and walked with purpose.

In the midst of chairs, blankets and bamboo mats, the three Steele women stared as they approached. Elia thought none of them appeared happy. He smiled regardless and

Heart of Steele

made himself comfortable on a corner of the blanket. "Is still light at ten."

"I know. Just getting dark now." Rick reclined next to him, putting his hands behind his head.

"Are you hungry, Elia?" Jenny asked. "I have food and drinks if you are."

"No. I no need. I good." He looked around the area. A few spectators turned away when he caught them looking.

"It's cloudy. I hope they shoot the fireworks low," Rick said.

Elia stretched out beside him, mimicking his posture. "*Si*. Is cloudy. What will happen?"

"They just set them off regardless of the weather."

"I'm cold," Connie said.

"Put on your jacket." Jenny handed it to her.

After she put it on she moved to opposite side of Rick and lay down with them, snuggling up against him.

Elia smiled at her. "You need warm?"

"Yes." Connie exaggerated a shiver.

"No," Rick said to Elia before he spoke the next line.

"You know what I say?" Elia asked.

"Yes. You were going to invite her between us. She's fine where she is." Rick put his arm around his sister to warm her up.

"You so smart." Elia laughed.

"And selfish," Rhonda said.

"You got that right." Rick rubbed Connie's arm to warm her.

"What are you going to do when Elia leaves, Rick?" Rhonda asked, checking her phone and using her thumbs to text.

"I don't want to discuss it."

Elia glanced at Jenny. She appeared upset. Elia didn't speculate whether it was because Rick would be sad he was leaving in a few weeks, or that Rick would also leave, going back to college. He wouldn't dream of asking her.

"Ya gonna be pen-pals?" Rhonda split her attention between her phone and the conversation.

"I said shut up."

A loud hiss quieted the crowd. A cracking sound and a boom came next, lighting up the cloudy twilight sky. A chorus of "Oooh!" from the crowd followed.

Elia unwound his tense muscles to enjoy the show. He didn't want to discuss leaving either. Being away from Rick was going to be brutal. They'd formed a mental and physical bond so quickly, it took Elia's breath away. He'd had many expectations of his exchange trip to America, but meeting the man of his dreams wasn't one of them.

It was nearing eleven when the display ended. Rick helped his mother fold the plastic chairs and blanket while Connie slumped her shoulders in exhaustion and Rhonda spoke to a few of her friends she'd met up with. She excitedly introduced them to Elia.

When Rick heard her say, "He's my brother's new boyfriend," he bolted upright from what he was doing and shouted, "Rhonda!"

"Rick is gay?"

"Rhonda! I'm going to kill you!" Rick balled up his fists.

"Nah. Just joking." Rhonda stuck out her tongue at Rick.

"Call ya tomorrow!" Rhonda waved at her girlfriends and stuck her mobile phone into her neon-pink hoodie pocket.

Heart of Steele

“Why did you say that?” Rick asked, seeing Elia trying to look inconspicuous.

“What’s wrong, Rick?” Jenny asked, “Does it bother you that your sister is being honest?”

Rick threw up his hands. “And you wonder why I want to get away from you all.” He nodded to Elia. “Let’s go.”

“Can I ride home with you?” Connie asked in a whine.

“No.” Rick gently prodded Elia by the small of his back to walk.

“At least help Mom with a chair!” Rhonda said.

Rick reached for two of the plastic folding chairs, held them in one hand and left.

Elia looked back as he walked with him. “This all the time?”

“Yes. It sucks.” Rick tried to prevent bumping people in the spotlight-lit mob.

“*Mama mia.*”

“No shit. I’m sick of it. I feel like since I’m the only man in the family, they expect me to be Mr. Perfect.”

“Is hard. I am only son. *Mio padre* no pleased I am gay. But he no mad. He accept it.” Elia made a gesture, opening his hands. “And he is mayor, so, is source of some embarrassment.”

Rick stopped short. “Mayor?”

“*Si.*”

“Your dad’s the mayor of your town?”

“Yes. Mayor. I no tell you?”

Rick continued his way through the crowd. “Wow. No.”

“Where is truck?”

“Keep going.” Rick tilted his head in the direction.

“You want I take one chair?”

“I got it.” *Mayor? Your dad is a mayor? Mine’s invisible, and my family is embarrassing. What do you see in me?*

Rick suddenly felt unworthy for such a high-class man. Who was he to judge anyone? He actually thought he had a chance for a relationship with Elia? He was Elia’s summer fling. That’s all.

The roads were crammed with cars leaving the event. Rick tossed the chairs into the truck bed, closing the canopy and getting behind the wheel. Elia was already waiting in the passenger’s seat.

“You good?”

“Yeah.” Rick started the engine.

“Why you no look good?”

“Just tired.”

“I say something. *La mia famiglia*. So stupid. I say wrong words. Yes?”

“No.” Rick signaled and leaned out of his window to try and enter the flow of traffic. Someone flashed their headlights at him to let him in. He waved and merged into the line of cars. “This is why I hate going to these things.”

Elia rubbed his forehead, looking upset.

Rick couldn’t help but ask. “Am I just a fuck?”

“Is this how you want?”

Hating the stop and go traffic, Rick was glad he had an automatic transmission. He noticed a side street and veered off, making better headway.

“Rick...”

God, how he loved the way he said that. *Ree-ick*. So sexy.

“*Bello mio...*”

“What does that mean?” Rick was glad to be out of the knot of traffic and on open roads.

Heart of Steele

“It mean you are more than ‘a fuck’.”

“I’m no mayor’s son.” Rick gave a sarcastic laugh.

Elia unhooked his seatbelt and slid over, gripping Rick’s thigh and sealing their bodies on one side. He rested his head on Rick’s shoulder. “And I am no American athlete. So?”

“It’s not the same.”

“Is same.” Elia massaged Rick’s crotch.

A lump formed in Rick’s throat. He put his arm around Elia and drove the last few blocks holding onto him as tightly as he could. The moment he parked, shut off his lights and the ignition, he unfastened the seatbelt and lunged for Elia’s mouth, kissing him, forcing him down on the bench seat under him. Elia cupped the back of his head, deepening their kiss to a heart-swooning level which Rick had never felt before in his life. He and Elia managed to fit in the tight space, their legs bent and on the floor under the steering wheel, the top of their heads against the passenger’s door.

In the streetlight’s halo, Rick went mad for him, pushing Elia’s shirt up his chest, then digging his hand down his pants. Elia slipped both his into the back of Rick’s jeans, massaging his ass cheeks and making Rick crazy, about to cream his shorts.

Dry humping, riding his cock over Elia’s until his teeth were clenched from yearning, Rick knew he was too attached to this man. How it had happened, he didn’t know. Why it happened? Because Elia was the most wonderful man he had ever met. Fate created a cosmic meeting, accidental, yet life-altering.

“*Ti amo...*” Elia gasped between kisses, seemingly unable to catch his breath.

Rick had no idea what it meant, but it sounded like music to him. "*Ti amo...*" he repeated, jamming his crotch into Elia's.

"Rick?"

Rick inhaled sharply and jolted out of his skin to see Rhonda using her knuckles to rap the passenger's window. He leapt off Elia and sat up, his heart pumping painfully from the fright.

"Jesus, guys! Mom sent me out to see why you weren't coming in. Now I know. Man, do you know what the neighbors would do? They'd call the cops!"

Rick opened his door and climbed out while Elia did the same on the opposite side. Remembering the chairs, Rick stopped at his tailgate and opened the canopy. With the two plastic seats in his hand, he closed up the back and joined Elia and Rhonda who were waiting for him on the sidewalk. Elia ran his fingers through his hair nervously and his head was lowered.

"Go." Rick waved for Rhonda to walk first to the house.

"You guys need to control your dicks."

"Will you shut up?" Rick could see this was upsetting Elia. "Can't you all just mind your own business?" He leaned the chairs against the house near the porch as Rhonda opened the front door. Moths and mosquitoes dive-bombed the outside light in a flurry of activity. Rick held Elia's elbow to nudge him into the house first.

"Are you hungry, Elia?" Rhonda asked as she headed to the kitchen.

"No. *Grazie.*" He glanced back at Rick looking worried.

"Are you okay?" Rick closed the gap between them and cupped Elia's face.

"I sad for you. Your family so angry."

Heart of Steele

"This is normal. You just don't know it." Rick put his arm around Elia and walked with him to the kitchen.

Connie was eating ice cream from a bowl and Jenny appeared tired.

"Do you want ice cream?" Jenny asked.

"No thanks." Rick opened the refrigerator and removed a bottle of water. He unscrewed the top and took a swig, handing it to Elia who did the same.

"Ew," Connie said.

"They swap spit when they kiss." Rhonda drank from a can of cola. "Believe me, if they have anything, they already exchanged it."

"Rhonda, please," Jenny said.

"See ya. I'm going to bed." She waved her black painted fingernails at them and left the room.

Elia handed Rick back the water. He finished it and tossed out the bottle. "Okay if we call it a night?"

"Yes." Jenny put the ice cream back into the freezer. "What are your plans for tomorrow?"

"I'd like to take Elia to see the Reds. I'm going to check if they have a game tomorrow."

"Can I come?" Connie asked.

"Only if Mom takes you." Rick made a gesture for Elia to exit the room first.

"*Buonanotte*," Elia said.

"What's that mean?" Connie asked.

"It means goodnight," Rick answered. "That one was a no-brainer, Con..."

"He is learning." Elia smiled at Rick.

"Goodnight, Elia. Rick." Jenny did not reflect the smile.

“Night, Mom, sis.” Rick followed Elia to their bedroom. When they were in private, Rick asked, “What does *ti amo* mean?”

Elia grinned slyly at him, but didn’t reply.

Rick wanted to boot up the computer and check, but it was in Connie and Rhonda’s room. It sounded good. What could it mean?

Once they were together in bed, Rick interlocked their legs and stared at Elia’s eyes. Sinking into the softness of the pillows under him, Rick stroked back Elia’s hair from his forehead. Elia’s gaze was riveted to his in the sparse light.

Though three weeks could be a long time for some, it was becoming too short of a time span for him. How would he get enough of Elia before he left? What would happen? A few emails? Then? Nothing? He would vanish into his studies, his life in Italy with his family? Become the mayor once his dad left office?

Rick’s eyes burned with tears of worry. He fought back so they didn’t overflow and embarrass him. Elia thought he was a powerful man. An athlete. *Yeah. That only accounts for my body, not my heart.*

As if Elia sensed something, he drew closer and pressed his lips against Rick’s. Rick instantly coiled his arms around him and embraced him, squeezing him as tightly as he could. The lump was back in this throat.

Why were the best things in life the hardest to attain?

Chapter Six

A cold beer in his hand, Rick checked the ticket stub as he found their section in the Great America Ballpark. "There they are. Not bad." Rick scooted down a row of upright plastic seat bottoms to the two he had purchased.

"Is beautiful." Elia put his beer into the cup holder and sat down.

"The park's only around five years old."

"And the view!" Elia gestured out to the Ohio River and Kentucky's skyline across from it.

"I know. Not bad for crappy Ohio."

"You so hate here?"

Rick's knees hit the seat in front of him as he tried to recline. "I guess I've had enough of living here. I need to see the world. I feel really stuck."

"Is big world." Elia sipped his beer.

"Bet you traveled a lot."

"Europe is like United States. Small trip from place to place. Not like here."

Seeing a couple trying to get by, Rick nudged Elia. They stood as two people squeezed past to their seats on the opposite side of them.

Once they had settled again, Rick wondered how this appeared through Elia's eyes. "Have you ever been to a park this big?"

"Big?" Elia chuckled. "Milan stadium hold over eighty thousand."

Rick choked on his beer and tried to cough. "No!"

"Si! What this? Half that?"

"Yes. Half. Around forty thousand. Holy shit." Rick felt his cheeks go red. "I'm such a dumbass."

"No. No, dumb. You no been there." Elia shrugged. "How you know?"

"I played soccer in school, but I'm really not a pro soccer fan."

"Is all we watch. We soccer mad, yes?" Elia took a drink of the beer.

Rick gazed at Elia's tight black slacks. He could see the outline of Elia's balls and dick through the material at his crotch. Sweating in his blue jeans in the heat of the summer night, Rick shifted his ass on the hard seat and wished he could squeeze that delightful package.

"You 'splain to me game, but I still no know. What happen first?"

Rick tried to shake off his daydream of sucking Elia's cock in the ballpark. "The first team will bat and try to hit the ball. The goal is to run around the bases and get home."

"Is so complicated. What all those numbers mean?" Elia pointed to the enormous scoreboard across from them. A monitor was showing a mixture of images to entertain the crowd before the first pitch.

"RBI is runs batted in, H is hits. That's the board for strikes and balls..."

Elia held up his hand. "No. I no get. You just tell me when we make point."

Heart of Steele

Chuckling, Rick agreed. "You got it."

A loud, amplified voice said, "Ladies and gentlemen. Would you please rise for the singing of the National Anthem."

Rick stood up, Elia by his side. A troop of soldiers; color guard, marched out onto the field with flags. Ball caps were removed as the Star Spangled Banner was sung beautifully.

Placing his hand on his heart, Rick always choked up for that song. And seeing the military made him feel guilty for not enlisting. When he dabbed at the corner of his eye, he noticed Elia had his hand on his heart too, giving him a loving smile. Rick winked at him.

A cheer rose up when the song was done, and a squadron of F16s flew overhead. The noise from the crowd in response was deafening. The moment the planes vanished, an enormous bald eagle was released from high in the stadium to land at the pitcher's mound on a man's arm.

The video monitor showed the bird close up in flight.

"Wow! Love the show during fourth of July weekend!" Rick laughed and checked Elia's expression. He appeared awestruck.

"America so powerful!"

"You bet we fucking are." Rick put his arm around Elia for a quick hug.

"I so glad we friends. I no want Italy in fight against US. No!" he said, laughing.

"Me too." Rick forced himself to release him, looking back to see who was seated behind him. It was a group of college guys, the same age as they were. They were wearing Reds shirts and caps and pumping their fists into the air in support of the show.

Rick and Elia sat down again as the game began. Rick raised his beer in a toast. "To Italy and America, always lovers, never fighters."

Elia tapped the necks of their plastic bottles together. "*Salute!*"

Rick drank his beer, making sure their legs and shoulders were touching. "Okay. Here we go!" The first batter stood at the plate.

"Is so exciting!" Elia wiggled in his seat.

Leaning close to Elia's ear, Rick whispered, "Wait 'til you see Joey Votto. Our first baseman. Ooh, so hot."

"No as hot as you."

"Oh yeah. He's way hotter."

"Blond and blue?"

"No. Dark hair and eyes."

"Then no hot as you."

Rick peeked behind him, found the young men busy cheering, and gave Elia's leg a quick squeeze.

Nine innings and nearly three hours later, Elia knew they had won, but had no idea how. He kept Rick's broad shoulders and US Air Force t-shirt in sight as they made their way through a tightly packed crowd.

Rick paused in front of a men's room. "Gotta piss. Too much beer and it's a long way home."

"I go." Elia nodded, following Rick into the men's room.

It was a cavern of urinals and stalls with men's voices echoing on the white tiles. Elia selected a urinal and didn't want to look at the men around him. They all seemed so macho and drunk, he didn't want to cause any trouble.

Flushing the urinal, Elia made his way to the sink and washed his hands, looking at himself in the mirror. Rick's

Heart of Steele

image appeared, giving him a seductive snarl. Elia's cock swelled instantly. He waited as Rick rinsed his hands, standing near the blower to dry them off.

"Ready?"

"Si."

Rick steered Elia in front of him to the door, his hand on Elia's ass, making Elia crazy. The moment they joined the throng headed to the exits, Rick walked beside him. "Hang on."

Before Elia could ask why, Rick jogged to a vendor along the wall. Elia moved out of the flow of foot traffic and waited. Women stared, smiling, men gave him curious looks. Elia gave himself a once over, hoping he didn't forget to zip his trousers. No. He did not.

A hat was placed on his head.

Elia looked up to see Rick's broad smile.

"You're adorable."

Removing the hat, Elia inspected the red baseball cap with the Cincinnati logo. "*Grazie! Molto buono!*"

"My pleasure. A memento."

Elia put it back on his head and smiled. "Oh, *ti amo*, Rick...*lo vi amo molto*."

Rick obviously loved his reaction. "What does that mean?"

"Is secret." Elia hooked his elbow and kept them moving in the noise and chaos.

After taking a look around, Rick held Elia's arm in place and escorted him down the long winding path to the street.

The traffic out of the parking garage and city streets was slow going. Rick held Elia's hand as they made inch by inch progress to I-75 North and back to Beavercreek. It was

after eleven by the time they actually hit highway, and the construction zones continued to impede their progress.

Elia massaged Rick's fingers and palm as he drove. They were tired and not talking, so Rick put the radio on low, classic rock. He had no idea if Elia hated it or not. "You okay?"

"Si. Much okay. I have wonderful time."

"Me too. I wish I could go to a soccer match with you in Italy."

"Why can you no go?"

"Yeah? Is that an invitation?" Rick was glad to see their exit and signaled to go off the ramp.

"Si! Yes! You come! When you come?"

Hearing the excitement in his voice, Rick felt his heart warm. "I will come. Don't invite me if you don't want me."

The grip on his hand tightened. "You will come?"

Rick glanced at Elia in the passing headlights as he drove down Indian Ripple Road to his home. "I'd like to."

Elia stuck Rick's middle finger into his mouth and began sucking it.

"Holy shit!" Rick jolted and his cock went rigid down the thigh of his pant leg. His heart rate escalated and he could barely focus on the road. The velvety softness of Elia's mouth was making him want to come. Now.

He pulled into his driveway, shut off the truck and breathed in and out as if he'd just run all the way from Cincy.

Elia released his suction from Rick's finger, unfastened his seatbelt and sidled closer. He snaked his arms around Rick's neck and kissed him.

Floored by the passion and connection they had made, Rick dug one hand into Elia's hair, deepening their kiss,

Heart of Steele

and the other he wrapped around his back, holding him close.

Midnight, in his truck, on the driveway of his mother's house, Rick was at first base, knowing he was going to get a grand slam homerun in a matter of moments.

Kissing as they made their way to the front porch, Rick loved Elia's tiny whimpers of longing. Peeking at the door, he managed to get his key in the lock and turn it, pushing it back while sucking on Elia's tongue. Rick closed the door quietly, bolting it, and they danced their way in a sexual swoon to Rick's bedroom, connected, mouth to mouth, tongue to tongue, hornier than hell.

Once inside his private sanctuary, Rick locked the bedroom door, flicked Elia's ball cap off his head and tackled him to the bed. They rolled around, kissing, like Rick had never kissed before in his life. He could spend all night exploring the way Elia used his tongue to swirl, lap, and penetrate his mouth. So tantalizing were Elia's kisses, Rick couldn't imagine stopping. He used his toes to push off his shoes, and didn't miss a moment of mouth to mouth as he opened his pants and wriggled out of his clothing.

Elia was doing the same, keeping their lips pressed together as he stripped. He seemed as eager as Rick to get skin to skin. When they achieved it, after an effort of grunting and wriggling, pushing things over the side of the bed, Rick pinned Elia on his back, using his knees to open Elia's legs.

He settled between them, rubbing their cocks and pubic hair together. With an elbow placed on either side of Elia's head, Rick relaxed and began to focus purely on Elia's mouth and technique. *French kissing? Hell no! Italian kissing! Ti amo!*

Rick had no idea what the two words meant, but he assumed it was an endearment since it was said during moments of intense passion between them.

Finally he parted from their kiss. His skin felt raw from Elia's coarse jaw, but he didn't care. He petted Elia's hair and stared at him as he stared back, Elia's chest heaving beneath his. "I..."

Elia tilted his head, holding onto Rick's biceps.

Rick cleared his throat nervously.

"Tell me." Elia kissed him again.

Rick lost himself on Elia's mouth, feeling Elia spread his legs wider in invitation. Elia bent his knees and bucked under him, creating friction that was enough for Rick to come if he let himself.

Parting again from Elia's mouth, Rick touched the stiff day's growth on Elia's jaw. "Christ, you're beautiful."

"I am so..." Elia bit his lip.

"So..." Rick pushed his cock down so it could slide between Elia's ass cheeks. "So what? So hot?"

"So hot. Yes."

"What do you want? Anything, lover." Rick caressed his face.

"You."

"I'm yours." Rick's heart rate accelerated.

"Mine?"

"Yes."

"Tonight, or?"

"Or?" Rick pecked Elia's slack mouth. "You want me?"

"Si. I want."

"Tell me. What do you want?" Rick noticed Elia's eyes begin to water. "Anything. Anything for you."

Heart of Steele

“You want me?”

“Yes.” Rick never wanted anything more in his life.

“Tonight or?” Elia asked again.

“Forever?” Rick massaged Elia’s balls with his stiff dick.

“Can I ask, ‘forever’?”

“Is that what you want?” Rick was awash with chills.

Elia averted his eyes nervously.

“You playing hard to ‘buy’ again?”

It made Elia laugh. He nodded. “*Si*. Hard to buy.”

Rick worked his arm under Elia’s body and spun them over so Elia was on top of him.

Elia pushed his hair back behind his ears and nestled between Rick’s legs, propping his hands on Rick’s broad chest.

“I want you forever.”

Elia blinked, looking surprised.

“So?” Rick asked. “Am I wrong or right?”

Holding Rick’s jaw, Elia went for his mouth again.

Rick smoothed his hand down Elia’s back to his ass, gripping it tight. It made Elia’s cock throb deliciously.

“*Ti amo*, Ree-ick.”

“Please. Elia. What does that mean?”

Elia paused and made intense contact with Rick’s eyes. “*I luff* you.”

The surge of pleasure that rushed through Rick almost jolted him off the bed. “You do?”

Elia bit his lip, nodding.

“Baby! Baby!” Rick spun him back over to the bottom again.

“Oh! You make dizzy!” Elia said.

“*Ti amo! Ti amo!*” Rick pressed his face into Elia’s neck and closed his eyes as they filled with warm tears.

“Make love to me, *bello mio*.”

Rick knelt up, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. He stretched to the nightstand and produced a condom and the lube.

He was so excited as he prepared himself to make love, he was shaking. While he rolled the condom on, he stared at Elia’s expression. *I knew I knew what that phrase meant. Look at the way he looks at me! No one has ever looked at me like that.*

With a blob of gel on his fingertips, Rick asked, “You ready, lover?”

“Yes. Come to me.” Elia held both his knees and opened his body.

His cock bobbing in anticipation, Rick slid two fingers into Elia’s ass. Elia hissed a breath in pleasure.

Getting him good and slippery, because he was going to ride Elia to the stars, Rick lubed him up, relaxing his tense muscles. He felt Elia tugging on his arms, letting him know he was ready.

Rick placed the head of his dick against his rim, pushing in easily. He groaned and kept penetrating until he couldn’t get any closer. “I love being in you.” Rick shivered with a chill down his spine.

“Climax for your lover.”

“With pleasure.” Rick leaned his body over Elia and began thrusting, watching Elia’s face. “Jack off.”

Instantly Elia’s hands connected to his cock. Seeing Elia’s expression of lust and his fisting action was all Rick needed. He’d been hungry for this all night. Fuck the beer and peanuts. This is real food for the soul.

When that rumbling of Italian profanity began, Rick was way ahead of Elia. “Fuck...” he whispered. “Fuck!” He

Heart of Steele

jammed his dick in deep, his balls tightening and his own ass puckering with sensations of pleasure. As his cock shuddered inside Elia, delicious ribbons of cum sprayed out of Elia's slit, coating his bronze chest.

Rick gave another few thrusts in, pulling out and collapsing on top of Elia. "Home run."

Elia chuckled tiredly, holding Rick in his arms.

"Ti amo, Elia."

"Ti amo, Ree-ick."

Chapter Seven

Rick opened his eyes. It was dim in his room and rain was pelting his blind-covered window. A flash of light lit the room followed by a house-shaking thunder blast.

Elia jumped at the noise and woke.

"I got ya." Rick cuddled him close.

Another flash of white light occurred almost at the same time as a booming crackling blast.

"Oh!" Elia jolted in fright.

"It must be right overhead." Rick stared at the window. "Just cross your fingers we don't hear the tornado siren."

"No!" Elia gasped.

"Yeah. Sucks being in a tornado belt state."

Through the door they heard Connie yell, "Mom!"

Rick chuckled. "My sister is petrified of thunderstorms."

"Is so loud!"

"It'll pass over us. Don't worry." Rick's morning hard-on throbbed against Elia's. He nuzzled Elia's hair, snuffling him. "You smell nice."

Elia laughed, then inhaled sharply at another house-shaking flash and bang. The wind whipped tree branches against the exterior of the home and window. When another

Heart of Steele

flash lit the room, Elia counted, “*Uno, duo, tre...*” The thunder crackled like it was full of electricity.

“See?” Rick said, “It’s moving away.”

“Tornado? I no want see that.”

“Me neither. They suck.” Rick kissed Elia’s neck, slowly making his way down his body. “Did you mean what you said last night?”

While Rick began ducking under the sheet, licking Elia’s dark nipple, Elia asked, “Did you?”

“Uh huh.” Rick kissed his way down the center of Elia’s abdomen to his belly button.

Elia went limp and spread his legs.

Rick felt him jump at another loud thunderclap. He nuzzled Elia’s cock and balls. “You need a piss first?”

“No. I need a come.”

Chuckling softly, Rick ran his hand over Elia’s length. “I got that covered.” He touched Elia, exploring his erection and sack, admiring his black pubic hair. “God, you’re hot.” He heard Elia laugh. He pointed his dick towards his mouth and enveloped it, moaning at the taste.

“Rick?” His mother knocked on his door. “Are you awake?”

“Later. I’ll be out in a minute.” Rick continued to suck.

“I think a branch came down on the house.”

“I’ll check it soon, Mom. I’m not going out there while it’s raining so hard. Just hang on.” He paused and heard her walk away from his door, resuming his blowjob.

“You no worry?”

“No. They overreact constantly to everything. They need valium.”

“What they do without you?”

“Later. I’m busy.” Rick didn’t want to think about anything but Elia’s cock coming in his mouth. He crawled

between Elia's legs and leaned his elbows on his thighs. Sucking, closing his eyes, he listened to the storm receding, the space between the flash and noise grow, and the need to make his lover climax growing as well.

Getting to his knees, Rick drew Elia's cock deep into his throat, and reached up to pinch one of his nipples. Elia groaned and tensed his leg muscles.

Rick went for it, orally fucking him deep and fast, smoothing his hand all over Elia's body from his chest to his balls and ass back to his erect nipples again.

When Elia's cock went rock hard, Rick waited for the blast of cum. It hit his tongue and he whimpered in ecstasy, swallowing him down and sucking hard for every drop. Sitting up, staring at Elia as he recovered, his chest rising and falling rapidly, Rick jerked off and shot cum all over him. "Oh, Christ, that feels good."

"Is good." Elia caught his breath.

Rick landed heavily on the bed, surrounding Elia. Keeping his body elevated from Elia's cum-coated skin, Rick pecked his lips and smiled. "So you still '*ti amo*' me?"

"You ask?" Elia grinned demonically.

Rick shrugged. "Maybe it was the beer."

"Two beer? No. No beer."

"Then you still love me?" Rick said.

"Still?" Elia laughed. "Few hours? I no luff you now? Is this how Americans do?"

"No. I'm just teasing ya." Rick licked Elia's chin. "Shower time." He climbed off the bed, offering Elia a tissue from the box. Elia took one and wiped off the spent cum.

As Elia slid on his briefs for the jaunt across the hall to the bathroom, Rick popped the Reds' cap on Elia's head playfully.

Heart of Steele

Elia took a peek at himself in the dresser mirror. "Is nice! *Grazie*."

"It suits you." Rick unlocked his bedroom door, holding the handle.

"Later I wear. No in shower." Elia put it on the dresser.

"No. Not in the shower." Rick laughed at him. He peeked out into the hall. "All clear." They hurried into the bathroom and Rick locked that door behind them. "Hey, we didn't lose power. How about that?" He started the water in the shower.

"You lose a lot?"

"Yes. It seems like we do. Here, not too much on campus in Columbus."

Elia stepped into the tub behind Rick, waiting as he wet down. When they swapped spots, Elia made circular patterns with his hands over Rick's pectoral muscles.

"You're going to get me going again." Rick gestured to his rising erection.

"I so enamor with you. So strong. Me? No strong."

Rick gave Elia's slender physique a good once-over. "You're perfect."

"But this?" Elia cupped Rick's chest, squeezing him.

From outside the bathroom door, Rhonda shouted, "How long you guys gonna be in there?"

Pushing back the sliding door, Rick answered, "Use Mom's!" and shut it again. "Sheesh. Too many women in this house." He replaced Elia's hands back on his chest. "You were admiring my pecs?" he said wryly.

Elia grinned wickedly and sucked his nipple.

"I love my Italian stud!" Rick closed his eyes and groaned.

The storm had past and hot sunshine created steam as it evaporated the cool rain.

Elia did a cursory check of the house with Rick before they ate breakfast. A few small branches were down, but nothing was damaged. When Rick stood near the pool, Elia noticed the amount of water that accumulated on the cover. "Is full."

"Yeah. But that's nature's way of filling the pool for us." Rick touched the blue tarp. "I just have to filter the leaves out."

"So much work."

"I suppose. I don't use it as much as my sisters do." Rick held out his hand. "Come on. Let's eat."

Elia clasped it and they walked to the back of the house, across the wooden deck and into the kitchen through the patio doors.

The scent of coffee and frying sausages filled the room.

"Everything okay?" Jenny asked as she tended the stove.

"Yup." Rick poured two mugs of coffee, handing one to Elia.

"Sit here." Connie patted the chair next to her at the round kitchen table.

Elia relaxed on the seat beside her. "How are you, Connie?"

"Good. Tell me about the baseball game last night. Did you like it?"

After sipping the coffee, Elia replied, "I like. But I no understand."

"Me neither." Connie shrugged. "I don't like sports."

"Then why did you want to go?" Rick asked.

Rhonda entered the room.

Heart of Steele

Elia studied her pink hair and black nail polish. When he noticed her stomach exposed again between a short top and low slung shorts he was slightly surprised. No woman he knew would wear that outfit unless they had the body for it. But she wasn't the only one he'd seen doing that during his visit.

"You guys shower together too?" Rhonda asked, pouring herself a cup of coffee.

Jenny obviously wanted to change the subject when she said, "Breakfast is ready. Bring your plates over and I'll fill them."

Elia went to stand and Rick held up his hand to stay him. "Tell me what you want, Elia. I'll get it."

Elia couldn't get used to such a big meal so early. "Is okay one cake, one sausage?"

"You sure?" Rick asked.

Elia bit his lip, nodding, hoping Jenny wouldn't think it was the food.

Rick handed him the plate. "Sis?" he asked Connie.

"Two sausages, two pancakes, please!" she replied excitedly.

Waiting for Rick to join them, Elia sipped his coffee. When he did, Rick whispered, "Do you hate mom's cooking?"

"No. Is good tasting. Just too much." Elia made a face in exaggeration and rubbed his belly. He noticed Rhonda sit behind a loaded plate of food and watched her douse it with butter and maple syrup.

"What do you usually eat in the morning?" Rick took a bite of his pancake.

"Uh..." Elia didn't want to insult anyone. "Coffee...perhaps small roll."

"That's it?" Rhonda chewed her food and sipped from her coffee mug.

Shrugging, Elia was afraid he'd hurt someone's feelings, so he shut up and tried to eat his food even though he wasn't very hungry.

"That's why Americans are fat and Europeans are thin," Rick said, pointing his fork at his sister.

"Screw you." She gave him a dirty look.

Having a hunch the topic would be controversial, Elia felt guilty.

"How do you eat in Italy?" Connie asked.

"No too different," he lied, trying to keep the peace.

"Sure." Rick gave him a sideways glance.

Jenny joined them finally, looking rushed and tired. "What are you guys planning on doing today?"

"It's up to Elia," Rick said.

"What you do. I no mind." Elia didn't even know what was on offer.

"There's nothing to do. We already did The Greene and a ballgame," Rick said, "That's it here."

"You can go to the Air Force museum," Jenny said.

"Cool!" Connie perked up.

"You like airplanes?" Rick didn't seem enthused.

"I no mind. They good last night."

Rhonda tilted her head. "Huh?"

"The Thunderbirds did a pass over the stadium before the game," Rick replied.

Connie went into a funk instantly and crossed her arms.

Rick said, "You just said you didn't like sports. So if you want to go, go with Mom."

Elia cringed at the bickering.

"I'm not your father or your playmate, Con..." Rick glanced at Elia. "Don't worry. This is normal."

Heart of Steele

Though he nodded, Elia still did not like it.

“A six year age difference and she expects me to take her everywhere.” Rick pointed to his mother. “That’s your job. Or yours,” he aimed his index finger at Rhonda.

“Who cares, you’ll be gone soon anyway.” Rhonda finished her food and took her plate to the sink. “And so will Elia, for that matter. Better enjoy him while you can, Rick.”

Elia and Rick exchanged solemn stares. The last thing Elia wanted was to be reminded of how short their time was together.

“Bye.” Rhonda left the room.

Jenny shouted, “Will you be home for dinner?”

“I’ll let you know!” The front door shut soon after.

“Where’s she going without a ride?” Rick asked.

“One of her friends is probably picking her up.”

“You let her go out with friends who drive?” Rick set his fork down on his empty plate.

Elia couldn’t finish all his pancake, gave up and put his fork down as well.

“I have no control of either of you anymore.” Jenny asked Elia, “Are you sure you had enough to eat?”

“*Si. Grazie.* I no can do much so early.”

Rick stood and took both their plates to the sink, dumping the uneaten food, rinsing the plates, and loading the dishwasher.

Feeling like a heel, but not sure why, Elia whispered to Jenny, “I sorry I so much trouble.”

She appeared surprised. “Elia! You’re no trouble at all.”

He noticed Rick perk up and listen.

“I like you here.” Connie ate another bite of her food.

“Elia, please,” Jenny whispered back, “Don’t mistake our family problems for anything you’re doing.”

“I am imposing, yes?”

“No. Not at all. Don’t be silly. You just tell me what kind of rolls you like and I’ll pick them up at the grocery store.”

“No. You no have do that. No. What you make is fine. I just eat small.”

“Nonsense. I’ll make some nice oven-baked croissants or something like that tomorrow. Okay?”

Seeing Rick drying his hands on a towel, looking angry, Elia nodded to Jenny. “Yes. Thank you. I no want to be bother.”

“You’re not. You’re a delight.” She reached across the table and patted his arm.

Rick approached the table and began clearing up.

“I help.”

Putting his hand on Elia’s shoulder, Rick kept him still. “Nope. Sit. You want more coffee?”

“Please.”

Rick brought over the pot and refilled Elia’s cup, offering his mother some. She nodded and he poured. Once he returned the coffee carafe to the maker, he continued removing items they didn’t need from the table and loading the dishwasher.

As Elia sipped his coffee, he admired Rick’s desire to help. Even though Rick appeared like a big tough sports hero, he obviously cared deeply for his family, and Elia was beginning to believe the gruff act was just Rick’s frustration with living in a place he did not like.

The humidity after the morning rain was unbearable. Rick floated on a raft next to Elia while Connie and her

Heart of Steele

thirteen year old friend, Janya, giggled together at the farthest corner of the pool.

“They must find us amusing,” Rick said.

“Amusing?” Elia tilted to look at them. “What we do to amuse?”

“They’re thirteen and we’re nineteen. You figure it out.”

Elia looked down at himself.

“Ya just figured it out.” Rick chuckled and rolled off the plastic float, pushing it towards his sister. “Here. Play with this. Stop staring at Elia.”

Elia’s eyes widened in surprise. He slipped off the raft he was on and shoved it aside. “What they stare at?”

“Probably your nuts. Never mind.”

More giggling and splashing ensued. Rick noticed both girls swimming under the water, goggles on their faces, towards them. “I have a feeling that rest time is over.”

Connie and Janya popped up near them. “Let’s play!”

“Play with Janya. Isn’t that why she’s here?”

“We want to play with you.”

“Come on, Connie. Elia and I just want to relax.”

Turning up her nose, Connie said to her friend, “Let’s race to the end of the pool.”

When they began swimming off, Rick said, “I’m bored shitless. Let’s get out of here and go somewhere.”

“Okay.” Elia shrugged and waded to the ladder.

As he climbed out Rick admired his ass in the tiny black bikini. He glanced at his sister and noticed both Connie and Janya ogling Elia. He tried to think back at what he was like at thirteen. Jerking off to naked men in magazines. *Yeah, hormones. What can ya do?*

“Are you done swimming?” Connie asked, hurrying over with Janya.

“Yeah. See ya later.” Rick tossed Elia a towel and used one to wipe his hair and back as he walked to the sliding glass doors. The air-conditioning felt icy cold on his wet skin.

“Oh? You boys done swimming?” Jenny asked from the den. She was relaxing in a recliner watching television.

“Yup.” Rick nudged Elia to keep walking.

“What are you going to do now?”

“No clue. There’s nothing to do in this place.”

“Ree-ick...” Elia scolded. “She live here. No be bad.”

“She knows I hate it. Do you think this is the first time I’ve told her?” Rick laughed, fondling Elia’s ass while he walked down the hall. As they approached the bathroom, Rick veered Elia into it from behind by his shoulders. He closed and locked the door behind him, stripping off his wet suit.

“What we do?” Elia kicked off his tiny bathing suit.

“I know what I’d like to do all afternoon.” Rick touched Elia’s cool, damp balls with his hot hands.

“*Si*. Night too.” Elia made a purring sound and closed his eyes.

Rick kissed him and reached inside the shower to turn on the water. “Wash off the chlorine so I can eat you.”

“Mm!” Elia exaggerated a shiver.

“In.” Rick pointed to the tub.

Elia obeyed, wetting down under the showerhead.

“How I love to watch you do that.”

“Come to me.” Elia opened his arms.

Rick fell against him and held him close under the hot cleansing spray. Shutting his eyes, one hand behind Elia’s head, the other around his waist, Rick rocked him in a slow dance of love. Though the time left began to feel as if he

Heart of Steele

was racing against a stopwatch, Rick wanted to savor each moment, as if it would be their last.

“What did you decide to do?” Jenny asked when they emerged from the bedroom.

“Bowling.” Rick frowned.

“That’s nice,” she replied with a smile. “Elia, have you ever been bowling?”

“Bocce ball, no ten pin.”

Rick knew his mother wouldn’t have a clue. “Lawn bowling.” It appeared she still didn’t. “Look it up on Google.” Taking his keys out of his pocket, Rick gestured for Elia to go first.

“Will you be home for dinner?” Jenny followed them to the front door.

“What are you planning?” Rick paused.

“We can all go out.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know. It’s up for debate.”

“Okay. I’ll call you if we’re late.”

“Good.” Jenny kissed Rick’s cheek. “Have fun, Elia.”

“*Grazie.*”

Head down, walking to his truck in the driveway, Rick tried to think of a decent place his mother could afford to bring the whole family to dinner. After all, Dayton was the land of fast-food and chain restaurants.

The truck was boiling hot on the interior. Rick started it up and blasted the air conditioner, waiting for cool air to come out before he climbed in. He met Elia on the bench seat and found his smile. “Yes?” Rick asked as he closed his door.

“I glad you say okay. I need spend time with Jenny too.”

“Don’t feel guilty. She’s not the one who’ll be going nuts when you leave.” Rick spotted Elia’s pout and melted. With a quick peek around first, Rick leaned over to peck him on the lips.

When he backed out of his driveway, Rick muttered, “I can’t believe I’m bringing you to a bowling alley. I haven’t gone in years.”

As he looked out of the windshield, Elia chuckled.

“You see? That’s how you know there’s nothing to do. When you break down and actually go bowling for entertainment.”

Elia whacked Rick on the arm playfully. Then he said, “Oh! Like rock.” He hit Rick again. “*Mama mia!* So strong!”

Feeling his cheeks go red hot, Rick grew shy. “Stop.”

Elia massaged Rick’s shoulder and biceps. “So sexy. You so much athlete. I get self worked up.”

“We just exchanged blowjobs in the shower.” It didn’t matter. Rick had another woodie as well.

As if he had to stop, Elia sat on his hands and was obviously trying to behave.

“Get over here.” Rick withdrew Elia’s hand stuck it between his legs. “I’m joking. I can’t get enough.”

Slouching against the bench seat, Elia massaged Rick’s crotch as they drove. “No. I no get ‘nuff either.”

Staring at traffic as they headed to the nearest bowling alley, Rick dabbed at the corner of his eyes, becoming angry at himself that he’d allowed this attachment to form. He was petrified once he was out of sight, he’d be out of Elia’s mind.

The alley was more crowded than he imagined it would be. Hot summer, cool interior, plus beer. That was the magic combination to bring people in. Once they

Heart of Steele

checked in, they were directed to the end of the building, to the last few unoccupied lanes.

Rick stopped at a desk for shoes, and after he and Elia each had a pair in hand, they walked to their designated spot. Dropping down heavily on a plastic chair, Rick removed his tennis shoes and slipped on the green and red bowling shoes.

Elia laughed.

Rick glanced up and smiled as Elia pointed at the unflattering pair of shoes on his own feet. "The height of fashion."

"So funny they make you change."

"I think it's to protect the floor. I don't know." Rick tied his laces. "I need a beer. Want one?"

"If you get, I get."

"Deal. Figure out the computer scoreboard." Rick took a twenty out of his wallet.

"You laughing?"

"Am I laughing?" Rick tilted his head.

"I no figure out. You figure out."

"Okay. Hang on. I'll be right back." Smiling as he walked to the concession stand, Rick loved everything about Elia, including his accent and choice of words. It was a hoot.

When he returned with a beer in each hand, he noticed Elia waiting patiently. "Here, babe." Rick handed him a cup.

"*Grazie*." Elia took a sip and turned up his nose.

"Sorry. They have a lousy selection."

Making a comic shiver of disgust, Elia placed the cup down on the table. "You drink. I no can."

"You want me to get you something else?"

"No. Is okay."

Rick took a swallow of his, cringed at the taste of the weak, big-brand-name beer as well, and set it aside. "A ball. We need to pick a ball."

"How you pick?" Elia followed him.

"By weight." Rick hefted one and stuck his fingers into the holes. "Here. Try this."

When he handed it to Elia, Elia nearly dropped it, not expecting it to be so heavy. "You laughing again?"

"Do you mean, am I joking?" Rick was indeed laughing.

"I no muscle athlete. No I can push this."

As a prank Rick handed him a light weight hot pink ball.

"Is good."

"No! You can't use that." Rick tried to retrieve it.

"Why no? Is no heavy." Elia judged the weight of it in his hands. "I use. *Rosa*. How you say?"

"Hot pink. Girlie ball."

"What mean girlie ball?"

"Never mind." Rick grabbed a black bowling ball and walked to the lane. "Man, we have to get on with the show or we'll be here all day." He set the ball on the return. "Now, let me figure out this score thingie."

Elia placed his pink ball down next to Rick's.

After a quick peek to see if anyone was judging their manhood by the 'baby-ball' Elia had chosen, Rick used the touch screen to add their names. "I take it you want me to go first."

"I no know what do. I know have to hit pins."

"Yes. The object is to knock as many down as you can."

"*Si*. This I know. I no *stupido*."

Heart of Steele

“Okay. Then you know all I know.” Rick stood, grabbed the ball and waited for the man in the next lane to go before he gave it a shot. He wound up and bounced the ball on the lane. When it rolled into the gutter, he gaped in horror.

“No hit pins.”

“Jesus! I’m crap at this.” The ball traveled down the return and Rick hoped no one was watching. He went for his second try, knocking a few down. Feeling like a dog with his tail between his legs, Rick returned to the chair and plopped down. “I suck.”

“You no sit.” Elia grabbed his shirt. “I no know how.”

“God! Get a different ball!” Rick rubbed his face.

“Why different?” Elia put his fingers into the holes. “Like this?” he asked, showing Rick how he was holding it.

“Yes.” Rick turned him to the newly racked pins. “As hard as you can, roll the ball through the middle arrow to the middle of the pins.”

“Is all?”

“That’s it.”

Elia watched a player on either side throw. He nodded as if he understood.

Rick stepped back, crossing his arms, thinking Elia looked absolutely to-die-for with that hot pink bowling ball.

As graceful as a ballet dancer, Elia whipped the ball, complete with a follow through armswing that impressed Rick.

Eight pins fell.

Elia spun around and appeared elated.

“Wow! First throw ever?”

“*Si!*”

“Get over here!”

Elia raced towards him and leapt into his arms. Rick spun him around and then put him back on his feet. When a man from the next lane was gaping at him, Rick said, "He's from Italy. It's his first time bowling."

As if that was a good explanation for the guy-hug, the man nodded, giving his attention to his own lane.

"Go again." Rick nudged Elia to the return.

"Again?"

"Yes. Try to hit the remaining pins."

Looking down the lane, Elia picked up his ball and stood a moment before he threw it. One pin was caught by the ball and knocked down.

Seeing the joy on Elia's face was worth everything to Rick. "I'm in big trouble! The novice with the pink ball is going to kick my ass."

Elia spun to look at the overhead scoreboard. "No worry. The loser will get to be *in* an ass."

Rick choked and then roared with hilarity. "Shh!" he warned, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes. As he passed Elia for his turn, he whispered, "Christ, I love you so much."

"I luff you too..."

Rick winked and picked up his bowling ball.

He couldn't help it. Watching Elia bowl ended up being sexy foreplay. By the time they made it back to the house, they were playing tag-grab-ass, running to the bedroom.

"Rick?"

"Later, Ma!" Rick closed and locked his door, stripping off his clothing as Elia did the same.

"Are you coming to dinner with the family?" Jenny asked through the door.

Heart of Steele

“Yes. Give us a minute, will you?”

“What are you doing?”

“Ma!”

“Fine!”

“Man, can she blow the mood or what?” Rick pulled on his own cock to keep it hard.

Elia hopped onto the bed and parted his legs. “I get you in mood.” He spread his ass cheeks.

“Holy fuck!” Rick dove onto the bed and stuck his face into Elia’s balls.

“Inside. You be inside.”

Sitting up, grabbing what he needed from his nightstand, Rick licked his lips as he put on a rubber. When he glanced up, Elia had the tube of lubrication, coating his own ass.

“Man! You are so fucking hot!”

“Shush! Jenny be listening.” Elia tilted his head at the door.

Rick touched his sheathed cock and waited as Elia put on a little show for him, massaging the glistening gel all over his own ass and balls, then fisting his long cock to add to the titillation.

“You are going to get a good fucking, Mr. Gianni.”

“*Magnifico.*”

“Can I take you from behind?”

Without hesitation, Elia flipped over to his hands and knees.

“Wow.” Rick pushed his dick into, what was now a well-worked hole, and didn’t wait a moment to bury his entire length inside. Elia shivered under him. “You okay, babe?”

“*Si.* Good.”

Rick held onto Elia's lube-covered-slick dick, and as he fucked him, he fisted him. A deep, low moan escaped Elia. It sent chills up Rick's spine. "I can't get enough of you." Rick rested his cheek on Elia's back, inhaling his skin.

"Never enuff."

Savoring screwing Elia and touching his cock at the same time, Rick closed his eyes and allowed his other senses to kick in. Rocking together, Elia's bottom moving in synch with Rick's palm on his shaft, Rick wished he lived alone and could do this all night. "One day."

"*Prego?*"

"Nothing. Come." Rick knew he didn't have 'all night' and his family was most likely starving, waiting for him. He upped the tempo of both his fucking and his fisting. It never took long if he did that.

While his cock throbbed inside Elia, Elia's pulsed in his palm. "I'm there," he said. Elia thrust wildly into Rick's fingers, obviously catching up. Choking back his grunts of pleasure, Rick felt hot cream fill his hand, running over his fingers. "Oh, yes..."

They both gasped for air for a moment as they recovered.

"Rick? Everyone's hungry."

"Okay, Mom. Hang on."

"What the hell's he doing in there?"

"You don't know?" Rhonda said, "Are you stupid?"

Rick frowned and pulled out, holding the base of the rubber as he did.

Elia spun over and dropped to his back, breathing hard and holding his chest. "So embarrass."

"Don't be. I don't care and neither should you." Rick stood and took off the condom, wrapping it up in a tissue. He tossed Elia his clothing. "Let's wash quick." Rick

Heart of Steele

peeked out of the door, waving Elia on. They sprinted across the hall and used a washcloth to clean up, dressing and checking their appearance in the mirror before they left the room.

“You’re amazing.” Rick held Elia still and kissed him.

“I have so good time. I never want go.”

Rick embraced him, squeezing him tight.

“Rick!”

“We’re coming.” Rick wiped at his eyes with his forearm and asked, “You ready?”

Holding him back, Elia asked, “You cry?”

“No!” Rick took it as a hit to his manhood, but softened his tone immediately. “I just get choked up when I think about you leaving.”

“I also. No think.”

“No. No think.” Rick pecked his lips and opened the door.

“Finally!” Rhonda threw up her hands.

“All right. Don’t start.” Jenny rummaged in her purse, removing her keys.

“What were they doing?” Connie asked.

“Nothing!” Jenny said, appearing to want to cut Rhonda off if she said anything.

Rick peeked at Elia and winked.

Chapter Eight

The temperature was slightly milder and less humid the next morning. A strong breeze blew the boughs, making the young trees twist and wave violently.

Rick stood in the cul-de-sac preparing to toss a football to Elia. Elia held up his hands, jogging backwards in anticipation. Seeing Elia in tight shorts, which showed off Elia's body to perfection, Rick was playing catch with constant wood.

He threw a spiral pass and Elia caught it on the run, like a wide receiver. Impressed with Elia's athletic ability, Rick knew throwing and catching an American football was new to Elia. A few basic instructions on tossing the ball, and Elia was pitching perfect torpedoes at him.

"Good arm!" Rick yelled, catching a bullet from Elia in both hands.

"Is wind!"

"Yeah, sure it is." Rick held the ball over his head, gesturing for Elia to get ready for his pass. Just to see if Elia could catch a rocket, Rick gave the next throw all he had, like his old quarterback days in high-school. As he let it go, he wondered if he shouldn't have put so much muscle behind it, worrying about hurting Elia.

It sailed on the brisk breeze and Elia kept backing up as it approached.

Heart of Steele

A car turned into the small street. Rick cupped his hands near his mouth and yelled, "Car!" An adrenaline dump filled Rick with fear as Elia reached up to grab the ball.

Elia caught it, spun on a dime and appeared to take a flying leap to the curb. The car had obviously seen them, slowed down and wasn't close enough to hit Elia. Rick recognized one of his neighbors behind the wheel and waved as he jogged towards Elia to see if he was frightened.

"You hit hard!" Elia's eyes were glowing as if he was awe inspired. "That is why you have trophy!" He flipped Rick the ball.

"I didn't know if you saw the car." Rick felt his cheeks blush from Elia's compliment.

"I saw. No worry."

"I do. I can't help it." Rick brushed Elia's hair back as it blew across his face.

"Now we try soccer. Yes?"

"Yes." Rick walked back to the garage, which was open, tossing the ball from hand to hand. He dropped the football into a box, and retrieved a white, worn soccer ball. "Needs air."

"You have air?"

"Yes. Hang on to it." Rick flipped it to Elia and located the pin and a pump. While Elia held it, Rick pushed the pin inside the ball and screwed the nozzle onto it. As they stood close, he pumped up the ball. "Tell me when it's enough."

Elia held it still as Rick cranked on the pump handle.

"Is full." Elia pecked Rick's lips.

Rick removed the pin quickly, dropped the pump into the box with the other sports equipment, and swooped down on Elia. He dipped him backwards and devoured his lips.

The wind howled past the open garage door as they stood between his mother's car and the cement wall.

The ball bounced out of Elia's hand and he combed his fingers through Rick's hair, deepening the already scorching kiss.

Aching to have him again, Rick urged Elia to lean back on his mother's car fender and groped between Elia's legs. The hard erection under Elia's tight shorts was driving Rick wild.

The kissing heightened to swirling, thrusting tongues and whimpering moans. "God! I can't get enough of touching you," Rick gasped between kisses as Elia humped Rick's palm. Just as Rick popped open the button of Elia's shorts, he heard a scuff of a shoe.

Connie was wearing her bicycle helmet, her jaw sagging as she gawked.

Instantly Rick made a gap between himself and Elia as Elia tucked his shirt in and reached for the soccer ball.

"Stop staring at us. Get your bike and go." Rick gestured with his hand, as if shooing her away.

"Man. If Mom saw you you'd be in trouble." Connie held her bike by the handlebars and backed it out onto the driveway.

"You'll tell her anyway. So it's like she did see us." Rick walked out of the garage as Elia rolled the ball from hand to hand, avoiding eye contact.

"I can't believe you kiss Elia."

"And I can't believe you still play with plastic toys at thirteen."

Connie gave Rick a dirty look and pedaled away.

He heard Elia make a noise of distress and pivoted around towards him. "You going to hog that ball all day?"

Heart of Steele

Immediately Elia's expression brightened. He dropped the ball to his feet and dribbled through Rick's legs and beyond him, heading to the cul-de-sac.

"Hey!" Rick laughed at the trick and raced after Elia.

"You may win American football. But you no win in Italian football."

Rick loved the gleam in his eyes. "Come on. Impress me." Watching Elia's command of the ball, his twirling moves and quick reflexes had Rick stymied. Elia booted the ball like an NFL punter, whizzing it beyond Rick as he sought to block it with his entire body. He didn't stand a chance. As he looked back at the ball come to a halt on a neighbor's lawn, Rick shook his head at Elia. "Jesus. Where were you on our high-school football team when we needed you?"

"You like?" Elia jogged to get the ball, using his feet to bring it back to where Rick waited.

When Elia drew closer, Rick leaned to his ear. "Do you know how hot it is to see you play?"

Elia used his toe to flip the ball to his hands, covering his crotch. "We play inside? Yes?"

Judging by the sensual glare, Rick knew Elia didn't mean indoor soccer. Both his sisters were out. Just his mother was home. As they entered the garage and Elia threw the ball back into the box, Jenny emerged from the house with her keys.

"Oh. I didn't even know you two were still home."

"Are you going out?"

"Shopping. Anything you need?"

Rick grinned at Elia. "I have everything I need."

The innuendo went over Jenny's head. "I'll be back soon."

Standing with Elia near the door which connected the garage to the house, Rick waited for his mother's car to

back out of the driveway, then he hit the automatic door button, closing the garage.

“Alone.” Rick grinned wickedly.

“*Solo.*”

“Heh. Heh.” Rick began to stalk Elia.

Elia broke into a laughing fit and bolted through the door, sprinting down the hall. Rick raced after him, pulling off his shirt as he did. There was only one room Elia would end up in. His room.

When Rick turned the corner he found Elia backed up against a wall, panting to catch his breath. Rick tossed his shirt on the floor and toed off his sneakers.

“You want?” Elia stroked his erection through his shorts.

“I want.” Rick dropped his own shorts to the floor and flexed his arms and chest, hungry for sex.

“You come get?” Elia leapt onto the bed.

“Are you playing hard to buy again?” Rick stalked him.

“*Si.* You need catch me.”

Witnessing Elia massaging his crotch in a tease, Rick stripped off his briefs and pulled on his cock a few times. “You’re going to get it.”

“Only if you get me.” Elia flew off the bed when Rick approached.

“It ain’t that big a room.” Rick fisted himself as he tried to creep slowly.

“Is big *pene*.” Elia gestured with his chin to Rick’s cock.

“Get over here.” Rick pointed to the floor in front of him.

Elia jumped on the bed again. “You get here.”

Heart of Steele

Seeing Elia was not going to give up easy, Rick made a play-fake to the right. Elia fell for it and was about to hop off the bed when Rick lunged at him from the opposite side, dropping Elia to the mattress with a line-backer tackle.

A grunt came from Elia at the surprise.

Rick crushed Elia's shirt up his chest and tore open his shorts. "Naked. Now."

"How you do that? I want make you wait." Elia shrugged off his shirt and raised his hips as Rick yanked off his shorts, briefs, shoes and socks.

"Never mind. I got you now." Rick crawled his way up Elia's body to his lips. At that connection, Rick sank against Elia, inhaling his scent from their outdoor play. He ran his hands up Elia's sides, to his armpits, where he massaged the dark tufts of hair. Hearing Elia's accelerated breathing from his growing excitement, Rick sat up, looking down at Elia's body, and his own. Both of their cocks were engorged and blushing. Rick smoothed his hand over Elia's, drawing it upwards to touch his.

When their erections were side by side, Rick pressed them together and squeezed. Elia moaned and shifted on the bed.

"I want you."

"I want you." Elia closed his eyes and inhaled, then opened them again, meeting Rick's gaze.

"I love you."

"I luff you..." Elia encircled Rick's hand with both of his own, coaxing him to pump his fists on their cocks.

Rick jerked on them, getting off on the feel of Elia's dick against his. But the craving to penetrate became powerful.

Tugging his hand free, Rick reached over Elia to the nightstand.

"How you take?" Elia asked, playing with Rick's cock.

“Face up.” Rick tore open the condom, putting it on as Elia assisted.

Elia grabbed his own knees and opened his body up for the taking. Rick took one look at his exposed ass and balls and lunged for it. The musky scent of man filled his senses. Forcing Elia’s legs backwards, Rick rubbed his face against Elia’s dick and sack, lapping at his salty skin. He was so crazy about Elia it was beginning to make him unhappy that the time was closing in on them. He pushed that thought out of his head and sat on his heels so he could spread lubrication on Elia.

When he dipped his index finger inside his rim, Elia whimpered sensually. It was so sexy, Rick’s cock bobbed in yearning. “I need to screw you so deep...” Rick felt his skin break out in chills.

“Deep. Deep in me.” Elia reached out his arms.

Rick couldn’t get his dick inside fast enough. He aimed the head of his cock against Elia’s slick hole and pushed his hips forward. As he sank inside his heat, Rick closed his eyes at the pleasure. “Oh, baby...”

“More close.” Elia pushed his body against Rick for complete penetration.

Balls deep, Rick paused to feel the warmth and tightness, his cock pulsating faster than his beating heart. From the bottom, Elia began thrusting. Rick directed Elia’s hand to his own hard-on and watched both acts, his cock in Elia’s body, and Elia doing a solo performance. A surge of pleasure hit Rick’s groin and he desperately tried to edge the climax and prolong it.

“More quick!” Elia’s hand became a blur and he pressed his head into the pillow as the pace intensified.

So much for edging! Rick couldn’t last if he upped the tempo. Elia began to climax under him, his teeth showing as he growled and threw back his head. Creamy streams of

Heart of Steele

cum splashed onto his smooth bronze chest as his hand milked his cock, running over the tip.

The shudder of pleasure erupted in Rick. He jammed his body against Elia's and grunted as he came. Lost in orgasmic bliss, Rick ground in for the last few waves and then caught his breath, dripping perspiration down his nose and temples. "Wow."

"Wow."

Forcing himself to pull out, Rick held the rubber and sat back again on his heels, gasping for air.

"Is so good. Is *sooo* good," Elia moaned, rocking his hips.

Rick was still hard and struggled to pull off the condom. When he did he dropped it on the floor and stared at the cum, like shining gloss, coating Elia's dewy skin. He dragged his pinky finger through it and sucked it.

Elia appeared to get a thrill from the act. He scooped cum on his fingers and offered it. Rick snatched Elia's wrist and stuffed his coated digits into his mouth, moaning as he sucked.

Elia bolted upright and embraced Rick, wrapping his arms around his neck and pressing cheek to cheek. "How will I go home? No. I no good with no you."

"Baby." Rick hugged him, closing his eyes.

"I no good."

Hearing Elia cry broke Rick's heart. He kissed his neck and tightened his hold. "We'll be together again. Please. Don't cry." Rick choked up and held back his own emotions. It was becoming torture, like the day of their execution was approaching. "I'll email or call you every day. I'll visit. You'll visit."

As Elia's hiccups worked to full blown wails, Rick died inside. He urged Elia to relax next to him on the bed and combed his long hair back from his sweaty forehead.

“Please don’t cry.” Rick wiped at his tears gently, his heart breaking. “I’m yours. I’ll wait.”

“How? You go back to university. I go back to Italy.”

“Shh. I’ll. Wait.” Rick made him look at him.

“Years. Is years.”

“I don’t care.” Rick dabbed at his fresh teardrops. “I swear to you, Elia. I will wait. I don’t care how long.”

“Promessa.”

Rick placed his hand over his heart. “Swear to God.”

Elia’s sobs lessened but he grabbed onto Rick as if he would be torn away. Rick held Elia to his chest, stroking him to calm him down. Though he wanted to sleep, sticky and covered in their sweat, he knew his family would be coming home soon.

“Don’t worry.” Rick kissed his hair. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Chapter Nine

Watching television later that night, Elia was becoming comfortable with Rick's contact in front of the Steele family and it seemed so was his family. Snuggled in Rick's arms on the spongy sofa, drowsy as Rick petted him, no one batted a lash or made any strange eye contact. Elia didn't know if his family would be as accepting of Rick. He didn't expect to find his life-long partner at nineteen, on a student exchange program, so he never anticipated preparing his family with the news.

They knew he was gay, but, in love with a Mid-Western-United-States-blue-eyed-blond college boy? How would his father react?

Most likely they will think he is a summer fling, and do nothing.

Elia kissed Rick's shirt as his thoughts upset him. Was he willing to move from his home country? *I am nineteen. My father thinks I am a child.*

Rick gave him a squeeze in return, kissing his hair.

Connie glanced over and smiled. Elia smiled back at her, rubbing his cheek against Rick's shoulder.

"You're getting me going," Rick whispered.

He took a quick peek at Rick's crotch. His gym shorts were tented. Though it was all right to cuddle, Elia couldn't

imagine cupping Rick's balls unless it was in private, tempting as it was.

Rick elevated his arm to read his wristwatch. Elia looked at the dial as well. After ten. Elia yawned and covered his mouth.

"Tired, Elia?" Rhonda asked.

"Yes. I no know why. I stay up late usual."

"Too much physical activity?" Rhonda smirked.

Elia could feel Rick gearing up for a reply, his chest expanded under Elia's caress. Before he did, Jenny said, "Rhonda, don't start."

"I saw Rick kissing and touching Elia in the garage," Connie announced like a boast.

"Rick!" Jenny glared at him.

"She snuck up on us." Rick didn't seem to care.

"She's thirteen," Jenny said.

"Yeah, going on five." Rick nudged Elia and he sat up. "We're outta here."

"I am not going on five," Connie whined.

"Goodnight all." Rick waved, holding Elia's hand.

Elia wished the women goodnight and followed Rick to the bathroom to wash. When they were closed inside the room, Elia said, "I so tired."

"It's because I'm working all the cum out of your body." Rick laughed and splashed his face.

"Is so. Maybe." Elia finished at the toilet and they swapped places.

"And I'm about to draw out more." Rick winked at Elia in the mirror.

Elia chuckled. "I have good supply."

Heart of Steele

After they finished in the bathroom, Rick took a wet washcloth with him to his room so they wouldn't have to return after playing with each other.

He locked his door and stripped, staring at Elia as he did the same.

Elia turned his head and hid his face in his hands.

Rick closed the gap between them and held him in his arms.

"Sono spiacente."

"You lost me, but it sounds bad." Rick gathered Elia's hair into a ponytail and leaned his forehead against his.

"I keep losing you in my heart." Elia dabbed at his eyes.

"I still don't understand." Rick wrapped his arms around Elia and sealed their bodies together. "Losing me? You're not going to lose me."

"This. Touch. You touching. This I will lose."

"I'll come out." Rick rocked him in a slow dance.

"How soon?"

"As soon as I can. If you want, I'll look into it at winter break."

"Winter break?"

"Christmas? Between Christmas and New Years? I don't know when it is but I'll check and we'll work on it."

"But what of mother? You no can leave for Christmas."

"Why not? It's just us and sometimes a few friends. I don't care."

Elia rested his head on Rick's shoulder.

"Can I stay with you? Will your parents let me?"

"I make let you."

"The Mayor. Man," Rick whistled. "I wouldn't want to piss him off."

Elia dragged Rick to the bed and they lay facing each other. "You no worry."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you." Rick caressed his face. "Once I'm back at the dorms, I'll get a web-cam. Can you get one of those?"

"*Si*. Yes."

"We'll arrange a time every night to call and maybe jack-off together."

When Elia laughed, Rick felt relieved. "So? Okay now?"

"Make promise."

Rick held up his hand. "Promise. And this is the second time. Why do you doubt me so much? Don't you trust me?"

"Yes. But so big time to wait."

"I'll call you every day. I'll get some phone option with free minutes or something. Or we'll do it over the computer."

"Is five hour difference. How we make call?"

"I'll call." He stroked Elia's coarse jaw.

The tension seemed to disperse from Elia's body. Rick nudged him to his back and massaged his soft cock and balls. They met eyes, then kissed. Rick was worried as well, but nothing was impossible.

Chapter Ten

Almost completely out of ideas for entertaining Mr. Gianni, Rick finally agreed with his mother's recommendation of the Air Force Museum. It was air-conditioned so they could escape the heat, and so immense it would take up most of the day to view it.

"Thank you for waiting until Connie was with her friend to mention it, Mom." Rick patted his shorts' pocket, checking he had his keys and mobile phone.

"I knew she would whine," Jenny said. "Wait. Let me give you some cash."

"You don't have to. I'll put it on my charge card." Rick noticed Elia coming down the hall with the ball cap on his head, looking delectable, but still not American. *Thank fuck!* Rick smiled to himself. He flicked the bill playfully. "Cute."

"Is good?" Elia adjusted it.

"Is good." Rick pecked his lips.

His mother cleared her throat.

Spinning around, Rick spotted two twenties in her hand. "Thanks."

"Don't use that credit card. It's too much money in interest."

"I pay it off, don't worry." Rick stuffed the cash into his wallet. "See you for dinner."

"Have fun!" She walked them to the door.

Rick used his key fob to disarm the truck. "Hot again."

"Is hot."

"And humid." Rick opened the driver's door and cringed at the heat coming from the interior. He hopped in and started the engine. "I love you in that thing. I want to get you a t-shirt at the museum to take back too."

"I buy. You no buy."

"Nope. Mom's buying." Rick smiled and headed to the freeway.

It was mid-week but since school was out for summer, the parking lot was full of cars. Rick parked and before he got out, he tilted his head sideways under the bill of Elia's cap and kissed him quickly. "That hold you?"

Elia grabbed a handful of Rick's crotch and asked, "I hold you." He laughed and climbed out of the truck.

His dick reverberating with tingles from the grope, Rick chirped the truck alarm and walked with Elia to the entrance. A jet airplane was set upright on its tail, planted in front of the circular atrium. Rick peeked at Elia for his reaction. His eyes were wide as he admired it.

"All things big in America."

"Yeah. Even the guys." Rick opened the door for him.

"Too big!" Elia held his hands in front of his stomach.

"No. I didn't mean that." Rick whispered, "I meant my dick."

"Oh!" Elia laughed, covering his mouth to be quiet.

"But you're right. They are bigger that way too." Rick hadn't been to the museum in years. He looked around for a sign of the cost. "It's free. Cool." He patted Elia's back and

Heart of Steele

took a small brochure with a map. “Air power. That way.” He pointed and headed to the fighter planes.

Rick loved the exhibit’s set up, the planes suspended in air, the impressive hanger and displays, but seeing Elia’s awe was the best part. A child-like quality shined in his dark eyes that Rick couldn’t get enough of. He used any excuse to touch him, guiding him gently at the small of his back, flicking his long hair playfully from his shoulder, or leaning on him as they read the information on each plane. He thought it would be boring, but with Elia’s enthusiasm, it was anything but.

They skipped the display of the Early Years and Dayton’s claim to fame, the Wright Brothers exhibit, and headed through the rooms the Modern Flight and Missile hangers. Rick walked slowly as Elia admired the missiles and space-crafts.

Hungry and growing tired, Rick asked, “Want to head out?”

“Yes. Is enough.”

“Gift shop first.” Rick hooked Elia’s arm and noticed a dad with two children scowl, so he dropped his hand to his side. “I need to move to San Francisco.”

“*Che cosa?*” Elia leaned closer.

“Never mind.” Rick entered the gift shop, which was nearly as impressively built as the museum’s exhibit buildings with high ceilings and masculine exposed ceiling beams. Before they both were lost inside the shop and its multitude of airplane models, books, stuffed animals, and jewelry, Rick guided Elia to the apparel and checked out the designs.

“Is good.” Elia held up a light gray t-shirt with a tiny US Air Force logo on the chest and F-16 jets on the back. “I get something for father.”

"A t-shirt?" Rick couldn't imagine the Mayor of Lombardy, Italy, wearing a US Air Force t-shirt.

"No. DVD?"

"Oh. Cool."

They browsed the selection and Elia chose, Military Air Power. "I buy. No you."

"Okay. I buy lunch."

"*Buono.*" Elia nodded and stood in line at the cashier.

When they were next, Elia placed his items on the counter. The woman behind the register said, "The Reds aren't doing so well this year."

"*Che cosa?*" Elia asked Rick.

"The hat." Rick smiled, tapping it.

"Ah!" Elia laughed and his cheeks became rosy. "I see game."

"Where are you from?" The woman scanned the tags as she spoke.

"Italy."

Loving the way Elia replied, *Eeetally*, Rick hid his giggle. *How cute is that? I could just devour him.*

"Well! Welcome to the United States," she increased her volume as if Elia was suddenly deaf, or louder English was easier to understand.

"*Grazie.*" Elia held cash in his hand.

"Fifty-two dollars and eight cents, please."

Elia glanced at Rick, holding up currency. "Is right?"

Rick took three of his twenties and handed it to the woman.

"You are adorable!" she gushed as she made change. "I hope you're having a nice time here in Ohio."

"Is nice. Thank you." Elia appeared very shy.

Heart of Steele

She gave him his change and a plastic bag. “Y’all come back soon.”

“*Arrivederci*,” Elia replied, smiling.

The woman repeated it, butchering the pronunciation.

Rick noticed she was still smiling as she helped the next customer.

Once they left the building, back into the humid heat of the parking lot, Elia asked, “What is *yuuall*?”

“It’s a stupid southerner expression. You all.”

“You all? No make sense.”

“They never do.” Rick removed his keys from his pocket.

“She have thick accent, yes?”

“She did. She must be from Kentucky or something.” Rick shielded his eyes, searching for his rig.

“You no sound like that.”

“Thank fuck.” Rick grinned at him.

“You no like sound?”

“No. I don’t. I think they sound *stupido*.”

“Is regional. Same in Italy. You know where come from by sound.”

“True.” Rick spotted his truck and aimed his fob at it, opening the door locks. Once he climbed in, lowered the windows and turned on the air-conditioning, he relaxed in his seat and stared at Elia.

Elia took off his hat and combed his fingers through his hair. “Is flat?”

Rick fluffed up his long locks. “Hat-head.”

“Hat-head?” Elia cracked up with laughter. “I need remember all good words.”

“Augh!” Rick was going sexually insane. “Get over here!” He gripped Elia’s jaw and drew him into an embrace.

Sucking on Elia's tongue, dipping his into his mouth, Rick moaned when Elia massaged between his legs. "Baby, baby..." Rick broke the kiss and looked around. A young couple with children drew near as they walked by. He shut the windows and made a gap between him and Elia, still staring at him. "You are absolutely gorgeous."

"*Grazie, Ree-ick.*" Elia held his hand. "*Ti amo, bello mio.*"

"I get goose bumps when you talk Italian like that."

Elia scooted closer and began purring Italian sentences in his ear. "Oh, holy crap." Rick rubbed his own dick as it thickened.

When the crooning turned to nibbling and licking on his ear and neck, Rick closed his eyes and whimpered in surrender. "I don't care if they see us, I don't care..."

Elia traced his fingers over where Rick had grown hard in his shorts. "*Pene grande, si?*"

"Yes. Whatever you want." Rick peeked out of the windshield, closing his eyes again.

"I say you have big dick."

Rick laughed softly. "Your dick. You own it."

"Want me suck?"

"Here?" Rick sat up and looked around.

"*Si.*"

"Hang on." He backed out of the spot and relocated to the farthest place he could, where no other cars were parked. "Our luck some uniformed guy will be checking for terrorists."

"I no do if you no want."

"No. I want." Rick opened his pants and flipped his cock out.

Elia dove on it.

Heart of Steele

Rick pressed back into the seat as if G-forces were pinning him against it. He kept a watch for security cars. "Man. Can you say, brig?"

"*Che cosa?*" Elia replied with his mouth full.

"Nothing. Suck." Rick massaged the back of Elia's head.

Elia drew hard, sucking and squeezing his cock.

Rick didn't know if he could come filled with paranoia. When Elia dug under his nuts and massaged his ass, Rick changed his mind. He spread his legs and turned up the blower on the A/C. "That's it. Just like that."

Rick massaged Elia's back, dipping into the waistband of his shorts to his ass. "Baby...wow..." A rush of pleasure zapped his crotch. Rick stared at Elia's head as it bobbed up and down. He yanked Elia's shirt out of his shorts and touched his skin. It made Elia groan sensually.

One last look at the parking lot and Rick closed his eyes. He braced himself and began pumping his hips into Elia's mouth. He was about to warn Elia he was coming when Elia pushed hard through his shorts to his ass. Rick choked on his words and came, his body tensed and his feet kicked under the brake and gas pedal. He grunted and clenched his teeth as Elia sucked the cum out of him. When Elia sat up, wiping his chin, Rick noticed his own hands shake. "Jesus, Elia. That had to be the best fucking blowjob I have ever had."

Using his hand to rub his saliva off Rick's exposed cock, Elia gave Rick a sultry glance, setting Rick's teeth on edge. He cupped Elia's head and drew him to his lips, tasting his own cum on his tongue. "I love you, my baby, baby..." Rick moaned in agony for him. He spotted a security car and jolted in panic.

Elia sat back and looked out of the windshield as Rick closed his pants and put the car in drive. "Buckle up. These

are probably not just security guards. I have a feeling they're air force officers."

As they drove off, Elia fastened his belt and turned his face away from their view.

Good. They'll think you're female. Rick made eye contact quickly with a man behind the wheel wearing camouflage fatigues, then Rick took off out of the parking lot. His eyes on the side mirror, he prayed the guard wouldn't follow them or pull them over.

Once he was on the outside streets, he breathed a deep sigh. "That was close."

"You afraid? They lock us? Can they do?"

"No. I just didn't want the hassle."

"Sorry."

"No!" Rick gripped Elia's hand. "It was fantastic! Don't you dare apologize."

Elia smiled and kissed Rick's hand.

They ended up back at The Greene for lunch. There was nothing else to do or better place for a meal. The shopping center was packed with parked cars and shoppers.

"What are you in the mood for?" Rick asked as they walked through the parking lot.

"I no mind. You pick."

"Not wearing your hat anymore?"

"Is too hot."

"Yes. It is." Rick touched Elia's cheek affectionately. "Do you like Mexican food?"

"I like most."

"Okay. Chipotle it is." Rick escorted Elia to the restaurant, opening the door for him. They waited in line, reading the selections from a menu on the wall over the heads of the people working the counter.

Heart of Steele

“What get?”

“I like the fajita burrito.”

“Make same.”

“Okay. They’ll make it the way you like it. Just tell the guy what you want.”

Elia nodded, seeming slightly perplexed.

Rick took one of the twenty dollar bills his mother had given him out of his wallet. He and Elia stood together at the food counter. “Two fajita burritos.”

“Chicken or beef?”

Rick glanced at Elia. “Chicken or beef.”

“*Chee-ken? Si.*”

Rick chuckled. “Two chicken.” He noticed the young man with the pierced nose and ear giving Elia a second look. *Yes, he’s foreign. And beautiful. And mine.*

Elia leaned over the glass display to watch the man prepare their meal.

“Marinated or grilled?” the young man asked, staring at Elia.

Appearing flustered, Elia held Rick’s arm. “I no know what he say. You do for me?”

“My pleasure.” Rick tried to get the young man to pay attention to something other than Elia. “Grilled.”

“Where are you from, dude?” The young man assembled the burritos.

“*Eeetally.*” Elia grinned at Rick. “You no have many from outside, no?”

“No. Who comes here on vacation? You kidding?” Rick smiled. “You’re a novelty.”

“What is novelty?”

Checking the progress of their order, Rick found the young man obviously infatuated, ogling his Italian lover. "It's something different."

"Is bad?" Elia asked.

"No, dude. Not bad..." the young man laughed as he replied. He wrapped up one burrito, working on the second. "Will you be here long?"

"Don't flirt," Rick said.

The young man went bright red. "I'm just being friendly."

"Sure ya are," Rick said, winking at Elia's bright smile.

"Yours is on the house." The young man placed Elia's burrito on a plastic tray. "A way to say welcome to Dayton."

"*Grazie*." Elia nodded.

"Anything to drink or chips and guacamole with that?" He moved to the register.

"Something to drink?" Rick caressed Elia's hair, taking possession of this man subtly.

"*Acqua*? Water?"

The man placed a bottle of water on Elia's tray.

"Two bottles." Rick held up his fingers.

A second one was balanced near the first. "How did you guys meet? Over the net?"

"No. He's an exchange student from the rotary." Rick handed the man his twenty.

"Dude!" he said as he pushed buttons on the till. "I'm signing up to get me one of those."

"Good luck. I think I got lucky." Rick took his change, surprising himself at his boldness at admitting he and Elia were a couple. For some reason, with the young man openly

Heart of Steele

admiring Elia, Rick didn't feel threatened, he felt very fortunate to be the one Elia was with.

"Well, have fun in Dayton. Come back soon."

Elia nodded graciously and followed Rick to a table for two by the window.

"Is very nice he give away." Elia opened his water bottle, taking a long drink.

"He was hot for you." Rick opened the paper wrapper and took a bite of his food.

"Is gay?"

"Probably. He was drooling."

While Elia enjoyed the compliment, Rick said, "But you're mine."

"Si. Yours." Elia tasted the food and nodded. "Good."

"Good." Rick glanced back at the young man and winked as he stared at them. The young man gave him a 'thumbs up' in approval.

"Got that right," Rick whispered.

"You say again?" Elia leaned over the table to hear.

"Nothing." Rick smiled.

Later that evening, Elia sat alone at the family computer which was situated in the room the sisters shared. He logged into his email box and found several messages from his mother and his own siblings. Though he had planned on emailing them more often, the days were slipping away from him and Rick kept him occupied and happy.

He read the emails he missed and typed a group email back to those who wrote him.

Hello to everyone,

I am doing well and having a great time. The host family is treating me very good and I have made a close friend of their son, Rick. He is my age and home for the summer break from university. He takes me everywhere and has been a companion to me. I hope he can fly to Italy and get to meet everyone.

Elia paused to think, tapping his lip.

Rick poked his head into the room. "Doing okay?"

"Yes. Okay."

"Do you want anything? Ice cream? Coffee?"

"Coffee? Si. Coffee."

"Is decaf okay?"

"Si. Grazie."

Rick vanished.

Elia stared back at the computer screen. He wanted to tell his family he was in love, but knew how it would seem. It would be better to tell them in person. Rereading his note once, Elia signed it with an affectionate phrase and sent it.

"Here ya go, babe." Rick set the mug down next to him on the desk.

"No. You no go." Elia reached out as Rick was about to leave.

"I thought you'd want privacy." Rick crouched next to him, caressing his hair.

"No." Elia touched Rick's jaw, staring into his blue eyes. They were the color of the sky, light and clear. When Rick's gaze darted to the computer, Elia asked, "You need?"

"No. Is everything okay back home?" Rick ran his hands over Elia's thighs.

"Yes. Okay. I just tell quick note I am okay too."

"Do you want to call them?"

Heart of Steele

“No. I no arrange call. Email is enough.” Elia signed out of the website. “Should I shut off?”

“Sure. I doubt anyone wants to use it.”

Elia closed the system down. Once the computer screen went dark, he gazed around the cluttered bedroom with two double beds and one single. “That for me?”

“It was.” Rick laughed. “Not anymore. I gotcha now.”

Elia raised the mug to his lips, blowing it to cool it. He met Rick’s gaze, took a quick sip and set it back down.

“Is it okay?”

“Yes.”

“I bet you’re just being nice. Everything sucks here.”

“No everything.” Elia admired Rick’s square jaw and high cheekbones. It caused his cock to pulsate in excitement. He slid his fingers around the nape of Rick’s neck, luring him closer by opening his mouth.

Rick dove on him in his usual brusque manner, connecting their lips. Closing his eyes, Elia buried his hands into Rick’s thick blond hair and groaned in longing.

“No way! Not in my room!” Rhonda said.

It startled Elia and he tried to slink back, but Rick held him.

Rick looked over his shoulder at where Rhonda was standing in the doorway. “Tough. Get lost.”

“Is okay.” Elia could see it upset Rhonda. “Is good she allow me computer.”

“It’s not hers, it’s my mom’s. It’s only in here because she whines the loudest.” Rick rose up, placing his hands on his hips.

“Shut up.”

“No. You shut up.”

Elia jumped to his feet and held up both hands. "We leave." He picked up his coffee mug and tilted his head to Rick.

"Baby," Rick said as he passed Rhonda.

"You're the baby."

"No. I'm the one getting laid."

"Oh!" Elia swatted Rick's bottom as punishment. "Is bad. Go."

"How can you stand him?" Rhonda crossed her arms.

"Believe me, he can stand me." Rick laughed at her.

"Go." Elia pinched Rick's butt to get him to move, trying not to spill his coffee.

When Rhonda closed herself into her room, Elia sat with Rick at the kitchen table to finish his coffee. "Why you treat so bad?"

"I'm just teasing her." Rick propped his chin in his palm.

"You miss her when you go." Elia wagged his finger at him.

"Nope. I doubt that." Rick swiped Elia's hand out of the air. "But I know who I will miss." He sucked on Elia's finger.

A rush of pleasure surged through Elia's crotch. He parted his lips and watched as Rick gave his finger head.

"I owe you one." Rick slipped Elia's middle finger into his mouth.

While the demand for sex rose, Elia squeezed his own dick, feeling it thicken in his shorts. "No drink *caffè*." He pushed the mug away.

Rick stood up and took Elia's hand with him.

"Rick? Are you going to bed?" Jenny asked from the den.

"Sort of." He grinned wickedly.

Heart of Steele

She didn't answer.

Elia felt awkward when they had sex while the family was home, but that was most of the time. So it was either get used to it or go without.

Rick continued to escort Elia down the hall. He opened the door and gestured for Elia to enter first.

When Elia did, his ass was gripped, hard. Breathing a sharp intake of air at the sensation of pleasure that ripped through his dick, Elia tensed his legs.

"Get naked."

The hair stood on the back of his neck at the power and sensuality of his lover. Elia opened his shirt and tossed it onto the bed.

Rick was behind him, smoothing his hands up Elia's arms, licking and kissing his shoulder. It made Elia pause, closing his eyes. *How will I go without him? How?*

Chills coursed over Elia's skin as Rick snaked his arms around his chest, pinching and pulling on his erect nipples. Elia whimpered and dropped his head back against Rick as he enveloped him in a slow dance of seduction. He was Rick's slave. A willing sexual plaything to this strong fair-haired athlete.

After his nipples tingled with sensation, Elia's shorts were opened. Rick dipped both hands into his waistband, rooting out his cock. Peeking down, Elia watched as Rick used his left to pump his stiff cock, and his right to caress his balls. An Italian word of excitement rolled off his tongue. He felt Rick hold him tighter, forcing his shorts lower on his hips. Elia spoke in his native language knowing it made Rick hot. He told him how much he adored him, needed him, couldn't live without him.

"Baby, baby..." Rick crooned, nuzzling Elia's hair.

"Luff you, luff you much..." Elia felt his heart breaking again and forced himself to think of the physical,

not emotional, contact. He was spun around and Rick sank to his knees, taking him into his mouth.

In pleasure, Elia cried out and held Rick's shoulders to steady himself. With the heat of Rick's mouth and the warmth of his palms as they ran circles over the globes of his ass, Elia went into a tailspin of sexual ecstasy. "*Molto buono...molto, molto, molto buono.*"

Rick enveloped Elia's entire length, holding it in his mouth, running his tongue up and down it.

The swoon of orgasmic bliss took Elia to another plane. He opened his lips to speak, but only air escaped.

Rick backed Elia up to the bed, allowing him to lie down. When Elia was horizontal, Rick stripped the rest of his clothing off. Once he was propped up between Elia's knees, Rick took his cock back into his mouth.

Elia relaxed against the bed, staring at the ceiling but not seeing it, letting his sense of touch take over. And letting this man do as he liked.

As he lay still, washing over the waves of tantalizing pleasure, Rick sucked to the tip and released him. Then Rick used his fingers to massage under the head of Elia's cock as he enveloped one testicle at a time, rolling it over his tongue. With saliva on his fingertip, Rick tickled Elia's rim, making him squirm and eager to come.

Elia bent his knees and spread his legs as wide as he could, inviting more. Rick groaned in his deep voice, sending chills over Elia. With his cock once again between Rick's lips, Elia began fucking it, raising his hips off the bed and thrusting into Rick's mouth. Using both his hands, Rick gripped the base of Elia's cock and increased the speed and suction.

A low rumbling moan emerged from Elia as he came closer to a climax. Rick began jacking Elia off at the same time, pulling out all the stops.

Heart of Steele

Elia ground his jaw as it started to churn in his balls. “I there.”

Rick grunted and sucked faster, harder, his hands riding up and down Elia’s slick cock.

At the intensity, Elia’s body stiffened and he felt his length pulsate inside Rick’s mouth. Though he wanted to shout, he just opened his lips and gasped silently, gripping the bedding.

Rick hummed as he swallowed cum, slowing down all his motion, milking and sucking gently.

“Oh...Reeick...so good...ohsogood.” Elia rocked his hips as he recovered.

Rick sat up and wiped his mouth. “Love it.”

“Before make love, come here.” Elia wanted to cuddle.

Standing, Rick stripped off all his clothing and met Elia on the bed, holding him. They pecked lips and Elia embraced Rick rocking side to side with him.

“Don’t get upset.”

“You see mind.” Elia struggled to hold back.

“I’m here.” Rick kissed his cheek, his neck, his ear.

“Two week. I no can think of it.” A lump formed in Elia’s throat.

“Shh. Baby. We’ll be okay.”

“Come close.” Elia crushed him.

“I can’t get any closer unless I’m in you.” Rick kissed his hair and shoulder.

Elia pressed their cheeks together, closing his eyes. *How on earth did I ever manage to fall in love so deeply with a man who will be five thousand miles away? I am completely mad.*

Though he craved sex with him, Rick allowed Elia to rest in his arms. Cradling him, stroking his dewy skin, Rick

had no more words of comfort. He'd promised, vowed, and begged Elia to believe him. He would wait. He would visit. But he knew time would be their worst enemy. It already was.

Rick had fallen asleep.

Waking, he checked the digital clock. It was nearing one. He heard crickets and night birds outdoors, then the central air-conditioning kicked on and he could only hear the fan blowing through the vent.

Elia was in his arms where he had held him before he slept. Their naked skin overlapped; sweat sealed them together. Rick blinked and hot tears ran down his cheek. It was too easy to cry, to think about them being pulled apart. That's why Elia grew upset. The beginning of the end was looming.

Staring at the dim shadows created by the moon, Rick tried to predict the future. Late August he'd be back in Columbus at the U for his sophomore year. Three years to graduate, less if he took classes every summer. Three-motherfucking-years.

How many trips to Italy could he afford? He'd saved up money by working part time while he was in high-school, and every summer break before this one. He could have worked this one as well, but wanted one summer off. He was very glad he took this one off or he'd be working while Elia was here.

He heard Elia moan softly and felt him shift his position.

While inhaling his scent, Rick caressed his arm lightly.

One, two trips a year? If they were lucky? He'd find the money. So what if he had credit card debt. He had a scholarship so he wouldn't leave college owing six figures.

Heart of Steele

Next session he'd enroll in Italian language classes. He had incentive now. His high-school Spanish was lost. Why not learn to speak Elia's native tongue?

Elia's tongue. God, how I want Elia's tongue.

Peeking down at him, Rick didn't want to disturb his sleep. His dick, however, did.

Trying not to jar Elia, Rick used his free hand to touch himself. He was stiff just thinking about fucking him. He stared at Elia's nude body in the glimmering moonlight and fisted his cock, instantly tingling with desire.

Just as he imagined spraying Elia with his spunk, Elia whispered, "You no have do alone."

"I'm sorry I woke you."

"No sorry. Come. I no let earlier." Elia rolled to his back, bending his knees in a straddle.

"You are the best fucking boyfriend a man could ever have." Rick scrambled for the condoms and lube.

Elia chuckled quietly.

Kneeling up, making sure he held the condom in the right direction, Rick sheathed his dick and squirted lubrication into his hand. He applied it to himself, his cock bobbing at his touch, and then spread Elia's thighs wider, using the rest of the gel on him.

A hiss of pleasure reached Rick's ears. "You want to come?"

"May-be."

"Just let me know." Rick scooted closer and aimed his cock. Once he was on target, he pushed inside Elia, holding onto Elia's legs. This time he was the one to hiss a breath of pleasure.

"You okay?"

"Si. Is good."

“Damn good.” Rick kept penetrating until he couldn’t go any farther. Once he was all the way inside Elia, he began thrusting his hips. “I needed this.”

Elia laughed. “You take what you need.”

“Oh, baby, baby! You are so good to me.” Rick knew he wouldn’t last long if he wanted to come. It was late and they had other nights to go slow and savor. He needed an orgasm. Staring at Elia’s semi-erect cock, his dark nipples, his fabulous face, Rick jammed his hips into Elia, his cock pulsating rapidly as he came.

“There?”

“Yes,” Rick said through clenched teeth. He hung his head and craved sleep. “Perfect. Thank you.”

“I happy to do.”

Catching his breath, Rick pulled out and reached for the washcloth he had brought in earlier. He removed the condom and wiped himself up, then Elia.

After getting them under the sheet, Rick snuggled against Elia and closed his eyes. “*Grazie*.”

Elia replied, “*Prego*,” and kissed his lips.

Coiled around Elia, Rick inhaled his hair and skin, interlocking his fingers to keep him close while he slept. He fell under the spell quickly and dreamed of his lover.

Chapter Eleven

Rick? Are you up?"

Hearing his mother's voice, Rick came around from a deep sleep. The clock/radio read nine-sixteen. "Yes."

"Do you two want breakfast? I have croissants for Elia."

"Great. Give us a minute." He heard her walk away from his door and rested his head on Elia's chest, listening to his heartbeat.

Elia stroked Rick's hair.

"Sorry she woke you."

"I up."

"Oh." Rick ran his hand down Elia's stomach to his pubic hair, running into his morning erection. "Yes. You are 'up'."

"I no know when I make love so many!"

"I know. Great, isn't it?" Rick caressed Elia's stiff cock and soft sack gently. "Thanks for making love to me so late last night."

"No thank. I luff you."

"And I 'luff' you too."

"You make fun?"

"Yeah." Rick leaned up to see Elia's eyes.

“You wait when you try speak Italian.” Elia wagged his finger at him.

“Ha. I know. I’ll suck at it.” Rick laid his head back on Elia’s chest. “I’ll take classes. I’ll try.”

“Yes?”

“You bet. I have to at least speak a little when I meet your folks.”

Elia hugged him. “Oh! I luff you!”

“*Ti amo...*” Rick replied. “Okay. Let’s jack off in the shower. Sound good?”

“*Buono!*”

“*Buono.*”

“See? You learn fastly.”

As he climbed off the bed he smiled at Elia. “Very fastly.” Rick cracked up laughing.

Rick dipped his oven-baked croissant into his egg yolk. “You sure that’s enough food?”

“Is enuff. I no eat much breakfast.” Elia stuffed the last bit of croissant into his mouth and brushed his hands off.

“What are you boys doing today?” Jenny refilled their coffee cups.

Taking a look out of the patio window over his sister’s head, Rick replied, “It’s raining.”

“Yup.” Rhonda helped herself to another roll from a basket in the center of the table. “You’re an Einstein.”

“That sucks.” Rick finished his breakfast and wiped his lips with a napkin.

“You can see a movie.” Jenny began clearing plates.

“Is anything good playing?” Rick tipped milk into his coffee cup.

Heart of Steele

“No.” Rhonda spread jam on her croissant after buttering it.

“Do you want me to get yesterday’s paper?”

“No. Don’t worry, Mom. I can check it online.” Rick noticed Elia staring off into space. “You okay, babe?” He tugged the ends of Elia’s hair.

He popped back into focus. “Yes.”

Connie carried her cereal bowl to the sink. “Okay if I go to see Janya?”

“Yes, dear. Do you need a ride?” Jenny filled the dishwasher.

“Please?”

“Okay. Go get ready.”

“I’ll clean up, Mom,” Rick said.

“Thank you, sweetie. I’ll be back in a minute.”

Rick watched her wipe her hands on a dishtowel and leave the room. He looked at Rhonda. “What are your plans?”

“Don’t know. Hanging out with friends at the mall?”

“Dayton Mall?”

“Yeah. Why?”

Before he replied, Rick noticed Elia had drifted off again. He hoped he wasn’t worrying about leaving. They still had nearly two weeks.

“It’s too wet out for The Greene.” Rhonda finished her roll and carried her plate to the sink.

“You need a ride?”

“Nope. I’m being picked up. See ya.”

When she left the room, Rick stared at Elia’s profile. “Stop torturing yourself.”

Elia met his eyes instantly.

"Hon, it's not worth being upset the whole rest of your visit." He rubbed his knuckle against Elia's coarse jaw.

"I no help." Elia gave him a sad smile. "I do best. What we do today?"

"On a rainy day like this?" Rick dug his fingers into Elia's hair. "Naked. In bed. All day."

Elia smiled. "No with mother home."

"I don't care. Look my sisters will be gone all day. She can go shopping or have coffee with a friend. She doesn't need to babysit us."

Elia brushed at the crumbs on the table absently.

"Don't you want to be in bed with me?"

"*Si*. Yes. Of course."

It didn't take much intelligence to see Elia breaking inside again over their impending separation. "Come here." Rick scooted out his chair and coaxed Elia to his lap. Elia rested his head on Rick's holding him around his neck.

Hugging Elia, stroking his back and thighs, Rick closed his eyes and squeezed him tight.

Wind pelted the glass sliding door, turning the rain into a sheet of water.

"I'm surprised it's not thundering and lightning."

A second later a crackling rumble was heard.

Rick laughed. "Never mind." He sniffed Elia's shirt and peeked between his legs. "A hard-on. Excellent." Using two fingers, Rick ran its length under Elia's shorts.

At a loud thunder blast, Elia jumped and tightened his grip on Rick.

"'Tis the season for storms, I'm afraid. Sometimes it feels like Florida here." Rick nudged Elia to stand. "Let me clear up the kitchen, then it's bedtime."

"I help." Elia began placing the dirty dishes in the dishwasher.

Heart of Steele

Rick put away the jam and butter, wiping down the table and counters, smiling at how nice Elia was. Not just another pretty face, but a good-hearted soul.

When the kitchen was neat and orderly, Rick picked Elia up in his arms and carried him down the hall, rubbing noses with him as he went. Outside the rain continued, but it felt safe and cozy inside.

Gently, Rick set Elia on the bed, closing and locking the door. He pulled his t-shirt over his head and stared at Elia as Elia watched.

“I want you to fuck me.”

The expression on Elia’s face was priceless. Pure joy. “You never before?”

“Nope. Always top dog.” Rick tossed a rubber and the lubrication on the bed.

In excitement, Elia squirmed out of his clothing, pushing it over the side of the bed to the floor. He tugged on his cock a few times, licking his lips in anticipation.

“You ever top anyone?” Rick knelt on the bed.

“No.”

“Really?”

“*Ree-lee.*” Elia’s chest rose and fell with his accelerating respirations.

Rick judged the size of Elia’s erection, suddenly having doubts. “Will you go easy?”

“*Si!*” Elia jumped to his knees to be at eye-level with Rick. “I no harm you.”

Since middle school Rick had been curious as to what it felt like to be screwed. Because of his size and attitude, he was always on the giving end. But when Elia pushed his hand against his ass when they played, Rick wanted him to push in.

Many times Rick had thought about experimenting, but never had the nerve. Nothing had gone up his butt but the tip of his finger when he washed in the shower.

He laid back on the pillows and spread his legs. The trust he had for Elia was complete. It was why he wanted Elia to take his cherry.

Elia stopped jerking on his own cock and positioned himself between Rick's legs. With a hand on each thigh, he smoothed his palms towards Rick's crotch and kneaded his anatomy.

Just the touch of Elia's skilled hands made Rick's cock thicken and throb. It appeared Elia was either contemplating his strategy or admiring Rick's hole. He pushed Rick's legs backwards and lowered down between them.

When the tip of a tongue touched his rim, Rick moaned, "Holy shit."

Elia ran wet laps from his ass to the base of his balls. All Rick could do was whimper and close his eyes. The tongue bath was both relaxing and exhilarating. Elia appeared from between his thighs, grinning like a demon.

Rick tried not to pant as Elia took the lube and opened the cap. The minute Elia pressed his fingers onto his puckered rim, Rick's hips jerked up from the bed and his cock bobbed and became dark red. He bit his lip on an expletive and watched every move Elia made.

The exterior of his ass was caressed lovingly, each pass at his hole Elia dipped inside. Rick had chills covering him and no longer paid attention to the wind, the rain, the noise of his mother returning. He didn't care.

"Is good?" Elia whispered in a breathy voice.

"Yes." Rick gulped down a dry throat.

Bolder with reassurance, Elia slid through the slippery glaze and entered Rick with one finger.

Heart of Steele

Instantly Rick broke out in goose bumps and felt the urge to climax increase. As Elia pushed in and out, spinning his finger like a top, Rick felt electrifying pleasure on one particular spot and almost toppled off the bed. “What the fuck?”

Elia stopped and made eye contact. “No?”

“Yes!” Rick focused on the sensation. “There. That spot. Rub there.”

Chuckling softly, Elia said, “Is your good spot.”

“*Holeee* shit!”

“Never had touch?”

“No.” Sweat broke out on Rick’s forehead and his dick slit began to ooze pre-cum. He moved his hips in time with Elia’s finger. Elia slipped a second digit in.

The pleasure increased. “Oh-my-God.” Rick was tempted to jack off as his cock bobbed and began to drip.

Three fingers pushed past his tight rim. Rick closed his eyes and arched his back, his head pressing into the pillow under him. “Jesus. I could come.”

Elia removed his hand and put on a condom.

As he watched, Rick panted, unable to catch his breath.

“Just calm. No tight.” Elia placed his cock against Rick’s ass.

“Yes.” Rick tried to relax his muscles. When he did, the head of Elia’s cock slipped inside him. “Ah!”

“What I do?”

“Wait.” Rick tried to relax.

“Take out?”

“No. Hang on.” Rick closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. “Okay.”

“I go?”

“Yes. Push in a little.”

Elia did.

Why did it feel so good with his finger, and it hurts with his cock? Sweat poured down Rick's temples and pits. His dick had deflated and he wasn't happy. "No."

Elia pulled out instantly.

Rick felt like shit and was angry at himself for letting Elia down. How did he take his cock up there?

"Is bad first time."

"It gets better?" Rick noticed Elia's cock had softened and he removed the rubber.

"Yes. Better each time. Body become accustom to." Elia dropped the condom and wiped his hands on his own thighs.

"It felt so good with your fingers." Rick became emotional. He wanted to do this for Elia and was angry at himself he was such a wimp.

"Fingers no big." Elia's eyes gleamed with his smile.

Needing him close, Rick reached out to him. Elia cuddled on top of him. "I'm sorry. Maybe we can try every day and I'll gradually be able to do it." He ran his hands through Elia's hair.

"Is okay. I no mind you do to me."

"Rick?" Jenny called from outside the door.

"What, Ma?"

"You boys going to be here for lunch?"

"Yeah." Rick checked with Elia, who nodded in agreement.

"What do you want?"

"Anything." Rick wanted her to go away.

"Okay."

Heart of Steele

Pausing, making sure they were not overheard, Rick whispered, "But when you give me a blowjob? Definitely put your fingers in my ass. That was incredible."

Elia ran his hand over Rick's soft cock. "I do now?"

The rush of love running through Rick was so strong, he spun Elia over, pinned him to the bed and smiled at him. "I am so glad you came here."

Elia's expression lit up. "Yes. I too."

Working his arm under Elia's head, Rick gathered him in close and kissed him making the spark of desire once again burn.

"What a waste of a day." Rick stared at the rain still falling as he and Elia ate lunch with his mother.

"Do you want to go to the mall?" Jenny asked, sipping coffee.

"Hate that place." Rick crinkled his nose.

"Did you check out what's playing at the cinema?"

"No. There's really nothing I want to see at the moment."

"Elia?" Jenny asked.

"I no know. What Rick do is fine."

"He's so easy." Rick tugged on Elia's hair.

"Did you have enough for lunch, Elia?" Jenny ignored Rick's comment.

"*Si. Grazie.*" He rubbed his belly.

"What would you eat for lunch at home?" Rick nudged his plate aside. "I have a feeling turkey and cheese sandwiches wouldn't be on the menu."

Looking shy, Elia smiled. "Is different in Italy."

"Yeah. Better." Rick began stacking their plates.

“Food, yes.” Elia reacted to his own words as if he had insulted Jenny. “But food good here.”

“Shut up. Stop being so polite.” Rick whacked his arm playfully. He stood and loaded the already full dishwasher. “I can’t wait to see for myself.”

“Oh?” Jenny didn’t sound enthusiastic. “When are you planning on going?”

“First chance I get. Christmas break?”

It was silent behind him. Rick looked over his shoulder and read Elia’s expression of worry as his mother fretted.

“Come on, Ma.” Rick picked up more silverware from the table to put in the washer.

“Now you’re not going to be home for Christmas.” Jenny rubbed her forehead.

Rick finished what he was doing and sat down across from her. “Mom, listen to me.”

Rick noticed Elia flinch slightly as Jenny met his eye.

“Are you paying attention?” Rick could tell she was mentally leaving the room. He touched her hand as it sat on the table.

“What?”

“I love him.” He paused.

Jenny didn’t say a word.

“I love Elia, and we are going to try and make this work.”

A sarcastic laugh came from her.

Rick reacted to the insult. “Forget it. I thought I could be honest and share my feelings. I should know better.” He rose up and continued to clear the table.

“You know him less than three weeks and you’re in love?”

“Yup.” Rick put the condiments back into the refrigerator.

Heart of Steele

“So...” she said, “How do you plan on making this work?”

“I’m going to visit him while we’re still in college, and hopefully he’ll visit me.”

Elia smiled at him when he met his gaze.

“Then, once we’ve both graduated...”

“You’ll get married and live happily ever after?”

Rick glared at her. “Are you trying to hurt us? You’re not funny.”

“How will you do it? Hmm?”

“I don’t know yet.” Rick reached out his hand to Elia. “Thanks for lunch. We’re leaving.”

Elia stood, pushing his chair under the table. “*Grazie*, Jenny.”

“My pleasure, Elia.” She stared at Rick. “You’ll both just end up getting hurt. It won’t work. Neither one of you can stay forever in each other’s countries.”

“Ma...” Rick wanted to cover his ears. He couldn’t handle immigration details now. They had three years of college in front of them.

“If he was a woman, you could marry him and he could stay here, but—”

“Mom!” Rick snapped. “Enough. We know what we’re up against. Okay?” He dragged Elia to his bedroom and started stuffing his wallet and keys in his pockets.

Elia appeared upset.

“Don’t listen to her.”

“She make sense.”

“No!” Rick bit his lip in fury.

“How we do? How we stay? I need visa, you need visa.”

“I’ll hire a lawyer when the time comes and find out. Don’t end this before it begins.” Rick didn’t even know where he was going. He just felt like he had to get away from his mother. “I’ll learn Italian. I’ll get a job there. I’ll figure something out.”

Elia covered his face.

“Baby...” Rick rushed towards him, holding him.

“It no work.” His eyes overflowed.

“Stop. Don’t you start doubting us too. Please.”

Clutching Rick in a tight hold, Elia pressed his face against Rick’s shoulder.

Rick rocked him, kissing his hair. “It’ll work. I’ll find a way.”

Chapter Twelve

Hot weather and boredom made for lazy days.

As Rick and Elia spent more time in bed, Jenny stopped asking them if they were going to have breakfast with the family.

Their naked limbs intertwined, Rick kept Elia near as the days began to dwindle and their separation anxiety grew.

The hot summer sun brightened Rick's bedroom. Birds began to sing at six bringing in the new morning.

Rick could see Elia's eyes were open. The direction of his stare was his shelf of trophies. He didn't have to ask what Elia was thinking. He knew.

Kissing Elia's shoulder as he spooned from behind, Rick felt Elia wriggle his bottom against his crotch in return. Rick ran his fingers through Elia's long, dark hair, letting the locks drop after extending them in the air.

His cock throbbed but they had time to linger. No one was rushing them to motivate to do things any longer. No one asked them to leave the room. Rick knew his mother was aware of the sensation of impending doom, and politely she didn't make demands any longer.

Yet her pessimism depressed Rick.

When Elia shifted, Rick released him to allow him to roll over. Seeing Elia's smile was all Rick needed to be happy.

"Hi," Rick said.

"Hi." Elia held Rick's genitals.

"Want some loving?" Rick grinned.

"Yes."

Rick massaged the back of Elia's head through his hair, staring into his eyes. His shaft was pulled and his balls were fondled, lighting the desire in him. "What do you want?"

"You in me."

"Okay, babe." Rick pecked his lips and reached behind him to the nightstand. Everything they needed was available and in plain view. Rick decided once Elia left Beavercreek, so would he. He wouldn't be able to stay in this bed without him. He'd get a dorm room early and hang out in Columbus. There he'd have a computer, privacy and a place to cry alone.

Elia dropped to his back and spread his legs.

Though his body craved a bout of feverish love, Rick was struggling, trying not to count the days, the time he had left to enter this man's body. If he did, he'd wail like a baby.

Just look at him. Stop thinking.

Rick knelt between Elia's legs and stroked his own cock, staring at Elia's, which was limp. "Touch yourself."

Slowly Elia smoothed his fingers over his torso to his dick. He toyed with himself, staring at Rick's face as he did.

Rick's cock thickened as he watched, but the ache in his chest was nearly destroying his desire. While he was erect, he grabbed the rubber and slipped it on, rushing to get lubricated so he could complete the act. Even with Elia

Heart of Steele

masturbating, Elia's cock did not grow completely hard. Rick kept his focus on Elia's sack and ass, creeping closer to penetrate. Elia held his knees and made himself more accessible.

Don't think. Don't think.

Rick pushed the head of his cock passed Elia's rim and closed his eyes. Inching in, not watching, but just thinking of his dick in a tight hole, Rick managed to stay hard and enter Elia completely. When he did, he braced himself and began a slow rhythm of thrusting, remembering his own foray the day before and trying to be gentle.

"Do no treat me like I will break."

Rick opened his eyes. Elia looked so unhappy Rick was about to stop what they were doing.

"Fuck me." Elia growled, jamming his hips upward.

Mixed with passion and mental pain, Rick obeyed, giving a more determined effort. As he stared at Elia's cock, seeing it swell on its own finally, Rick decided he would be able to come after all.

Closing his eyes again, upping the tempo to a full-fledged piston-fuck, Rick began to feel the orgasm begin to take shape. "Elia..." he breathed.

"More hard."

Sweat dripping down his neck and pits, Rick opened his eyes and quickly met Elia's. Rick looked back at the physical connection again so he wouldn't be distracted. Hammering Elia with everything he had, Rick forced himself to think of the sex and the heat surrounding his dick.

"You come...you come!" Elia begged.

Close but not crossing the line to climax, Rick began growing emotional and bit it back. When he slowed his hips, Elia took over, pumping from below.

Rick broke inside. He stopped moving, feeling Elia try to keep going, but Rick's cock was losing its erection.

"No!" Elia said, "You no cry!"

Rick sat back on his heels and covered his face, his cock flaccid and his chest heaving as he held back the anguish.

Elia bolted upright and embraced him. "No. No!"

"I can't. It's killing me." Rick held Elia and hid his face in his hair.

"We must love. Last few times. We must."

Rick crushed him to his chest as tears ran down his cheeks. He wiped them on Elia's shoulder and tried to control himself.

When something touched his cock, he realized Elia was removing the spent condom. Rick loosened his grip on Elia and waited, then they flopped back onto the mattress together with a bounce. Lying side by side, staring at each other, Rick hated himself for being weak. But his love for this man, the pain of losing him, was preoccupying him to the point of distraction.

"Do you want to shower and eat something?" Rick wiped at his eyes roughly, pretending he wasn't losing it.

"No." Elia ran his thumb over Rick's morning stubble.

"What do you want? I can suck you off." Rick had to pretend things were okay.

"In minute."

"Okay." Rick nodded and broke the staring contest they seemed to be having. Feeling Elia move his position, Rick was encouraged to rest his head on Elia's chest. With his ear pressed against Elia's ribcage, Rick stared at the window blinds as Elia caressed his hair. He wrapped his legs around Elia's and kept silent as hot tears continued running out of the corner of his eyes.

Heart of Steele

Rick used his mother's old thirty-five millimeter camera to take pictures of Elia. Elia remembered he had not used his camera either, so they spent the afternoon snapping photos. Jenny took several of them standing together, and the rest Rick did in his room, more risqué and private. He wanted something to look at while he jacked off.

"Let's take them to the one hour photo place." Rick removed the film from the camera and pocketed his wallet and car keys.

"Here too." Elia gave him the roll from his camera.

"I wish I had a digital camera or a phone that took pictures." Rick looked down at his basic cell phone model. "Just a cheapie. Pay as you go. I can't afford a fancy phone at the moment."

"No I. I no need. I have same like you." He dug his phone out of his carry-on suitcase.

"Maybe when we're rich and famous." Rick stuffed his phone back into his pocket.

"Sì. You will be *ricchi e famosi*."

"Sure I will." Rick winked. He left the bedroom and said, "Ma? I'm heading out. You need anything?"

Jenny rushed to meet them at the front door. "Do you mind picking up some milk and bread?"

"Nope."

"What are you doing for dinner?" Jenny brushed her hair back from her forehead.

"Nothing yet." Rick checked with Elia. "Do you want to go out?"

"No matter. You decide. Is fine."

"You mind cooking?" Rick asked his mother.

"Mind I cook?" Elia pointed to his chest.

Rick stared at Elia in surprise and noticed his mother was as well. "Did you just offer to cook?"

“*Si*. I would like. You let?”

Rick opened his mouth to reply but he was so unprepared for Elia to offer he didn’t know what to say.

“I would be delighted, Elia,” Jenny said, smiling.

“Is good.” Elia nodded.

“Are you sure?” Rick asked.

“*Si*. Sure. No complicated. Simple.”

“Okay.” Rick shook his head in disbelief.

“Wait. Let me give you some money for groceries.”

“Is no much. No worry.” Elia held up his hand.

“No. Let me. Hang on.” Jenny raced off.

“Are you nuts?” Rick said when his mother left.

“No nuts.” Elia chuckled. “I like cook. You like eat.”

“I like eat.” Rick grabbed Elia’s crotch. When his mother returned flapping ten dollar bills, Rick stood back from Elia.

“Is this enough?” She handed Elia the money.

“No worry.” Elia wouldn’t take it.

Rick did. “Got it. See ya later.”

“Okay. I’m looking forward to it, Elia. Thank you.” Jenny walked them to the door.

“My pleasure. I enjoy.”

Rick headed to his truck, unlocking the doors with the remote. “You like to cook?”

“*Si*. Mama cook so good. Everyone help.”

After he climbed behind the wheel and started the engine and air-conditioning, Rick replied, “You have three older sisters. Can’t they cook?”

“All cook. Papa cook as well. Is all family.”

“Wow. That’s very cool.” Rick drove them out of the cul-de-sac. “I can’t wait to taste it. What are you planning?”

Heart of Steele

“Simple pasta. No fancy.”

“Mm.” Rick rubbed Elia’s thigh.

“I can no wait for you to come to *Eeetally*...you taste Mama’s cooking, you no want leave.”

“I don’t need to taste your mom’s cooking to not want to leave.” Rick located Elia’s hand and kissed it.

“You come. Yes? Christmas?”

“Yes. I’m coming. Christmas.” Rick tried to drive and not be distracted. *Great. Now I’m hard.*

While they waited for the photo shop to process their pictures, Elia wandered up and down the aisles of the grocery store as Rick pushed the cart. He chose fresh penne pasta, plum tomatoes, red bell pepper, basil, garlic, freshly baked bread from the bakery, and sausages at the butcher counter.

“I like it already,” Rick said.

“Is simple. No hard make. You see.”

“Connie won’t eat it. You watch. She’ll have my mom microwave her chicken nuggets.”

Elia gave him a quizzical look. “No eat? No even try?”

“No. She’s the worst. I hope I’m wrong but I know her.” Rick paused. “Anything else?”

“*Si. Parmigiano?*”

“Do you mean, parmesan cheese?”

“Yes. Parmesan.”

Rick brought him to the dairy section.

“No.” Elia turned up his nose at the grated prepackaged cheeses. “From whole.” He used his hands to form a shape.

“Back to the deli counter?”

Nodding, Elia was disappointed by the amount of prefabricated ‘fake’ food. The best part of the process was picking out the finest ingredients from the market.

When the person behind the counter gave Elia his attention, Elia said, “You have parmesan?”

“In that case over there.”

“Is whole?”

Rick added, “Not grated?”

“Yes. There should be some wedges that aren’t grated.”

“Thanks.” Rick rolled the cart to the refrigerated island. “Here it is.” He held up a chunk.

Elia turned up his nose at first, eying it. He was used to having a slice cut from a round cheese wheel for him. “No better. So, must be okay.” He tossed it into the cart, disheartened.

“Ohio, my love.” Rick laughed at him. “Or as I affectionately refer to it, O-hell-o.”

Elia broke up with laughter. “So bad!”

“Yeah, no kidding.”

They walked to the check-out aisles. Elia asked, “No place to buy fresh cheese? No market?”

“Not really. Sometimes they have a farmer’s market, but not like what you’re thinking.”

Rick began to place the items on the conveyer belt.

Elia frowned. *How will I live in America? I can’t even get good food.*

Once the items were bagged and Rick paid for them, they waited at the photo counter for their pictures. The minute the envelope was in his hand, Rick thumbed through it, leaning on Elia as he did.

Heart of Steele

“Nice!” Rick held one of Elia on his bed with just the sheet covering his crotch. “I’ll be jacking off to this one.”

“I like this.” Elia held out one of the two of them standing, holding each other’s waist.

“Do you want to enlarge it?”

“Si. Yes.”

“Excuse me?” Rick got the attention of the clerk. “Can we order two reprints?”

She returned to the counter and had Rick fill out an envelope. “If you use a digital camera, you can print out enlargements right there.” She pointed to a kiosk with a computer screen.

“Yeah. Oh well.” Rick shrugged. Neither his mother nor he had the luxury of fancy electronic gadgets. The computer in his sister’s room was five years old.

He finished writing up the envelope and slid the negative inside it. “When will it be done?”

“Next Wednesday?”

“Good.” He looked at Elia. “You’ll still be here.”

Though Elia nodded, his pout appeared.

“Let’s go.” Rick pushed the trolley cart to the door, then grabbed the few plastic bags to carry to his truck. “I hate this humidity. I instantly sweat.” When Elia didn’t answer, Rick bit his lip and kept walking.

After he loaded the bags in the bed, he climbed into the driver’s side. “What’s wrong?”

Elia didn’t respond immediately and Rick could tell he was struggling with his emotions again.

“We have to stop torturing ourselves about this.” Rick started the engine and lowered the windows.

“No. Is no that.”

“What then?”

“Is live here. I no know if I can.”

“Me neither. I can’t live here.”

“No. I mean United States.”

Rick spun his head around to Elia. “You mean everywhere in the States? Like even California?”

“I no been there. But no market? No fresh food? I no know if I can.”

Driving out of the lot, Rick grew angry. “Food. You’d not come live with me because of food?”

Elia turned his face away as if hiding against the passenger’s door.

They didn’t talk for the drive home.

Feeling betrayed, Rick had figured Elia would be the one to move to his country, not the reverse. Elia knew English. How hard would it be for Rick to learn Italian? And the job opportunities must be better here. What on earth could he do for a living in Italy? Elia could be anything here in the States. Rick had a hunch he was getting the cold shoulder because in reality Elia did not want them to be together permanently.

And that hurt more than if they just couldn’t manage it logistically.

Still silent, Rick carried the bags to the kitchen and set them on the counter, removing the milk, meat and cheese to put in the refrigerator.

Jenny joined them. “So? What Italian dinner will you prepare, Elia?”

“Is pasta. You like *salsiccia*?”

“What?” Jenny asked Rick.

“Sausage.” Rick held up the package.

“Yes.” Jenny inspected the other items. “Looks lovely. I can’t wait.”

Heart of Steele

Rick left the room. He was becoming furious. After kicking off his shoes he collapsed on his bed and buried his face in his pillow.

“Ree-ick?”

“Leave me alone.”

“No. I no leave.” Elia shut the door and sat on the bed, rubbing Rick’s back.

“Look. You don’t want to live with me. I get it.”

“I say mistake. I no mean.”

Rick turned over to face him. “So, if we’re going to be together, I have to live in Italy.”

Elia shrugged. “No option? Must be one way?”

“What can I do for a living there?”

“What I do here?”

“Anything!” Rick crossed his arms and lowered his voice. “Stop judging fifty states by one crappy one.”

“And you no judge Italy.”

“Forget it. It was a stupid idea. It’ll never work.”

Seeing Elia’s expression sink, Rick felt sick to his stomach. Elia stood, leaving the room, closing the door behind him. Rick’s eyes stung from his tears. He ground his jaw in rage and tried to calm down.

Climbing off the bed, Rick headed to his sisters’ room and sat at the computer. He could hear his mother and Elia talking in the den, but not what they were saying.

Once the computer was ready, Rick put into a search engine, ‘American jobs in Italy’ and ‘jobs for Italians in America’. Then he began reading the options.

Elia looked away from the nightly news station on the TV when Rhonda entered the room.

“Hi. Where’s Rick?” She dropped down on the sofa.

"In his room. I think he's taking a nap," Jenny said, giving Elia a look of compassion.

"You guys have your first fight?" Rhonda asked. "The honeymoon over?"

"Rhonda. Please." Jenny shook her head.

"You'll see my brother's a selfish jerk, Elia. I wouldn't waste your time."

In Elia's opinion, there was only one selfish jerk, and she was in the room. He didn't answer. He was too polite.

"I'm starved. What are you making, Mom?"

"Elia's cooking."

"Cooking? You're cooking?"

"*Si*. I cook." Elia wanted to be with Rick, not this strange girl with the black fingernails and pink hair.

"What are you making?"

Jenny answered, "Pasta with sausages."

"Sounds good. Connie won't eat it." As she said it, they heard the front door open and close.

Connie skipped into the room. "I'm starving! I only ate cookies at Janya's house. When are we eating?"

"I go start." Elia stood and headed to the kitchen.

"What does he mean, Mom?" Connie asked.

Jenny followed Elia. "He's cooking dinner."

"Ew! I'm not eating it."

"Shut up." Rhonda huffed. "Go eat more cookies then."

"Ma!" Connie whined as she ran in after Elia and Jenny.

"Just go watch TV." Jenny pointed to the den. "What can I do for you, Elia?"

"I need pot for pasta. Yes? One for sausage, and I roast up *pomodoro, peperone e aglio*."

Heart of Steele

“Wow. This sounds great.” Jenny went into action getting everything Elia needed.

Not great. I want my man. Elia tried to smile but felt queasy. He held up the garlic head. “Board to break?”

“Yup.” She placed a plastic cutting board on the counter and a sharp knife.

As Elia smashed the garlic head so he could separate the cloves, he wished he could predict the future, but he didn’t own a crystal ball.

“What are you looking up?” Rhonda asked as she entered the room.

“Nothing.” Rick picked up the pages he printed, and sniffed the air. “Man, that already smells excellent.”

“Did you guys fight?”

“Nope.” Rick stood, holding the paperwork. “Should I leave the computer on?”

“Yes. Thanks.”

“No problem.” Rick left the room and walked to the kitchen. Elia was whirling around, chopping basil, sautéing the sausages, and broiling the vegetables. The aroma was making Rick’s stomach grumble. “Wow!”

“Look at him go!” Jenny laughed. “It’s like watching the cooking channel.”

Elia opened the oven and shook the pan. “Is done.” He took out the roma tomatoes, garlic, and red pepper he’d roasted and placed the tray on the stove top. “You have...” He tapped his lip. “How you say...” Elia twirled his finger around. “Whizz?”

“Blender?” Jenny asked.

“Is blender? Show.” Elia waved his hand.

Jenny removed a blender and then a hand mixer.

“This. Blender? Is call ‘blender’?”

“What do you want to do?”

As his mother and Elia conferred on getting the roasted vegetables pureed, Rick sat at the kitchen table to observe.

“Peel skin.” Elia started removing the charred tomato, garlic, and pepper skins with a paring knife.

“Hot!” Jenny blew her fingers.

“I do. You set up machine.”

“Okay.” Jenny smiled at Rick. “Are you okay?”

“Yes.”

“What do you have there?” She tilted her head to the papers he held.

“Options.”

Elia spun around. “What is ‘options’?”

“When you have a minute, I’ll tell you.”

“Si. In minute.” Elia dumped the tomato, pepper and garlic into the blender. “Turn on.”

Jenny put the lid on the blender and it made a high pitched noise as it mixed. Elia signaled to stop. He opened the lid and sprinkled basil, salt and ground pepper. “Pour here.”

As Elia held up a pot, Jenny poured the contents in. “I am loving this!” she gushed.

“Me too.” Rick smiled and Elia grinned back at him.

He stirred the sliced sausages and said, “Make pasta. Is done.”

Jenny dumped the fresh pasta into the boiling water.

“It will be fastly. Make table.” Elia stirred the pasta.

“Set the table, Rick.” Jenny removed plates out of the cupboard.

Rick put the paperwork aside and took silverware out of a drawer.

“I’m starved!” Connie said.

Heart of Steele

“Get your sister.” Jenny stacked the plates next to the stove.

“What is it?” Connie turned up her nose as Elia mixed the sausage into the sauce.

“Great food. Go.” Jenny nudged her.

As Connie left she said, “I’m not eating it!”

“Yes, I’m afraid you are!” Jenny replied.

“Have cheese, Rick?”

“Okay.” Rick grabbed the grater and a bowl, using the kitchen table to work on getting some shredded.

“Ah! Bread!” Elia unwrapped the baguette and sliced it open. “Still on?” He pointed to the oven.

“The broiler is. Should I shut it?”

“No. Leave.” Elia sliced open the bread and spread butter and minced garlic cloves into it. He put it onto the tray and slid it under the red coils. “Pasta is done. Need drain.” He took the pot off the stove.

Rick was so impressed he didn’t know what to do or say. Seeing his mother’s eyes wide, her excitement, Rick knew she had never cooked like this before.

“Is it done?” Rhonda asked. “I’m so hungry. Man, that smells great.”

“*Seeit! Seeit.*” Elia waved everyone to the table.

Rick finished grating a pile of cheese and sat down.

After he took the bread out of the oven and shut off the broiler, Elia made a mound of pasta and sauce on each plate, handing them to Jenny who distributed them.

Rick salivated over the food, waiting for Elia to join them.

He passed the bread around and took the seat next to Rick. “Eat...no wait.” Handing Rick the cheese bowl, Elia said, “Need add.”

Rick took a pinch, sprinkling it on his dish. “You too?”

“*Si*. Please.”

“Say when.” Rick topped Elia’s sauce.

“*Buono*.”

“Delicious!” Jenny said. “Elia, it’s fantastic.”

“Good!” He tasted it. “Is nice.”

After he gulped down a few bites, Rick noticed Connie poking the plate but not eating. “More for me.”

“Connie, try it,” Jenny said. “Stop acting like a baby.”

“I don’t want to.”

“She no have to.” Elia shook his head.

“Will you at least taste it?” Rhonda devoured sauce covered bread. “It’s to die for.”

Rick ignored Connie’s predictable behavior. She never tried anything new. He nudged Elia and made a face at him, trying to get him to stop worrying about his kid sister’s attitude about food.

“So?” Jenny asked.

Rick spun around to see Connie had actually stuck some on her tongue.

“It’s okay.”

“Okay?” Rhonda choked.

“She’s eating it. It must taste good,” Jenny said.

“This is good, Elia.” Connie took a big mouthful.

“Good!” He laughed.

Once the meal was eaten and the plates were cleared, Rick held Elia’s hand and led him to his bedroom, bringing the paperwork with him. “Have a seat.”

Elia dropped down to the bed.

Rick closed and locked the door, sitting beside him. “This is how you can stay here, and this is how I can stay in Italy.” He handed Elia the papers. “Can you read English?”

“A *leettle*.” Elia stared at the words.

Heart of Steele

“Tell me if you need help.”

“Let try.”

Rick stroked Elia’s back as he read.

“Is okay if we meet facts.”

“Yes. You know, I was thinking about something. My dad’s family has some Italian heritage.”

“No!” Elia met his eye.

“I think so. Look,” he pointed to the paperwork, “If I can prove my grandparents were from Italy...”

“Grandparents Italian? Steele?”

“No. My dad’s mom’s maiden name is Leto.”

“Leto? It say here that is all need?”

“Well, no. I think she had to be born in Italy and I have to somehow prove it.”

“How I stay here?” He flipped pages.

“You can maybe get a job at the Italian Consulate in San Francisco.”

As if the amount of work ahead was too much for him, Elia dropped the paperwork and covered his face.

Rick dragged him to the bed to lie in his arms. “Please. We have to make it happen, somehow.”

Hearing Elia exhale in anxiety, Rick held him tight, knowing they had options, they just had to work towards them over the next three years.

“Quello che sara.”

“What does that mean?” Rick hoped it didn’t mean, no way.

“Will be?” Elia shrugged. “Who know?”

“I know. That’s who.” Rick gripped Elia’s face and kissed him.

Elia crawled on top of Rick and pressed his crotch against his.

Instantly Rick's cock twitched in his pants. *I am going to fuck you this time.*

"Get naked."

Elia practically tore off his clothing as Rick did the same. Once they were nude, Rick tackled Elia, pinning him to the bed and ground his stiff cock against Elia's. They kissed, moaning in desire. Not wasting any time to stop and think about it, Rick sat up, tore open a condom and slipped it on.

A few Italian phrases emerged from Elia as he spread his legs and exposed his ass. Seeing Elia was as hard as he was, Rick took a quick suck of his cock, rubbing his face into Elia's balls and groaning in agony for him. Elia's whimpers only served to drive Rick wild.

His chest heaving, Rick reached for the lube and applied it generously. *'cause you are going to get fucked!*

As Rick capped the tube, he noticed Elia spreading the gel around his own rim. A rush of lust coursed through Rick's length. Rick held Elia's legs and pressed their bodies close, aiming his dick at Elia's ass. "Ready, babe?"

"Si. More than ready."

Rick thrust his hips and glided inside Elia's back passage effortlessly. "Oh! Baby!"

When Elia began fisting his cock, Rick said, "I'm going to suck you. Don't come."

Elia nodded, slowing down his hand.

Rick ground his hips in deep, pulling out to the tip and pushing in to his balls. "Christ, I love you so much," he breathed between thrusts.

Seeing Elia pinch the base of his own cock, Rick knew he was holding back. Glistening pre-cum oozed out of his slit and Rick couldn't wait to get his mouth around him.

With that thought, Rick increased his speed, fucking hard and deep until he was nearing climax. "Yes!" Rick

Heart of Steele

dragged Elia's hand to his own ass, trying to get Elia to push his finger in.

Elia leaned up, reaching behind Rick, smoothing his palm over his rump to his hole. The minute Elia touched his rim, Rick convulsed with the orgasm, throwing back his head and feeling his dick pulsate in the tight heat.

Panting as hard as Rick was, Elia dropped back to the pillows, licking his lips as he waited for satisfaction.

One more good thrust inside, and Rick pulled out, stripping off the condom and landing on the bed between Elia's thighs. He aimed Elia's dick into his mouth and sucked hard, using the slick lube to massage Elia's balls and ass.

Elia's body jerked and tensed. A deep grunt escaped his lips and Rick felt his mouth fill. "Mm!" he groaned, swallowing and milking Elia's cock for more. When he could coax no more out, Rick collapsed beside him, draping his arm over Elia's chest.

They lay still, recuperating. Before Rick knew it, he had fallen asleep.

Chapter Thirteen

Four weeks had come and gone.

As Elia packed, Rick could barely watch. But he did. Sitting on his bed, trying to keep sane, Rick felt as if he had a fever or was on drugs. It was surreal.

The overcast day only seemed to add to the dreariness Rick felt.

“Are you almost ready, Elia?” Jenny checked her watch.

“I’m driving him.”

“Alone?”

“Yes.”

“You sure?”

“Mom.” Rick wasn’t about to cry in front of his mother.

“I ready.” Elia held his luggage at his side.

Rick stood to help him, taking it from him. They walked to the front door where Connie and Rhonda waited.

“It was great meeting you, Elia.” Rhonda hugged him.

“You as well. I will be in touch.”

“I’ll miss you!” Connie gave him a big hug.

“Me too.” Elia petted her head.

Heart of Steele

“Well,” Jenny said, holding out her arms. “Have a safe trip. You were a delight.”

“Thank you for allowing me stay.”

“Our pleasure. You just let us know when you get home so we know you’ve arrived okay.”

“Si. I will.” Elia met Rick’s eye.

“Okay.” Rick felt like he was sleepwalking. “See ya later, Mom.”

“Rick.” She held him back. “Are you sure you don’t want company?”

“I’m sure.”

“Drive safe.”

“I will.” Rick carried Elia’s bag to his truck, putting it in the bed. *This is not happening. This is not real.*

They sat together on the bench seat. Rick started the engine, immediately holding Elia’s hand.

As he drove to Dayton International Airport, he noticed Elia kept dabbing at the corner of his eye. It was all Rick could do to keep it together and not collapse.

He parked in the short stay lot and again carried Elia’s bag to the terminal. As they approached the entrance, Rick began to lose it. He stopped walking and battled to keep strong.

Elia dropped his carry-on and embraced him. As Elia broke down, so did Rick. He released the suitcase and held Elia as tightly as he could. “I can’t let you go.”

“I am died inside.” Elia sobbed.

Rick held his head, crushing Elia’s cheek against his. “Baby, I’ll miss you like hell.”

“I get web camera. Day I home. I get. I will see you.”

“Yes, please.” But Rick knew it would not replace Elia’s touch. His scent.

When they released their embrace, Rick used the tail of his shirt to wipe his face. The struggle to not cry was painful. Rick picked up the carry-on, handing it to Elia, then his luggage and continued their walk to the terminal. Once inside, Rick gestured to the correct airline desk and stood with Elia as he waited in line to check his bag and get a seat assignment. Rick didn't look at the other passengers. He wanted to crawl into a cave and cry.

A boarding pass and passport in his hand, and his carry-on bag over his shoulder, Elia moved to join the line for security. "Christmas? *Si?*"

"Yes!" Rick lowered his voice. "Yes. I'll book the flight this week. I need that reservation to keep sane."

"Me as well. I have something look forward."

"Yes." As they drew closer to the guard who was checking passes before allowing passengers to join the lines for the metal detectors, Rick said, "I have to let you go."

"No. Never."

Rick choked up again. He wanted to kiss Elia but was petrified to do it.

Elia didn't have the same fear. He held Rick's face and kissed him. A sob filled Rick's throat.

As if in a misty dream, Elia handed his passport and boarding pass to a man in uniform, floating away from Rick. Waiting, Rick stood back as Elia went through the check point. When Elia spun around for a last look at Rick, they both fell to pieces. Elia waved and threw a kiss. Rick could see the tears running down his cheeks from where he was. He threw one back and had to leave. There was no holding back the tidal wave any longer.

He looked back once, and didn't see Elia.

Pain searing through his chest, Rick jogged to his truck, got in and burst with his sobs. Wailing, resting his forehead on his arms on the steering wheel, Rick knew life

Heart of Steele

would never be the same without Elia. He cried hard, like suffering a death.

Every time he gained control, it would wash over him again and he fell apart. He needed to be strong for the drive home. Taking his time, slouching in the seat, he waited for the tears to subside before he started the car.

Elia raced to the men's room and hid in a stall. Grabbing tissue, he held it to his eyes and nose as he cried. The devastation he suffered over parting was more painful than anything he had ever felt in his life. He dabbed at his eyes and inhaled a few times to calm down. After deep breaths he picked up his bag and splashed his face at the sink. His eyes were red and puffy and he felt like hell.

Walking through the small terminal, Elia paused to get a coffee, checking his watch. He had the urge to call Rick's cell phone but knew it would only make him cry again. He thanked the barista for the coffee and walked to the waiting area, dead on his feet and dreading the stop-overs to get home. Cincinnati, London, and then Milan. An eternity on a plane to think about his lover left behind. *I have found inferno.*

Rick managed to drive home though he didn't even remember doing it. He parked, walked through the front door and directly to his room, dropping face down on his bed.

"Rick?"

"Go away."

"Are you all right?"

"No. Go away."

"Sweetie. Can I get you anything?"

Yeah. Elia. "No." He heard his mother walk away from his door. Rick rubbed at his burning eyes and picked up the

envelope of photos he had left on his nightstand. As he thumbed through the pictures of Elia he cried.

Not able to look at them anymore, he set them aside and crushed his face into the pillow, choking back his emotions. When his door opened and his mother approached him, Rick reached for her.

“My sweet boy.” Sitting next to him, Jenny cradled him in her arms.

At his mother’s love and sympathy, Rick let loose a torrent of tears. He hadn’t cried in her arms since he was a toddler, but it felt good to let it out.

She rocked him, petting his hair back from his forehead and kissing it. “Shh. You’ll make yourself sick. Stop crying. It’ll be all right.”

He hiccupped and strangled a wail of pain in his throat. “I love him so much.”

“I know.” She wiped at his tears.

“Help me. Help me get back to him. Please.” Rick couldn’t see through his watery eyes.

“I will. I’ll do what I can.”

Rick embraced her, resting his face on her shoulder. Just when he thought his crying had stopped, he choked up again and held her tighter.

“Okay, hush. Rick, you’ll be all right.”

Elia’s mother and father picked him up from the airport. He was overtired and exhausted from crying. His mother appeared very upset when she saw him.

As his father drove them home, Elia sat in the back seat resting against his mother as she held him close. She whispered, “Is it about this boy?”

“Yes.” Elia wiped at his eyes.

“You silly man. You fell in love?”

Heart of Steele

“Yes!” Elia hugged her and wept on her shoulder.

“Shhh. It will be all right.”

“What’s wrong?” his father asked from the front seat.

“Nothing,” she said. “Keep driving.” She kissed Elia’s hair and caressed his back. “It was a long trip. You need to rest.”

“Mama, I miss him already.” Elia blinked and tears ran down his face.

“You will call. You will use the computer. You will stay in touch.”

Nodding, Elia closed his eyes and tried to unwind. He felt ill.

His father helped him with his bags to their house. He followed his parents inside and entered the kitchen. It felt strange to be home. Everything was different, the scent, the feel, the sounds...everything.

“Let me tell Rick I’ve arrived safely.” Elia removed his shoes.

“Okay, darling. What can I get you meanwhile?” His mother caressed his face.

“Nothing. I will sleep after.” As Elia headed to his computer, he heard his mother say to his father, “He fell in love. How sad.”

Coughing to hold back more sobs, Elia sat at his desk and moved the mouse. His computer was always on. Everyone used it. He wiped at his eyes and entered his email box.

In the subject line he wrote, ‘*Is Elia*’.

He typed, ‘*I just wan tell you I home safe. No miss flight. Everyting on time.*’

Elia hiccupped and used his arm to wipe his eyes.

‘*I get web-camra after I sleep. I no sleep on plane. When I get here, I email you.*’ He took another minute to

stop crying and added, *'I weep. I no know what do without you. Come to me Christmas...come to your Elia.'*

He couldn't reread it he was so tired. He sent it and stripped for bed.

A light tap caught his attention. His mother was smiling sadly at him. "Tell me about him."

"I show you." Elia dug through his carry-on. "Mama, he is beautiful."

"I assume he is." She sat on his bed and patted the spot next to her.

He opened the photo envelope handing her the stack of pictures. "This is Rick Steele."

"What a handsome man."

"Is so kind. So wonderful." Elia tried to stop the flow of tears and couldn't.

"He is your age?"

"Yes. Nineteen and in university. Mama, I love him so much."

"And he loves you?" She flipped through the photos.

"Yes. He adores me. I saw him cry too. He was so hurt when I left."

"You will keep in touch." She put the photos back into the envelope.

"Is it okay I invited him here for Christmas?"

"Of course. I would love to meet him. Does he speak Italian?"

"No." Elia laughed sadly. "But I speak enough English, and so do my sisters. So?" Elia shrugged. "I will translate for you and Papa."

"Good. Get some rest."

"Mama, can you or Papa buy a web camera? Please? While I sleep?"

Heart of Steele

“I’ll get your sister Juliana to go.”

“Thank you.” He kissed her cheek.

“Rest. I will wake you for dinner.”

Elia smiled for her and then sank when she left the room. He climbed under the blankets and struggled to get rest.

Chapter Fourteen

The next morning Rick woke up early and headed to his sisters' bedroom. They both still slept as he turned on the computer, sitting at the desk. Clicking keys, he found an email from Elia in his box and felt his heart burn with hope.

He read it, seeing Elia wrote the exact way he spoke, and his spelling was charming. Rick couldn't love him any more than he did. *That's it, I'm getting a webcam today. I'm heading back to school. I can't sit in my sisters' room and jack off.*

He typed Elia back a message.

'Baby! Miss ya like hell. I'm going back to Columbus today so I can be alone in the dorm and do what I need to do. I have an old computer I use for class and I can get it hooked up fast. I'll email you when I get there. I can't wait to see you on webcam! I'll get the flight reservations and send you the confirmation. We can do this, Elia. Please. Hang in there with me.'

Rick spun around when he heard noise. Rhonda shifted on the bed but didn't open her eyes.

He finished the email. *'I love you. With all my heart and soul, I love you. I'll arrange cheap calls with the phone company. When I get everything done, I'll email you. Love you, love you, love you. 'Ti amo' very much!'*

Heart of Steele

He reread it and hit send, closing down his email site. Creeping into the hall and shutting the door behind him, Rick started a pot of coffee, checking the time. It was before six. When it stopped dripping he poured a cup for himself, headed to his room and packed for his trip to campus.

By the time his family began to stir, Rick had already put his clothing, computer and books into the back of his pickup.

On his last trip to load his belongings, he found his mother in her robe and slippers at the door watching him.

“Morning, Mom.”

“Are you leaving today?”

“Yes.” He brushed by her and searched his room for anything he missed.

“Do you have a place to stay?” She stood at the threshold of his doorway.

“Since it’s between sessions, I’ll be able to get a room at the dorms. Don’t worry. It’s empty over summer break.” He patted his pocket nervously for his key and wallet.

“Did you eat anything?”

“No.”

“Come. Sit with me and have some toast.”

Though he was anxious to get on the road, Rick followed his mother to the kitchen.

She held up a mug, asking him silently if he wanted more coffee.

“No. I’ve already downed half the pot.”

Once she poured for herself and placed two slices of bread in the toaster, she stood near him, petting his hair. “Are you sure you’re doing the right thing? Heading back to school early and being on your own?”

How was he supposed to tell her he'd be jacking off with Elia on a computer? "Yes."

"I worry about you."

The toaster popped up the bread. She placed them on a plate and set out butter and jam.

"Don't worry." Rick buttered the toast and bit into it.

"What will you do all alone?"

"I'll find work or something. I can't hang out here, sleep in the bed—" He shut up and met her eyes. "Never mind."

"I get it." She sat down and sipped her coffee. "Will you call me if you get depressed?"

"Yes." The lump returned to his throat. He was already depressed. Did she mean suicidal? "Mom, don't worry about me."

"It's a mother's job." She pressed the back of his hand where it rested on the table.

"And my job is to finish school." *And get to Italy.*

Elia sat at the computer while his sister Juliana plugged wires into the tower.

"Try it now."

Elia clicked the download icon. "It's loading."

They waited as the computer worked.

She said, "There it is on your screen. Try it."

Using the mouse, Elia opened the program and a box with his image appeared. "There it is." He adjusted the camera so he could see himself clearly.

"Is he on line?"

"Let me see." Elia tapped keys excitedly. He used his email box and typed, '*You here?*'

Heart of Steele

Juliana sat on the floor, leaning her elbow on Elia's lap so she could see the monitor.

"What is the time?" Elia asked anxiously.

"One."

"He is five hours behind me."

"He won't be on line now then."

Typing another message, Elia wrote, *'I have cam. Download instent message programme when you get chance.'* He sent it and waited again.

"Use that link to invite him." Juliana pointed to the screen.

Elia followed her directions to open an instant message system to Rick.

"That's all you can do, Elia."

"Yes. But wait for him."

"Is he really coming here for Christmas?"

"That's what he said." Elia rubbed his coarse jaw and met his sister's eyes.

"He is beautiful. What was it like there?"

"Without Rick I would have gone crazy. There was nothing to do."

"So? All you did was have sex?" She laughed.

Elia winked at her, smiling.

She peeked into the hall quickly before she asked, "Will you eventually live with him in the States?"

"I don't know who will go where. I guess it depends on jobs, visas..."

"Yes. Too bad it's so far away."

"It will not be Ohio. So the plane flight will be more direct. He wants to live in California."

"How exciting!"

Elia stared at the email box, wishing Rick was on line.

“Call him?”

“Let me call the phone company first. It will cost a fortune to call him without a special rate.” Elia stood, hauling Juliana to her feet.

“I would love to hear his voice. I enjoy American accents.”

“He said he would take classes to learn Italian.”

“He sounds wonderful. I am so happy for you.”

Elia embraced her. “Come. Let’s find the last phone record to call and make a new plan.” He held her hand and hurried to speak to his mother.

Rick was alone in a dorm room in Archer House; four floors of mainly sophomores who liked to study and not party. Freshman year in a freshman dorm on the south end of campus was like one continuous frat celebration. It was fun for the first month, but it got old quickly.

With his focus on graduating as soon as humanly possible, Rick needed quiet study time. Luckily being one of the first students to sign up for a dorm, he had gotten a private room.

The building was dead silent as he carried three loads of belongings to the room. Walking through off-white painted cinderblock corridors with fliers and posters taped up everywhere, it seemed the walls were more of a message board than something holding up the structure.

After he had moved his truck from the front of the building to the resident lot, displaying the permit, Rick jogged to his room to get the computer operating. Using his card key to enter his room, he removed the tower, monitor and wires from a cardboard box and got to work.

Sweat running down his face, Rick knelt behind a tiny desk to plug in wires. After it was set up, he tore open the new webcam package and read the instructions. He was

Heart of Steele

hungry, exhausted and worn out from the drive and carrying his stuff to his room, but this was priority. He had to get connected to Elia or he'd go insane.

The drops of perspiration stung his eyes. Rick yanked off his shirt and used it to wipe his face. He lay across the floor and plugged the cam into the port, then reached to the keyboard to tap it and get it to download.

"Yes," he said in excitement, sitting down in front of the desk, scooting the chair close. The minute he was on line, a box popped up asking him to become a part of an instant message service. He laughed out loud and opted in. The icon appeared and Rick clicked it, seeing a message waiting from Elia in his box. He quickly sent, *'I'm here'* on the instant message pop up.

'here too!'

Rick pumped his fist into the air and cheered. He bit his lip as he figured out how to take photos of himself via webcam.

'I see you!'

"Oh my God!" Rick adjusted the camera so it pointed straight at him. *'Babe!'* he typed.

'You see me?'

Rick struggled with the strange messages. Then one asked if he would accept the request for the webcam. He licked the sweat off his top lip and waited. An image of Elia appeared in a box. *'I see you too!'* Rick typed, tears filling his eyes. He wrote, *'miss you, miss you, miss you'*.

He could see Elia laughing and beckoning to someone. A pretty dark-haired woman appeared, leaning over Elia, waving. *'is sister, juliana'*.

Rick waved, then looked down at his chest and reached for his shirt.

Elia typed, *'no cover!'*

Rick laughed and dropped the shirt. *'Hi Juliana!'* He loved it. Meeting Elia's family in cyber-space. How cool was that?

'she say hi.'

Rick could see Elia pushing her to go. Rick started laughing again. It took a second, but Elia vanished and reappeared, taking off his own shirt.

"Oh, yes!" Rick's cock throbbed. *'You alone?'*

'Si.'

Rick watched him stand and drop his shorts. He immediately did the same. Naked, staring at the computer video images of each of them, he typed, *'ready?'*

'si!'

Rick made sure his torso and cock were visible where he sat, seeing Elia do the same. "Holy shit, this is awesome." Rick fisted himself staring at Elia masturbating. He was so pent up, the climax rose quickly and he came, covering his chest with creamy spatter. Rick leaned closer to the monitor to see Elia ejaculate over his belly button and black treasure trail. Milking himself to enjoy the last few waves of pleasure, Rick grabbed his t-shirt and wiped up the spill. He typed, *'amazing'*.

Waiting until Elia cleaned up and returned to keyboard, Rick licked his lips, recalling everything about their time together.

'Si, so good.' Elia slipped on his shorts. *'you make flight?'*

'I'll do it now. Stay put.'

'I no go.'

Rick opened another screen to a discount airline site. As it downloaded he removed his wallet from the shorts lying on the floor and set out his credit card.

A message popped up. *'I miss my lover.'*

Heart of Steele

Rick dabbed at his eyes, knowing Elia could see him on the cam. *'I'm going crazy. I need you.'* While he carried on an instant message conversation, Rick entered information into the flight search. *'Rome?'*

'Milan.'

"Milan." Rick hit search. When he found how expensive it was and the number of stop-overs he choked. "I won't be able to do this often." Rick rubbed his eyes to clear the tears and hunted for the best price. He typed, *'how long can I stay?'*

'long as need.'

'two weeks?'

"Si. Longer?"

Rick wanted to stay with him forever. He had time off from December eleventh to January fourth. *'Two is the best I can do.'*

'2 then okay.'

Rick entered the dates and cringed as the price rose for flights during the holidays. "Fuck it. I'll get a part time job." He entered his credit card info and waited as it downloaded. When the confirmation came through he copied it to Elia's email box.

He waited, watching Elia over the cam. When Elia opened it, he jumped off the chair and danced around. Rick cracked up with laughter. "Man, I better get an Italian tutor fast!"

'I so happy!' Elia wrote, sitting back down again. He threw kisses at the camera, mouthing I. Love. You.

Rick smiled and could hear Elia saying it in his head. "I *luff* you too." He didn't want to get off the computer, ever. They discussed his flight, their plans, and their tears at parting at the airport.

Though Rick tried to be strong, he kept welling up as he typed. Naked, his cock rising and falling depending on

the topic, Rick still had to contact the phone company to get cheap rates to call Italy.

At one point they stopped typing and stared at each other on the tiny box. As if getting an idea, Elia perked up and removed the camera from its perch, showing Rick his room. Rick tried to see the bed, the windows, the pictures, imagining making love to Elia there.

They stayed on line together for nearly three hours, jerked off twice and parted reluctantly with promises of meeting the same time on computer tomorrow. It was nearing eleven Italy time and Rick still hadn't eaten since toast that morning.

Saying goodbye was painful. Rick touched the moving picture of Elia before he shut it off. *'sweet dreams, lover'.*

'and you, my beautiful man'.

When the image went dark, Rick felt empty and alone.

Chapter Fifteen

Rick had never been on a plane flight this long in his life. Though he slept one leg of the journey, he felt cramped, exhausted, and sick of being in a tuna can for an eternity.

It was late when he landed in Milan. The public address announcements were in Italian and his brain was fried.

He was funneled to an immigration section and held onto his passport and small carry-on backpack, hoping he wouldn't have to field too many questions because he couldn't think straight.

After waiting in line he was signaled to a counter and handed a man in uniform his passport. Without another word, the man stamped it and handed it back. Rick waited to see if he had to do anything, but the uniformed man signaled the approach to the next person in line.

"Okay. Whatever." Rick figured he didn't look like a terrorist or the uniformed man was as tired as he was.

He pocketed his passport and kept walking to baggage claim.

Dead on his feet, his watch reading Ohio time, which ironically was five hours earlier but that didn't ease his fatigue.

His bag appeared on the conveyor belt. Rick was happy to see it, surprised it made it through all the transfers.

Shouldering the heavy load, he followed ‘*Uscita*’ signs hoping to locate the man of his dreams just on the outside of the customs area.

The crowd became a blur of noise and waving arms. Rick kept moving through a barrier, outside the secure zone.

“*Ree-ick!*”

At that voice Rick’s heart pumped and he spun around. “Elia!” They scrambled through a mob to reach each other. The minute Rick laid eyes on him he dropped his bag and held out his arms.

Elia leapt to his embrace and squeezed him tight.

“My baby!” Rick’s eyes filled with tears as he inhaled him, burrowing his face into his hair.

“*Bello mio*...so good see you.” Elia kissed each of Rick’s cheeks. “Come. Meet parents.” He picked up Rick’s bag. “We make sex later. Yes?”

“God yes!” Rick laughed, his exhaustion vanishing with his excitement. As he swallowed his nervousness, Rick thought back to the photos he’d seen of Elia’s family in email attachments.

For six months they had jacked off nightly via webcam while moaning in harmony on the phone, emailed love notes and photos, and kept true to each other.

Elia held his hand and escorted Rick to a handsomely dressed couple in their fifties waiting for them outside the ring of arriving passengers and family members.

Rick was impressed. Elia’s parents were as beautiful as he was. He extended his hand to his mayor-father. “*Piacere*, Mr. Gianni.”

“You learn!” Elia slapped Rick on the shoulder.

Heart of Steele

“That’s about it, Elia.” Rick felt his face heat up. Rick shook hands with Elia’s mother and she reached to kiss his cheeks the way Elia had. Mrs. Gianni held Rick’s jaw and said something to Elia.

Rick hoped it was a nice comment.

“Come. You tired. I know trip. I know how feel.” Elia held Rick’s elbow.

“What did your mother say?” Rick whispered while they walked behind Elia’s parents.

“She say you very handsome.”

“Really? I feel like shit.” Rick laughed.

“You no look like shit.” Elia rubbed against him as they walked.

“I missed you.” Rick felt emotional and knew it was because he was so tired. “Two weeks. Here we go again.”

“Shsh! You just come!”

Elia’s mother turned around, a curious expression on her face. Waving at her dismissively, Elia said something and she returned her attention to their destination.

“You’re going to get tired of translating for me.”

“Never. No. You ask, I tell.”

“*Ti amo.*” Rick felt like a love-struck schoolgirl.

“*Ti amo.*”

Rick caught Mrs. Gianni’s smile and looked away shyly.

His bag was stowed in the trunk of a sleek black BMW sedan. Rick and Elia sat in the back seat together, snuggling, Elia’s hand on Rick’s thigh while Elia’s parents asked a few questions in Italian about Rick’s trip.

As the car interior heated up, Rick unzipped his leather jacket and waited as Elia acted as translator.

After a few minutes it grew quiet and Mr. Gianni turned on the radio to what sounded like talk-radio or news

to Rick. He exhaled deeply and rested his head on Elia's shoulder, closing his eyes.

Elia massaged his leg soothingly, but didn't go for a grab of his crotch, even in the dark back seat.

Hearing Mr. and Mrs. Gianni's soft conversation, a lull to his weary ears, Rick was content to be quiet and enjoy the dialect he had fallen in love with.

Rick recognized signs on the highway from Elia's home address. *Monscia*. "Are we close?"

"*Si*. So close. Soon."

Sitting up so he could look out the window, Rick couldn't see much in the dark winter night but head and tail lights. Elia's father drove down an isolated lane. In the light of the car's high beams, Rick made out a stately home. The car ground to a halt on what felt like gravel.

Rick opened the car door, got out, and looked around. The dwelling appeared to be surrounded by a huge plot of land. "Wow."

Elia held Rick's suitcase and handed him the backpack. "Come." He waved Rick onward to the inviting home.

Immediately Rick was hit with the openness of the interior with stone floors and wide arching doorways. It looked nothing like the American homes he had seen. The kitchen had large stainless steel appliances which juxtaposed the old world charm of the exposed wooden beams between white stucco ceilings.

"*Ciao!*"

Rick spun on his heels to see Juliana. The family resemblance was striking.

"*Ree-ack!*" She rushed to him and kissed his cheeks. "Elia is so happy to see you."

Heart of Steele

"I'm happy to see him too." Rick blushed with her attention, loving the fact that they all said his name the same way.

"I luff your accent!" she giggled.

"And I *luff* yours."

Elia clasped Rick's hand. "We go my room." Elia said to his sister, "He is tired."

"Yes. Tired!" Juliana laughed, adding something in Italian.

Rick gave her a little wave as he was whisked off. "What'd she say?"

"She said most like horny, no tired."

"Both." Rick kept moving down the tiled hall.

"Is here." Elia nudged Rick into a bedroom. Before Rick could admire the décor, Elia closed the door and lunged for Rick, knocking him onto the bed. As Rick's head spun in delight, Elia covered him in kisses. Rick held Elia's head through his long hair and met his lips.

Groaning in pleasure, Elia shrugged his jacket off his shoulders and rubbed their crotches together. With a breath he asked, "No too tired?"

"No. Kiss me again." Rick removed his jacket as well, kicking off his shoes and sucking at Elia's lips and tongue. "I want you!"

"Have me." Elia knelt up, opening the buttons of his shirt.

"I can't believe we're going to make love. God, I've missed you. Jerking off all the time isn't the same."

"No. No same," Elia agreed strongly.

They got naked quickly and Elia located a condom and a brand new bottle of lubrication, placing it on the bed.

"Need be inside." Elia shifted to his back and spread his legs.

“Six fucking months waiting for this!” Rick groaned.

“In! In!”

With all the blood rushing to Rick’s dick, he fumbled with the condom wrapper as Elia used the lube to coat his own ass.

Once his cock was sheathed, Rick grabbed the base of Elia’s dick and sucked him. Elia’s length went rigid and throbbed in his mouth.

With his own yearning growing, Rick decided he needed to taste his lover’s cum. He’d gone too long without a fix.

Smearing the gel around Elia’s balls and rim, Rick dipped his finger inside him and felt Elia’s body tighten and push deeper in his mouth. Rick finger-fucked him until Elia released a breath of air between his teeth and came.

Swallowing down his milky spunk, Rick’s own cock bobbed and began to ooze pre-cum. He sat back and caught his breath, staring at Elia’s face.

“I miss. I miss mouth. *Bello mio*, so good to me.”

“I’m about to get a whole lot better.” Rick placed the head of his cock on Elia’s ass. He knew it’d been a long time without penetration, so he went slowly. “You tell me if you want me to stop.”

“No stop.”

“But—”

“No stop! In!” Elia raised his hips off the bed forcing Rick’s cock inside him.

“Holy crap I’m not going to last.” Rick closed his eyes.

“No hold on.” Elia thrust from the bottom. “I want hear you ahgaaad.”

Rick tried to keep a straight face, but it was very funny. “Okay.” He held Elia’s legs and entered Elia to the hilt. He paused a moment to savor the connection before he

Heart of Steele

hammered hard. His body was primed. He had been visualizing screwing Elia for months. Going for it, thrusting to his heart's content, Rick felt the pleasure race through his groin. "I'm there." Rick shut his eyes and pressed as hard as he could against Elia, feeling his dick pulsate and his balls tighten.

Hanging his head, Rick caught his breath and pulled out. "Your parents must think we're being unsociable."

"No. They know what we do." Elia brushed his hair out of his eyes.

"Yeah. I suppose they do." He took off the condom. "What should I do with this?"

Elia pointed to a box of tissues.

After Rick wrapped it up and dropped it on the floor, he collapsed next to Elia and cuddled him close.

"Welcome to *Eeetally*."

"And what a welcome it was." Rick climbed on top of Elia and connected to his mouth for some long, leisurely missed kisses.

Elia knew Rick was dead on his feet, but he also knew it was too early to sleep, local time and Ohio time. He brought Rick to the kitchen where his mother and sister prepared dinner for them.

"Sit. You eat something. I know journey. Terrible food."

"Ya got that right." Rick sat at a darkly stained wooden table with eight chairs surrounding it.

"A drink, Rick?" Juliana asked.

"Anything is fine." Rick smiled.

"Wine?"

Elia exchanged glances with Rick. "Would rather have beer?"

"I'll try the wine."

"You no be polite. You ask for what you need." Elia arranged five ceramic plates around the table.

"I already got that." Rick grinned wickedly.

Juliana laughed and their mother asked in Italian, "What did he say?"

"Nothing." Elia shook his head, smiling at Rick. "You get more later."

"Yum." Rick took the glass of red wine. "*Grazie*, Juliana."

"*Prego*." She blushed.

"No flirt with my boyfriend," Elia said.

"He is gorgeous. Why not?" Juliana responded in Italian.

"I should have learned more *Italiano*." Rick sipped the wine. "They didn't offer it this quarter. I have to take it next." He held up the glass. "Wow. This is nice. I'm used to red wine tasting bitter."

"No bitter." Elia placed silverware around the plates. "No like America wine."

"Hey, don't judge all wines by me. You know I like beer."

Elia asked his sister, "Why don't you get him a beer?"

"He said he wanted wine."

"Uh oh." Rick laughed, "This is beginning to sound like me and Rhonda."

"Is same!" Elia said, "Though Juliana no have pink hair."

Juliana laughed and shook her head.

"Or a muffin top." Rick gestured to her flat belly.

"*Che cosa?* Muffin-top?" she asked.

Heart of Steele

“*Grasso.*” Elia held his hand out in front of his stomach.

“Oh.” She nodded and joined her mother at the stove where she was cooking.

“Rhonda no fat. Just little bit.” Elia placed a basket of bread in the center of the table along with olive oil and small flat plates.

“Call your father to dinner, Elia.”

“Okay, Mom.” Elia said to Rick, “I get father. You want bread?”

“I’ll wait for everyone.”

Elia located his father on the phone in their home office. He waited politely at the door. When he got his father’s attention, Elia mouthed, “Dinner is ready.”

His father nodded in understanding and continued the call. As Elia walked back to the kitchen, he was glad he and his parents had already talked about Rick and his family. Dreading embarrassing questions about Rick’s absent father, Elia knew most things about Rick were already out in the open. There was no need for Rick to be uncomfortable.

When Elia returned, his mother was placing large, painted ceramic bowls of risotto and a salad with mozzarella and gorgonzola cheese on the table.

“Wow.” Rick sat up in his chair.

“My mother very good cook.” Elia took the seat beside him. “You will enjoy.” Holding the basket, Elia said, “Take bread. Dip in olive oil.”

“Really?” Rick tore a chunk of the crusty rustic loaf.

“*Reelee!*” Elia chuckled. He poured oil into the small plate in front of both him and Rick. “Dip. Like this.” Elia dunked his bread into the oil and took a bite.

Rick did the same. His eyes lit up. “I swear the olive oil back home does not taste like that.”

"No. It no taste like that." Elia smiled.

"You start." Juliana held up the bowl of risotto.

"Should we wait for your dad?" Rick asked.

"He be too long. On phone." Elia handed Rick the serving spoon.

"Has he ever had risotto?" Elia's mother asked.

"Yes, I think so." Elia asked Rick, "You have risotto at Brio, *si*?"

"Not like this!" Rick took another mouthful of food. "*Molto buono*, Mrs. Gianni."

Elia lit up at Rick's reply as well as his mother's reaction. She got flustered and blushed modestly at his compliment.

"He likes it," Elia whispered to her.

"He's a delightful man, Elia."

"Thank you, Mom. I think so too." Elia caught Rick's eye, smiled and winked.

Stuffed on fabulous food, including pears and chocolate cake for dessert, Rick couldn't keep his eyes open as they relaxed in a lounge before a roaring fire.

"Bed." Elia elbowed him gently.

"Yeah. I think I'm done. I'm out of it."

Elia stood and he held out his hand to haul Rick off the couch. "*Buonanotte*," Rick said, giving a little wave.

Elia's parents and sister echoed it. Elia threw his mother a kiss. "See you in the morning." He accompanied Rick to a bathroom near his bedroom.

Rick stopped short. "Man, you have a nice house."

The sink counter was marble with two basins. Ceramic tile ran up the walls to nearly the ceiling which was high and painted white. A window with an arched top had two

Heart of Steele

large panes of glass which Rick could see opened like barn doors, side by side. There was a toilet, a huge bathtub, a shower stall and a bidet.

“You want wash in tub?” Elia placed beige, fluffy towels on the sink counter.

“I’m not a bath person.”

“Use shower?”

“Do I stink?” Rick sniffed his own pits.

“No. No stink.” Elia smiled. “Smell good.”

“Can I shower in the morning? I’m wiped.”

“Si! Of course. I just want do what you want.”

“I want to wash my face, brush my teeth and hold you naked.”

“Good.” Elia nodded, laughing.

Getting his wish, Rick closed his eyes in the pitch dark room and couldn’t hear a noise. No cars, no barking dogs, nothing. He wriggled against Elia under the chilly sheets and rested his head on his shoulder. “I’m so glad I’m here.”

“Me as well. I like you in my bed.”

“Mm!” Rick pushed his stiff dick against him. “I’d come again, but I think I need to pass out.”

“Sleep. We play in morning.”

“Any reason to get up early?”

“No. No reason.”

“Goodnight, my love.”

“*Buonanotte, tesoro mio.*”

Chapter Sixteen

The morning was crisp and cold.

Elia spun over to find Rick sleeping soundly. It appeared Rick had gotten his hair cut before the trip. It was shorter than he remembered seeing on the webcam and since his birthday had passed in October, it made Rick look older than his twenty years. Elia admired him as he slept. Living in two worlds was very hard and Elia wanted to have faith in them, but he struggled.

If they were the opposite sex he and Rick could marry, instantly adopting the spouse's country. But gay men? Not a chance.

Elia's life was hollow without Rick with him. His classes were overshadowed by an inner fear that this relationship would not stand the test of time. How could either of them move countries? Did he want to live in America even if he could?

He would have to visit California before making that decision. And if neither he nor Rick could get a permanent visa? What then?

I go there, you come here, what? Two times a year? Once in summer, once in winter? I can't live with that.

Startled out of his contemplation by the sight of Rick's bright blue eyes, Elia felt guilty for his thoughts.

Heart of Steele

“Hi.”

“Hi.” Elia gave him a smile.

Rick stretched his back, reaching his hands over his head. “How long did it take you to feel normal when you came to Ohio?”

“Few days.”

Rick propped up his head in his palm, staring at Elia.

“You cut hair.” Elia ran his fingers through Rick’s blond locks.

“You’re just noticing it?”

“No. I notice. I just pay more ‘tension now.’”

“A-ttention.”

“A-ttention,” Elia repeated.

“Too short?”

“No. Look nice. Man-lee. Look, I cut.” Elia showed Rick the ends of his hair.

“Not much.”

“Few centimeter? Bit.” Elia made a gap between his index finger and thumb.

Rick held Elia’s hair and pulled it behind his head. “You look great with long hair. Would you ever cut it off?”

“I must when get job.”

Settling again with his head in his palm, Rick asked, “You’re never going to move to the States, are you?”

Elia felt an icy chill run down his spine. “Why you say?”

“Because it’s awesome here. I wouldn’t leave.”

“You no can come?”

“I have no idea.”

“You want come?”

Rick flopped to his back and blew out a loud exhale.

Elia crawled closer, resting his leg across Rick's thighs. "What we do?"

Appearing upset, Rick rubbed his face, closing his eyes. "I don't fucking know."

The thought of them never living together angered Elia. "I need go California. How I know what is there?"

"Me too. We can plan a trip there together."

"*Si*. Could plan." Elia smoothed his hand down Rick's abdomen to his pubic hair, feeling his cock was soft, which surprised him. "You no make love?"

Rick turned his face towards the wall.

"No." Elia's heart broke. "No be sad. *Ree-ack*, we try. But so younger, so many years to go."

"I get it." Rick gave Elia his back. "Why did I come?"

A knife-like pain seared through Elia's chest. "You say, why you come? Come to *Eeetally*?"

Rick didn't answer.

"You come be with your Elia?"

"My Elia?" Rick said, "It doesn't sound like you want to be mine in the long run."

"Is problem. *Is* long run." Elia spooned Rick from behind, touching Rick's balls as they bulged from between Rick's thighs.

"Couldn't you have broken up with me before I flew out here?"

"Break? I no break."

Rick looked over his shoulder. "It sounds like you are."

"No. Just long run. Like you say. Long run and who move where?"

"Forget it." Rick curled into the pillow.

"Why you do this? Hmm? I no understand."

Heart of Steele

Rick spun around quickly, making Elia back up nervously.

"You just told me we're too young and it's too long to wait. And now you ask me why I'm doing this?"

"*Sono vent'anni.*"

"What the hell does that mean?"

Elia struggled with the translation. "*Venti.*" He held up his ten fingers twice. "Year."

"You're twenty. So am I. And?"

"When school end, *ventitre*'. Three more, yes?"

"Elia!" Rick appeared exasperated. "What the fuck are you trying to say?"

Would he be ready to leave his family at twenty-three? That's what Elia wanted to say. But the look of devastation in Rick stopped him. He wanted Rick to live in Italy, but that didn't seem like a real option for Rick. He seemed stuck on the idea of California.

"No talk more." Elia drew the covers up to his chin and stared at the ceiling.

"Fuck this." Rick climbed out of bed.

"What you do?"

"I'm leaving." Rick dragged his briefs up his legs.

"No do this!" Elia leapt out of bed and confronted him.

"Why not? You just told me you don't want to be together." Rick's voice broke with a sob. "I borrowed money to come here. Elia..."

Rushing to embrace him, Elia held Rick tightly. "You no leave. No."

"Every night we jacked off, talked dirty, emailed..." Rick didn't hug Elia in return. His hands were limp at his sides. "You led me on. How could you do this to me? What was the point of me coming here? To prove to your family

you had an admirer who would fly a hundred hours to see you? Well, you proved it. I'm outta here."

"No!" Elia tightened his grip. "I no know what you say? Prove admirer? What is this? No. Sit." Elia directed Rick to the bed and knelt in front of him. "Why you so react? You no hear me. I say long time. I say so young. No say, no want."

"You want me to live here. Right?" Rick's eye looked puffy and tired.

"I prefer. I no lie. But three year from today?" Elia shrugged. "I be different man."

"But will you still be my man?"

"I always be your man. In here." Elia placed his hand on his heart.

"And in reality?"

"Is reality. No? In here?" Elia was in agony. The language barrier had never been so impenetrable.

Rick dropped back onto the bed, his feet hanging over the side of the mattress.

Staring at him, Elia held Rick's knees, wondering if he was just exhausted and jet-lagged and that was why he was overly touchy and emotional. Elia didn't think he was doing anything other than voicing his fears. He wanted Rick in his life. Of that he was sure.

He kissed Rick's leg. Rick didn't react.

Elia ran feather-like kisses towards Rick's cock, nuzzling his balls. He felt Rick's tense muscles release. Taking Rick's soft cock out of his briefs and into his mouth, Elia massaged Rick's sack and thighs, feeling Rick's cock grow between his lips. Just as Rick's dick stiffened to its maximum length, Rick drew his heels onto the bed and moved into a wide straddle.

Elia moaned and crawled closer on the bed, handling his heavy testicles and tracing the tip of his finger against

Heart of Steele

Rick's rim. He stripped Rick's briefs off and dropped them onto the floor.

"I can take you inside me now."

Elia heard and paused, trying to understand. Sitting up he asked, "Inside?"

"Yeah."

"You have men?" Elia almost cried.

"No. I have dildo."

"Dildo?"

"Crap. How on earth do I explain this one?" Rick leaned up on his elbows. "Fake dick."

Elia understood. "No!"

"Just shut up and screw me. I'm hoping it worked."

Before he hunted down a condom, Elia sucked Rick again, getting him harder. His own cock throbbed in time with his racing pulse. Elia covered himself with a condom and used his teeth to open the top of the lubrication. He pinched out a blob and capped the tube again. Staring at Rick's reaction as he worked, Elia made Rick's ass slick with gel. He entered like he had the first time, with two fingers.

"Holy crap that always feels amazing." Rick raised his hips to meet Elia's hand.

"Is same like before."

"Nope. This time I'm taking it."

The comment made Elia's cock bob with excitement. He pushed four fingers in. Rick blew out a blast of air, arching his back.

"No?"

"Yes!"

Elia quickly got to his knees and aimed his cock. "I go in."

“Okay.”

As slowly as he could, Elia penetrated Rick’s ass.
“Okay?”

“God, yeah.”

“More in?”

When Rick gripped Elia and jammed his pelvis up, completely enveloping Elia’s cock, Elia gasped in surprise.

“Practice makes perfect.” Rick moaned and began a rhythm of thrusting.

“*Bello mio!* I so happy to be in you!” Elia touched Rick’s cock, feeling how thick it grew from the internal massage. “You happy your Elia in you too.” He laughed.

“Fuck me, lover.”

“*Si.* I fuck good.” Elia braced his arms on either side of Rick and pumped deep and fast. The pleasure began churning in Elia’s groin. This was an unexpected treat he never anticipated. He loved being a bottom, but topping his big, American, athlete boyfriend thrilled him.

“Oh, so close...Ah!” Elia pumped faster, sweat breaking out on his forehead. He heard Rick choking back a groan and opened his eyes. Creamy ribbons of cum shot out of Rick’s cock, spattering Rick’s hairless chest. It sent Elia over the edge. He drove in hard between Rick’s ass cheeks and came, closing his eyes and clenching his teeth.

“*Amante mio,*” Elia breathed, “I no ever leave you.”

Rick reached for Elia’s biceps, dragging him up his body. Elia’s cock slipped out of Rick and he met Rick’s lips, sliding on the spent cum on Rick’s chest.

Rick tumbled them over, pinning Elia to the bed.

The kiss was intense. As intense as the love making. While Elia held onto Rick, he was in awe of the strength of his back muscles. Rick’s powerful build always excited Elia. “I am your Elia? Yes?”

Heart of Steele

“I hope so.” Rick chewed on Elia’s earlobe.

“*Si*. I am your Elia.” When Elia closed his eyes, a hot tear ran down his face.

Afterward

“I never knew I could fall in love so deeply, so completely, with an exchange student from Italy. But I did. Madly in love.” Water filled Rick’s eyes. “That was four years ago. And you know something? We kept in touch every day for four years. *Every day!*” Rick dabbed at his eyes.

“I’m not an immigration attorney, but I don’t see a problem, Mr. Steele. When you get married, Mr. Gianni will be given permanent leave to remain.”

“Call me Rick, please, Mr. Larsen.” He smiled.

“And you call me Jack.”

“Jack. You got it.” Rick laughed. “I’m very glad the laws have changed. We’ve come a long way from the anti-gay marriage bills of the past. Including here in California.”

“We have. We finally live in a world where gay men and women can be together; marry, have children, and are granted the same civil rights as the rest of the citizens of the world. But it took a long hard battle.”

“No kidding. I can’t understand why people being in love and wanting to live as everyone else in society could be so hard.” Rick bit his lip on bitter thoughts. “Anyway, I can’t wait to tell Elia how simple it is. We knew the laws had changed, but I wanted to make sure. You know.” Rick admired Jack’s handsome features shyly. He guessed Jack was nearing forty, but he looked fantastic and fit.

Heart of Steele

“Once you have an authorized copy of your marriage license, come back to see me. I’ll submit the paperwork for you. If I have any problems, I can call another lawyer who specializes in immigration, and refer you.” Jack jotted down notes as he spoke. “I really don’t expect any difficulty. Like I said, we finally have laws which give us equality with straight marriages.”

“Man, did me and Elia time it right, or what? He loves it here. You should see him shopping at the fresh air markets and delis. He’s like a kid in the candy shop.”

“Another man living the American dream.” Jack laughed.

“We both are. I promised him we’d split the time between the U.S. and Italy. So we’re working on either dual citizenship, or just permanent leave in both countries. He’s handling my immigration status to Italy.” Rick wanted to show Elia off to Jack. He had photos in his wallet, he just felt shy to pull them out and wag them around.

“You said he’s been working a job here as well?”

“Yes. He’s working for the Italian consulate.”

“Has he set up accounts here?”

“Yes. We did everything the immigration website recommended. He’s got his own bank account, we registered the phone in his name, loads of things in case just the marriage wasn’t enough.” Rick loosened his tie and unbuttoned the top button of his shirt. “I brought a copy of his bank account statement as well as a letter from his employer.” Rick took the folded paperwork out of his inside jacket pocket, handing it to Jack.

“That might be enough to get him permanently here on its own, but being married is better.” Jack smiled, his blue eyes shining.

“I don’t know how to thank you, Jack.” Rick extended his hand.

“Just be happy. It’s all us guys really want, isn’t it?” Jack took the paperwork.

At the ‘us guys’ comment, Rick noticed a photograph on Jack’s desk; four men wearing tuxedos, including Jack. “Are...are you gay?”

“Yes. And married.” Jack handed him the photo he was admiring. “That’s Adam Lewis, he’s my husband. The other two are also a married couple, Mark Richfield and Steve Miller.”

“Mark Richfield? The model for the cologne?”

“That’s him.”

Rick licked his lips at the handsome men. “I love LA.” He set the frame back on the desk. “I never would have guessed you were a gay man, Jack.”

“I could say the same about you.”

“Duh. I’ll shut up now.” Rick felt his face heat up. “Since we’re showing off our lovers.” Rick took his wallet out of his back pocket. He held up a recent photo of him and Elia. “This is us a few months ago, but this one...” Rick removed one from behind a sleeve, “is how we looked when we first met. He was an exchange student.”

“Nice! He looked great with the long hair. Shame he had to cut it.”

“Still a knock-out in my book.” Rick stared at Elia’s photo for a minute before pocketing his wallet.

“He is. I’d love to meet him.”

“Would you?” Rick lit up. “You know, we don’t know many people around here. We haven’t lived here for very long. And all our family is either back in Ohio or Italy.”

“Call anytime. I have a great group of gay friends who would love to meet both of you.” Jack handed him his business card. “Here’s my mobile phone number.”

Heart of Steele

Rick reciprocated, handing him his. "You're awesome." He stood up and smiled. "I'll let you know when we get married."

"Bring Elia by. I'd love to meet him."

"I will." Rick walked to his office door. "Thanks again, Jack."

When Rick was back on the street, he took his phone out of his pocket, hitting speed dial.

"Italian Consulate, Elia Gianni speaking, may I help you?"

"Hey, hot stuff." Hearing his lover's voice, Rick walked to the parking garage with a hard-on.

"Hello, my love."

"Pick a wedding date."

"No!"

"Si!" Rick laughed.

"I so luff you!"

"I so luff you too! I want to suck your dick." Rick peeked around the shady parking garage, looking for his car.

"Come to me."

"On my way." Rick flipped close his mobile phone and climbed into his car.

Elia headed down to the parking garage and checked his watch. The minute he spotted Rick's sleek sports car the blood rushed to his crotch. He jogged to meet Rick, who leaned over to open the passenger's door for him. Elia kissed him quickly and closed the door. "Go there. By corner."

Rick backed into a space and shut the engine.

"What lawyer say?"

"He said when we get married, you would immediately be able to stay. Just like straight couples. He wants our marriage license and some forms filled out. It didn't sound complicated."

"I speak to office. They say same thing if we go Italy. So?"

"So? Do you want to be my wife?"

"Elia Steele?"

Rick opened Elia's belt and zipper. "Yeah. Or Rick Gianni. I don't care. Just be mine."

Closing his eyes as Rick sank to his lap, taking his cock into his mouth, Elia replied, "*Si*. You have Elia like wife. So, why no make wife?"

"Mm!" Rick drew harder.

"Rick Steele have heart like steel, yes? So strong!"

"Hush up and come." Rick quickened his pace.

Elia tensed his leg muscles and closed his eyes, combing his fingers through Rick's short blond hair. "Oh, luffer, I close now." He felt Rick's fingers massaging his ass and balls. When it hit, Elia thrust his crotch against Rick's face and groaned.

While the cum shot out of him, Elia shivered and gripped Rick's head. Rick released his suction and sat up, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "*Delizioso*."

"I so luff you." Elia urged him to his lips, tasting his own cum on Rick's tongue.

"Thank you."

"For?"

"For coming to LA. For living here. For making me the happiest fucker on the planet."

"I no think we make it but we do." Elia tucked his cock back into his pants.

"Any regrets?" Rick caressed Elia's hair.

"No. Is nice here. No regrets."

"I'll let you get back to work. I'm buying you a ring."

Though it was spoken like a warning, Elia laughed. "I must buy too, yes?"

Heart of Steele

“Yes.” Rick tugged Elia close and kissed him again. “I can’t tell you how excited I am to make it official.”

“We must have *la mia famiglia...si?*”

“Absolutely. We’ll have two ceremonies. One here, one in Italy.” Rick drove Elia back to the building entrance.

“Ah!” Elia jumped in excitement. “*Buono! Si.* I like.”

“See you at home.” Rick leaned over for another kiss.

Elia interlocked his fingers around Rick’s neck and made it a kiss worth remembering.

“Now I want to fuck you.”

“You will. Later.” Elia cupped Rick’s face.

“Bye, babe.”

“Bye.” Elia climbed out and waved as Rick drove off. He tucked in his shirt, straightened his tie and smoothed back his hair.

What was there not to like here? He had the beach, beautiful weather, great food, and a strong community for support.

He never imagined finding his true love at nineteen and leaving Italy. But then again, life gives and life takes away. He was just proud to live in a place that accepted love of all kinds. It was a hard battle to win, but they had won it.

“And I also win the heart of Steele.” Elia smiled and headed to his office.

The End

About the Author

Award-winning author G. A. Hauser was born in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, USA, and attended university in New York City. She moved to Seattle, Washington where she worked as a patrol officer with the Seattle Police Department. In early 2000 G.A. moved to Hertfordshire, England, where she began her writing in earnest and published her first book, *In the Shadow of Alexander*. Now a full-time writer in Ohio, G.A. has written dozens of novels, including several bestsellers of gay fiction. For more information on other books by G.A., visit the author at her official website at: www.authorgahauser.com.

G.A. has won awards from All Romance eBooks for Best Novel 2007, *Secrets and Misdemeanors*, Best Author 2007. Best Novel 2008, *Mile High*, and Best Author 2008.

Author Note

In celebration of my fiftieth novel I would like to share with you the short story of an aspiring, not-yet-published author.

Enjoy!

**ABOVE AND BELOW
THE SURFACE**
MICHAEL ZEPHYR

Dedication

To:

GA Hauser

My Mentor – My Friend

* * * * *

Edwin

My Friend – My Husband

* * * * *

And to All of Us

Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder

Chapter One

Dinner Party

“Thanks but no thanks, I’ll pass.”

“Oh c’mon, Pauly, just this time?” Diana said.

“Di honey, every time I’ve been invited to one of your dinner parties, you know how it goes. There’s no one there I ever click with. And I always end up sitting in a corner looking like a goddamned wallflower with no one to mingle with. No, Di. No.”

“Please? Pauly, *please*?” Diana asked with a pleading voice.

“Christ. You and your knack for reeling me in. What am I going to do with you, Di? You always have to win, you know that? God, you can be such a royal pain in the ass at times,” Paul Stephens said jovially.

“I love you too, Pauly. Dinner’s at seven.”

“Whatever. Okay. I’ll be there. But when the clock strikes eight and I turn into a wallflower, I’m outta there.”

“You drive such a hard bargain, Pauly. See you at seven.”

Paul hung up the phone and rolled his eyes. He and Diana had been the best of friends for years. On a daily basis, they were phone calling, emailing, and texting each other. Diana’s passion however was throwing those damned dinner parties—

Michael Zephyr

repeatedly. Diana loved to entertain. And Paul loved Diana. However, he generally couldn't stand her choice of friends.

Or perhaps what was really bothering Paul was the one thing he knew was lacking in his life: an intimate companion to call his own.

Paul was "fashionably late." That is, he purposely arrived at the dinner party about forty-five minutes late. *I hate arriving early at these things. It's so much easier getting there after everyone has arrived.*

He rang the doorbell. Within a moment, Diana enthusiastically answered the door with a glass of white wine in her hand. "Pauly! It's about time you got here. What took you so long?"

Paul reacted with the 'give me a break look' while taking off his coat. He tossed it in her arms and reluctantly headed inside.

"Well, hello to you too," Diana said with a giggling laugh.

When Paul entered the dining room, he saw about a dozen guests seated at the long dinner table. Most of them appeared to be giving him the "You're late" stare. Paul would have loved to flip them all off. But of course he knew his manners and politely smiled at the guests while sitting down at the remaining available seat towards the end of the table.

Diana followed right behind, taking her place at the head of the table on the other end. "Go on, Ryan," she said.

Ryan, who looked like a pathetic Ken doll and appeared to be in his early to mid-thirties pompously continued on with his schpiel, "As I was saying before our *late* guest arrived..."

Asshole, Paul thought.

"Stacey and I just got back from our ski trip in Colorado. Of course we stayed at The Aspen Four Seasons..."

Above and Below the Surface

Is this plastic schmuck for real? Paul glanced over at Diana trying to silently communicate to her, ‘See, this is why I don’t like to come to your dinner parties.’

Diana returned the stare. “Chill, Pauly. He’s not that bad of a guy.” Then she threw Paul a kiss in return.

As Ryan went on with his endless bragging, Paul decided to just tune him out while glancing at the other guests at the table. The woman who looked like a bimbo of a Barbie doll sitting next to Ryan while mesmerized with his bragging must be Stacey. *She’s probably so vacant that when she walks, air whistles between her ears.* Paul continued to inspect the other guests. They all seemed to be intently listening to Ryan’s story, except for two others at the end of the table; a stout woman and a handsome man in a wheelchair with a nicely shaped angular face, a dark mane of brown hair with a few wisps of gray, and a very well-trimmed goatee.

Wow, and a good looking man at that too. Actually, make that very good looking. Paul quickly glanced back at the man in the wheelchair who appeared sad. Paul could tell he didn’t want to be at the dinner party either. The stocky woman next to him seemed to be just as bored. *Where does Diana know those two from?*

“...and next week, we’re off to Hawaii for some water skiing and aloha fun!” Ken-doll-Ryan went on non-stop.

Diana politely interrupted and began to get up from the table. “I’m off to the kitchen to serve us the next course.”

Paul spoke up, “I’ll come and help you.”

When they both got into the kitchen, Paul asked Diana, “Where the hell did you pick up the Barbie and Ken Nightmare Set from?”

“Stacey’s the front office manager where I work. I invited her tonight, but she’d only come if her husband Ryan could come too. Naturally, I couldn’t say no.”

Michael Zephyr

“Jesus, Diana.” Paul became enthusiastic when he asked, “Tell me, the man in the wheelchair. Who’s he?”

“Why, Pauly, you appear to have a gleam in your eye. Are you finally enjoying one of my dinner parties?”

“No. And answer my question.”

“His name is Larry. That’s all I really know about him. He’s been quiet the whole time he and Sara have been here,” Diana said.

“And is Sara his wife, girlfriend, significant other, yadda yadda yadda?”

“I don’t think so. I think Sara’s just a friend of his. When I invited her, she asked if she could bring a friend along. Of course I said yes.”

“Well, the good thing is,” Paul said with a satisfied smile on his face, “Larry appears as turned off to the asshole Ken doll as I am. By the way, I find him quite good looking.”

“Ryan?” Diana asked.

“No silly, Larry. He’s *the* good looking one. Though he appears to be quite sad for some reason,” Paul said feeling concerned.

Diana handed Paul a large platter which was the main dish. “C’mon lover boy, let’s head back to the guests.” Diana grabbed a casserole while Paul followed right behind her with the platter.

Paul purposely placed the platter down on the table in front of Larry while giving him a glance. He looked into the most incredible emerald eyes he’d ever seen. Larry stared back at Paul. There was definitely magnetism as they gazed at each other. Though the time they spent looking at each other only lasted a few seconds, it certainly seemed like an eternity to Paul.

Wow! He is incredibly handsome. Paul slowly went back to his seat not taking his eyes off of Larry. Larry was the first to break the eye contact and resumed looking depressed.

Above and Below the Surface

“How about I tell you all this incredible joke I heard the other day?” Ryan went on, “Did you hear about the blonde who dated the cripple? I found it fucking hilarious...”

Just then Larry spoke up, “Excuse me.” He abruptly turned his chair around and wheeled himself out of the room. Looking concerned, Sara quickly got up and followed Larry. The whole table went deathly silent as Larry and Sara headed out of the room.

“What’d I say wrong?” Ryan asked sarcastically, looking towards the doorway. “Geez dude, get a grip.”

Paul had had enough. “Ryan, not only are you a complete jerk, but an insensitive one at that.” He pulled out his chair, threw his napkin on the table and stormed out of the room. In the background, he could still hear Ryan’s obnoxious voice.

Paul approached the living room’s sliding glass door while looking out at Sara and Larry on the patio. Sara was sitting next to Larry, stroking his hair. Larry’s head was bowed down.

Is he crying? Jesus, that must have hurt when that asshole Ryan began to blurt out that terribly rude joke. Slowly he opened the sliding door and walked out to join them.-

Larry instantly stopped crying and avoided Paul’s gaze.

Sara smiled at Paul.

“Okay if I join you two?” Paul asked.

“Of course,” Sara said.

“I’m Paul, and you are?”

“Sara. And this is Larry.”

Paul shook hands with Sara. He liked her instantly.

Feeling excited, Paul next held out his hand to shake Larry’s. “I’m Paul.”

Larry remained silent.

After a few moments, Paul lowered his hand, sitting down in the chair next to Larry. “What happened back in there was

Michael Zephyr

unacceptable. Ryan's an asshole who should not have cracked that insensitive joke. If there's anyone I can't stand...it's a braggart who's also a grade-A schmuck."

Sara laughed sarcastically. "That obvious to you too?"

"Extremely." Paul joined her laughter. "You know, I didn't want to come to this dinner party, but Diana always talks me into these things. She may be a good friend, but she always finds a way to get me to come."

Suddenly Larry looked up at Paul. Larry's eyes were slightly red from crying. He sounded angry. "Then why did you?"

"I beg your pardon?" Paul asked.

"Why didn't you just tell Diana that you weren't going to come to this fucking pathetic soirée?" Larry said.

Poor guy. He's really hurt and upset. "It's a long story," Paul replied. "Suffice it to say I'm a wimp when it comes to Diana. I guess I'm one of those people who don't know how to say no."

Larry gazed right at him. "I'm sorry. That was rude of me to snap at you."

"No, it wasn't."

"It's that plastic yuppie jerk that's got me all pissed off. Not you," Larry said.

Again, Paul and Larry's eyes locked in a long passionate gaze. They both remained silent for a while.

Sara smiled. "I'm going inside." Then she made her polite exit.

"How do you know Diana?" Larry asked.

"We've been friends since we were kids. Since then Diana and I have been like brother and sister. And yes, she always invites me to her dinner parties. And if you can keep a secret, Larry, I do adore Diana. But I find her—to borrow your words—soirées, fucking pathetic."

Above and Below the Surface

That put a smile on Larry's face.

"And how do you know Diana?"

"Sara's a friend of hers. So, she also dragged me here. I'll admit to you, I didn't know how to say 'no' to this event either."

He's not only incredibly good looking. He's a beautiful person.

"It appears we have not being able to 'just say no' in common," Paul said laughing.

Larry asked, "What's so funny?"

"'Just say no.' Wasn't that Nancy Reagan's pop phrase back in the eighties?"

Larry put his finger down his throat in a parody of trying to throw up. "Oh yeah, how can one forget?" He joined in the laughter.

"So tell me about yourself, Larry," Paul asked.

Larry instantly appeared upset. "What's to tell? Can't you see my lovely fate?" He pointed down to the wheels on his chair. "And that's the obvious thing to tell. Pretty much an unexciting life."

Paul almost felt tears in his eyes hearing Larry say that. "Well, as the cliché goes, 'You're not alone.'"

"How so?"

"My life isn't exciting at all."

"But you *can* walk."

"So? It doesn't mean that makes my life any more exciting."

"But you can just get up and go do anything, anytime you want. As for me? Oh shit, sorry. I probably sound like I'm whining," Larry said.

"No you're not. Go on."

"I thought I was the only one with a boring life."

Michael Zephyr

"Cliché time again. 'You're not alone.' Look, Larry, even if I can walk, it doesn't necessarily mean my life is exciting. Hmmm." Paul had a thought.

"Yes?" Larry asked.

Ask him. Now's the opportunity. "Perhaps we could try to do something exciting together."

"Oh?"

"Dinner?"

"Oh no, I'm not going back in that room with Mr. Yuppie Asshole," Larry replied.

"No, I mean dinner someplace else. Just you and me."

"You're serious?" Larry asked, "As in a *date*?"

"I mean as in, 'dinner' together." Paul smiled. "But if you want to call it a date...then yes, as in a date."

Larry appeared skeptical. "God, here I am thirty-eight years of age and no one has ever asked me out on a date. Gee, I wonder why?" He pointed towards the chair's wheels.

"Well, here I am, a forty-two year old that finds you at thirty-eight years of age, nice. And attractive."

Larry smiled. "Is that a pass?"

"If I said no, I'd be lying," Paul said.

"Flatterer." Larry laughed.

"Thanks for the compliment. And besides, I've never had the opportunity to flatter a good looking man before."

"Well, I can't walk and you can. But I suppose that couldn't keep us from having dinner together?"

"I take it, that's a 'yes' answer?" Paul felt excited.

"If I said no, I'd be lying," Larry answered wryly.

They laughed together. Paul also didn't realize that over the past few minutes they had moved towards each other and were only a few inches apart.

Above and Below the Surface

Oh, how I would like to kiss those incredibly sensual lips of yours. But I don't want to scare you away by being too forward. Paul said, "Tomorrow night then?"

"Yes." Larry smiled. "But..."

"Why is there always a 'but' with a pleasant answer?"

"Do you know how to lift me from the chair and into your car so when we get to the restaurant you can help wheel me in? Especially because most places aren't wheelchair accessible?"

"Nope—"

Before Paul finished his sentence, Larry added, "I thought so." He looked away from Paul.

"You didn't let me finish what I was saying." Placing his hand gently on Larry's shoulder, Paul went on, "But if an attractive man like you tells me what to do to assist making the evening as pleasant as possible for you, I can certainly give it a try. Wheelchair accessible or not."

"So? You think I'm attractive?" Larry said, "Well, if I'm attractive, then you're kind—"

"Oh, it was nothing."

This time it was Larry's turn to say, "And now you didn't let me finish my sentence. As I was saying...Well, if I'm attractive, then you're kind...and attractive too."

Paul was stunned. He felt tears forming at the back of his eyes. "No other man has ever told me that before."

"Oh come on. I'm sure other guys would stand in line for you."

Paul waved his arm around to emphasize the empty area around the patio. "I don't see any line. Do you? You're the only one in line now."

Both men continued their friendly and easy conversation sitting side by side. Before they knew it, time had passed from dusk well into the evening.

Michael Zephyr

The sliding door opened and Sara stepped out onto the patio. Looking at both men, she had a pleasant expression on her face. "I hate to break this up, but it's time to go, Larry." She walked to the back of his chair to assist wheeling him out to the car.

Paul stood up. "May I?"

"Of course," Sara said with a smile.

Paul grabbed the handles on the back of Larry's chair and helped wheel him through the house. All the other dinner guests had already left. Carefully he rolled Larry through the front door and gently down the porch steps, then the front walk.

Diana joined them to say goodnight to Sara and Larry. She stopped by Paul. "You're staying longer, aren't you?"

"Nope," Paul replied.

Larry laughed.

"What's so funny?" Diana asked.

"Your best friend just learned how to 'just say no,'" Larry said.

Paul joined in the laughter. He continued to wheel Larry to their car with Sara and Diana tagging behind. When they reached the car, Paul opened the door. "Tell me what to do."

"You sure?" Larry asked.

"Well, I did wheel you all the way out here. And with no ramps to boot. I didn't even let you bump or fall."

"This is true. Okay. Open the car door. Then lift me from the chair and set me on the seat."

Sara pulled the key fob from her pocket and chirped the car door locks open.

Paul put one arm around Larry's back and slipped his other arm under his legs. Effortlessly he lifted Larry from the chair. He placed him on the car's front passenger's seat.

Larry had an incredulous look on his face. "How did you so easily lift a five-ten, one hundred and sixty pound man?"

Above and Below the Surface

Paul smiled. "I take my vitamins."

Sara laughed. "Well, you're a hell of a lot stronger than I am!"

Larry continued, "Now, if you can, fold my chair and place it behind my seat."

Paul fumbled with the wheelchair while everyone watched. Before he had the chance to let embarrassment set in, he finally located the latch to get it to fold. After that, the chair easily slipped behind Larry's car seat.

Everyone applauded.

Paul blushed as he took a courtly bow. "Thanks." He closed the car door for Larry, motioning his hand for Larry to roll the window down. He pulled his out wallet from his back pocket, taking a piece of paper from it. "Does anyone have something to write with?"

Larry fumbled in the glove compartment and found a pen, handing it to Paul.

Paul wrote on the paper, giving the pen back to Larry. "Here's my phone number. Call me tomorrow morning and let me know what time is good for dinner?"

"Why do *I* have to call you?" Larry asked sarcastically.

Paul felt dejected.

Larry smiled. "I mean, I can tell you now what time is good for dinner. Six o'clock tomorrow night. By the way, do you have an extra piece of paper?"

With a big smile, Paul pulled a piece from his wallet and handed it to Larry.

Larry scribbled his phone number on the paper and handed it back to Paul. "You can call me too, you know."

"Really? When's a good time to call?"

"Tomorrow, I hope," Larry said, grinning. "Goodnight."

Again, they silently made intense eye contact. Paul leaned forward into the car.

Michael Zephyr

And they kissed. The moment their lips touched Paul felt a warm and pleasant electric charge pulsate throughout his body. It had only been a few seconds until their lips parted, but it seemed like hours.

“See you tomorrow,” Paul whispered.

“Tomorrow,” Larry whispered back.

As Sara got settled into the car and started up the engine, Larry rolled the window back up, waving to Paul.

Paul stood on the curb with an ear to ear smile on his face while waving back as they drove away.

Diana wrapped one arm around his and looked up at him. “Well, well, well... I’ve never seen Pauly Stephens light up like this before.”

Paul raised an eyebrow at her. “Like what?”

“Like something exciting has happened to you. Or should I say, *someone?*”

“We’ll just have to wait and see. Won’t we?” *God, I hope so.*

Chapter Two

Date

Around noon the next day, the phone rang.

I'd better not pick it up on the first ring or I'll appear too desperate.

Halfway into the second ring, Paul quickly picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hi, Paul. It's Larry."

Whew. "Hi Larry, how are you doing?"

"If I said 'not good,' I'd be lying."

"I'll second that motion," Paul said.

Though Paul suspected both men were excited at each end of the phone line, an awkward silence followed.

Paul continued, "Are we still on for dinner?"

"Is it okay if I say, I sure hope so?"

"Is it okay, you ask? Let me think...hmm, I also sure hope we're on for dinner."

"Pick me up at six?"

"Of course I will. By the way, I know this Vietnamese restaurant nearby that has great food."

Michael Zephyr

Larry laughed. "Haven't had Vietnamese food yet. My general rule for trying food I haven't sampled is, as long as it doesn't bite back."

Paul laughed with him.

Another awkward silence followed. Larry broke the pause and gave Paul directions to his house. They both said their goodbyes before hanging up.

The rest of the afternoon, Paul was flying on The Great Cloud of Excitement. *I hope Larry is too.*

Paul drove down the street looking for Larry's address.

Will he look as good as he did last night? Or was I overly infatuated? Take it easy, Paul. It's just dinner for Christ sake. Yeah, right. What if it is a disaster? What if? What if? What if? Jesus, Paul, give it a rest. You just met him last night!

Before he had the opportunity to continue his mental ping-pong, he spotted the house with the porch ramp in front and parked his car. As his heart paced twice as fast as normal, he walked up the ramp and knocked on the front door.

After a few moments, the door opened. "Wow!" He enthusiastically exhaled.

"Wow?" Larry said.

Paul felt his cheeks blush. "Er, sorry."

"Sorry?"

"I mean..." Paul knew he turned a deeper shade of red
"You look great."

"I do?"

"Yes. You do, Larry."

"Then I suppose it's my turn to say, you look good too, Paul. Real good."

"Wow."

"There you go saying 'Wow' again. Do I bring out the wow factor in you, Paul?"

Above and Below the Surface

"I'd be lying if I said you didn't." Paul leaned down to Larry and gave him a nice passionate kiss. This time he reached to the back of Larry's head and ran his hand through his mane of dark hair.

Larry's hand caressed Paul's cheek and then his chin.

As they continued to kiss, Paul felt the same electric charge that sparked every nerve in his body. And it appeared Larry did as well.

When the kiss parted, Larry let out a long contented sigh. "Wow."

Paul laughed. "Now it's your turn to say, 'Wow.'"

"Shall we go to dinner?" Larry asked.

"After you, sir," Paul said as Larry began to roll his chair towards Paul's car. Paul jogged ahead and opened the car door. As before, he picked Larry up and placed him in the front passenger seat. This time he effortlessly folded Larry's chair and put it behind the front seat.

As they approached the Vietnamese restaurant, Larry was the first to speak. "Well, I'll be. The restaurant has ramps for the disabled. Now that's a rarity."

"That's one of the reasons I chose this restaurant. For their ramps and the food," Paul said proudly.

Larry looked at Paul. "Wow...for the restaurant...and for your thoughtfulness."

Paul was the first to set down his menu while Larry kept on reading his.

"I have absolutely no idea what to order," Larry said.

"How about I order for the two of us?"

"Wow," Larry said again sarcastically. Their mutual laughter was heard throughout the restaurant.

Michael Zephyr

The meal was wonderful as was the conversation. Paul loved the way they kept making goo-goo eyes back and forth at each other.

Larry spoke up, "May I be so bold as to ask you something?"

"Go ahead."

"How did you get to be so good looking?"

Paul felt his face blush again. "Funny, I was wondering the same thing about you."

Larry smiled. "I asked first."

"Dunno. And you?"

"I'm actually ugly. You just happen to find me good looking," Larry said sarcastically.

That made Paul upset.

"Sorry," Larry said, "It's still hard to believe someone finds me attractive. I've never experienced this before with anyone. I mean who wants to be with a guy confined to a wheelchair?" Larry cast his eyes down.

"Me." Paul reached over and gently raised Larry's chin. "Larry, to hell with 'everyone else' and all that shit. I really *do* find you attractive. When I got to that damned dinner party last night, there you were at the other end of the table. I didn't see a disabled man in a wheelchair. I saw a great guy and a very good looking guy at that."

Larry remained silent looking directly at Paul. Within a few seconds a tear rolled down his cheek followed by another. "Thank you."

Paul reached for Larry's hand. "You're welcome. How about we go somewhere else?"

"Okay," Larry said softly.

When they were both back in the car, Paul was about to put his key in the ignition. Before he started the engine, Larry reached for his hand. "Paul, wait."

Above and Below the Surface

“Okay.” Paul put the keys in his pocket and looked at Larry. “Yes?”

Larry took Paul’s chin in his hand and pulled him close. This time along with their passionate kiss, they embraced. As they continued kissing, both slowly opened their lips to let each other’s tongue in. Paul thought the mutual male taste along with the herbs from the delicious lemon grass chicken dinner was incredible. Within a few moments their warm tongues were fervently waltzing. Their hands were on each other’s faces and in each other’s hair.

Paul was incredibly hard and moist, and hoped Larry was as well.

As they came up for air, Paul was the first to speak, “How about we go back to your place?”

Larry smiled. “I’d be lying if I said that I didn’t want to.”

They laughed again. And embraced. And kissed again. And again.

When they got back to Larry’s house, Paul followed Larry through the front door and closed it.

Larry turned his chair towards Paul. Suddenly Larry looked anxious. With a shaky voice he said, “Thanks for the ride home.”

“Larry, what is it? Are you okay?”

“Actually, I’d like to say goodnight. Thanks for the dinner. But I’d like to be alone now.”

“Wait a minute, Larry. You invited me in and now you’re asking me to leave? What’s not right with this picture?”

“Please, Paul. Go,” Larry said in a curt voice.

Something was keeping Paul from leaving. He wanted to get to the bottom of what was bothering Larry. “No, Larry. Not until you tell me what’s upsetting you.”

Michael Zephyr

Abruptly Larry turned his chair around and wheeled himself out of the room. Paul watched him go down the hallway, into another room and slam the door shut.

Something's hurting him. I have a hunch what it is. But should I leave? No.

He walked down the hallway and knocked on the door. "Larry? What is it? Please tell me." When he put his ear against the door, he was sure he could hear Larry sobbing.

"I said go!" Larry yelled.

"No! Look, Larry, you told me last night I'm a wimp around Diana. Well, I don't want to be a wimp now." Paul couldn't believe he didn't want to leave. Usually he would hightail it out of there. But even knowing this man only for a day, there was something that made him stay and adamantly not want to leave.

What seemed like a couple of hours were actually only a couple of minutes. Finally Larry opened the door. He looked at Paul with red, teary eyes. "Okay...so, you don't want to leave. Now I'll convince you to leave. Come in here and sit on the bed."

Paul stood frozen outside of the bedroom. Larry rolled towards him and grabbed Paul's arm, angrily yanking him in the room. He pushed Paul towards the bed and ordered, "I said, sit down!"

Paul sat on the bed feeling confused. "What did I do, Larry?"

"Everything! Nothing! God-damn-it! Other than being a totally kind son of a bitch, you did nothing!" Larry said, "You might as well know. This is why all the others took off running. Now it's your turn to run."

Paul didn't know what to do other than remain in place and let Larry go on.

Larry turned his chair towards Paul. Slowly Larry ran both his hands down his own right leg...and, pulled it...off. As he

Above and Below the Surface

shook the prosthesis in front of Paul, he asked, "Ready to leave now? This is why all the other guys that 'wanted to date the cripple' ran. They're always touched that I'm in a wheelchair. But when they find out the reason why, they split. No one wants to get involved with an amputee." Larry placed the prosthesis in his own lap, then he hid his face in his hands. "Go ahead, Paul. Run."

"No."

"No, what?" Larry asked with a tear-stained face.

"No, I won't leave. I'm not 'the rest of them', Larry. And furthermore I never will be like any of 'them' either."

Larry looked up at Paul. "What do you mean you'll never be like any of them?"

"How did you lose your leg?"

"What difference does it make?"

Paul leaned forward and said with a compassionate, soft voice, "Because I want to know why. Because I care."

Both men silently remained in place. The tension was thick enough to split rails.

Then Larry spoke, "Oh what the hell... When I was sixteen, I had just gotten my driver's license. I was thrilled to be able to drive a car on my own. Well, as I was driving home from the store while passing a schoolyard and a kid suddenly chased a ball into the street. I instantly swerved the car out of the way and ran into a brick wall head on. The next thing I knew was waking up in the hospital bandaged, in pain, and without half of my right leg."

"Okay," Paul said.

Larry laughed sarcastically with an angry expression on his face. "Okay, you say? Do you know the shit I've been through with all this! Do you?"

"No, Larry, I don't know all the shit you've been through after your accident. I'm sure though it's been pure hell."

Michael Zephyr

“Well that’s putting it mildly.”

Now it was Paul’s turn to get angry. “Larry, do you think you’re the only person that has gone through this kind of shit?”

“Oh puh-leez, spare me the ‘I feel sorry for the cripple’ pity pot lecture.”

Paul got up from the bed and stood in front of Larry. “Maybe I should leave. Would that make you feel better? You could take me and put me up on the pedestal of rejection along with all the other men that have. Is that what you want? Because you’re doing a pretty good job at trying to push me away.”

“Fuck you, Paul!”

“Fuck you, Larry!” Paul sat back down on the bed and took a deep breath to calm down. Then he placed his head in his hands. Now it was his turn to shed tears. “And I thought I was so alone with my own shit. How do you like that? I always thought I was the defective one.” After a few minutes he looked back up at Larry. He reached over to Larry’s lap and gently took the prosthesis from him and set it down on the floor next to the bed. Next he stood up and faced Larry.

I can’t believe I’m about to do this. Slowly Paul began to unbutton his shirt, taking it off.

“What in the hell do you think you’re doing?”

“Shut up, Larry.”

Larry opened his mouth to protest, but he closed it just as quickly. As angry as he was, he could see Paul had quite a masculine, hairy chest; his broad shoulders, arms and legs were also nicely defined.

Paul unzipped his pants and slowly took them off.

Larry was mesmerized.

Finally, Paul removed his briefs and stood completely naked in front of Larry.

Above and Below the Surface

Larry continued to gaze at Paul's naked body. "Oh...my...God...Paul, you're fine-looking." *And you have a delicious cock too.* "But why did you stay here? What could you possibly want with someone like me?"

Paul sat back down on the bed. "Larry, there is something I want to tell you."

Now it was Larry's turn to see Paul was hurting. Reluctantly, he rolled forward and took Paul's hand in his.

Paul continued, "A long time ago when I was five years old, I was awoken in the middle of the night by screaming along with the acrid smell of smoke. The fire was moving so rapidly, I barely had any time to get out of bed and run out of the house. As I was running through the living room towards the front door, flames caught on the back of my pajamas." Paul took a deep breath and said, "Suddenly my whole backside was on fire. As I ran screaming in pain, while in flames out the front door, I was lucky that one of the neighbors was there to quickly lay me on the grass to get the flames out. Then she watered me down with our garden hose. Within minutes I was rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. When I woke up a few days later, crying and in excruciating pain, I was calling out for my mother. They sedated me again. The next day when I woke up I was told both my parents and my sister were instantly killed in the fire. I was the only survivor." He paused for a moment. "I didn't know what was worse, the physical pain of third degree burns on the backside of my body or the news of my family being killed. How does a five year old cope with all of that?"

"Oh, Paul..."

"Then the surgeries and the skin grafts came to try to restore the damage. But what was worse than the fire and losing my family was the hell I went through over the years: The recurring nightmares of the fire and the torment the other kids put me through, treating me like I was a freak." Paul paused for a moment and it seemed like he was caught up in his memories.

Michael Zephyr

“But over the years, Diana is the only true friend I’ve ever had that knew what happened. You see, she lived next door. It was her mother that put out the flames on my back. Her father was the one who called both the fire department and an ambulance. After I slowly began to recover, Diana’s parents adopted and raised me. Diana became my sister and best friend.”

Paul said, “Now that I’m physically ‘scarred for life’ I can’t go anywhere with my shirt off or wear shorts. The looks and comments I get from people always do me in. Prepare yourself.”

Paul stood up and turned around for Larry to view his naked backside.

Larry was able to see the result of the burns and skin graft scars along with some slight discoloration in various areas. The damage ran all the way from Paul’s neck down the length and width of his back, his ass, his legs and the heels of his feet.

Paul stood there for a few more seconds before he reached down to put his clothes back on.

“No,” Larry said, “Don’t.”

“Don’t what? Don’t stay? You don’t want to be with the freak?” Paul said sarcastically.

“No. I mean, wait. Please don’t put your clothes back on. Let me look at you.” Larry paused for a few seconds. “Paul, you’re beautiful. Front and back. I mean it. And by the way, if you don’t mind my saying, you have an incredible ass. I must admit, I kept noticing that last night at the dinner party when you got up to help Diana in the kitchen and when you walked out to talk to me on the patio. And it still looks just as fine to me now...as does the rest of you.”

Paul turned around with tears in his eyes.

“Paul?”

“Yes, Larry?”

“I have a confession to make.”

Above and Below the Surface

"I'm all ears, Larry."

"I can actually walk with my prosthesis on. It's a terribly embarrassing limp. I look like a circus clown while I walk since my shorter leg is partially paralyzed. That's why I prefer to be in the chair. People don't react to seeing someone in a wheelchair. But when they see someone with a funny limp, well, you know what I mean."

"Thank you for telling me. And now I have a confession for you."

Larry tilted his head. "Oh?"

"I already knew you wore a prosthesis."

"You did? How?" Larry asked.

"Well, last night when I lifted you into the car after the dinner party, I felt your prosthesis against my arm. When I first saw you looking sad in your wheelchair at the dinner party, I already had a pretty good hunch. You see, growing up being in and out of burn wards, you get to know quite a lot of people there who've also lost limbs. That's how it's fairly easy for me to tell. And you wearing a prosthesis doesn't make any difference whatsoever to me." He continued to speak, "You see, Larry, we live in a world where people spend just about all their time only noticing what's 'above the surface.' But it's really about what's 'below the surface' that really matters. I admit I'm quite drawn to your looks, above *and* below the surface."

"You actually knew about my leg before our date and you still wanted to go out with me?" Larry asked.

"Yes. Very much so. Larry, I thought about you non-stop like a runaway train last night and all day today before our date."

Larry smiled. "So did I. Paul, there's something else I want to tell you."

"Yes, Larry?"

"Last night at the dinner party, I know I looked sad and angry about not wanting to be there. Well, it wasn't really about

Michael Zephyr

the dinner party or that pompous jerk at all. When you arrived late and first walked into the room, I instantly felt drawn to you. Your handsome face, sandy blond hair, deep golden-brown eyes, nice build, and the way you walked; it was like trumpets were sounding at the same time. But then I assumed you wouldn't want me. And all this time I was wrong. Now help me onto the bed? Come to bed with me. Please."

Paul smiled softly and leaned forward and picked Larry up from his chair and laid him on the bed.

Larry held out his arms. "Come here."

Paul lay down next to Larry. They embraced and passionately kissed. Since Paul just shared one of his deepest and darkest secrets along with his display of sincerity, Larry felt a great amount of empathy which led to him feeling even more attracted to this wonderful man. Slowly Larry began to unbutton his shirt as Paul watched with interest. Paul helped him take it off.

Paul thought Larry had a nice chest, sprinkled with dark hair and the most incredible small nipples he had ever seen. Paul helped Larry remove his pants and finally his briefs. It was the chance Paul needed to get a good look at Larry.

"God, Larry, you're beautiful too. I mean it," Paul said emphatically, "Now guess who's also hearing trumpets?"

"Do you really like what you see?" Larry asked. "A man with only one and a half legs?"

"Do I like a man with one and a half legs?" he asked. Paul straightened up and caressed Larry's half leg with both his hands. Then he leaned forward and kissed every section of it. "Does that answer your question?"

Larry was visibly touched. "Come here."

They embraced again, resuming their deep kissing. That spectacular feeling of every nerve sparking returned as they mutually moaned together. When they parted for air, Paul

Above and Below the Surface

looked into Larry's eyes and said, "I should ask you the same question, do you like what you see?"

"I'd be lying if I said no." Larry chuckled.

Paul joined along with the intimate laughter.

They embraced again and continued their kissing as their tongues powerfully waltzed. As the kissing grew deeper, the mutual erotic spark between the two grew more and more intense. Their hard, throbbing cocks were moist and rubbing against each other. Their hands continued exploring while pleasing one other.

Paul gently laid Larry on his back. He passionately kissed Larry all over his face, neck and shoulders. Then he began to move lower. He massaged one of Larry's nipples with his thumb and index finger while he gently sucked and brushed his teeth around the bud of the other nipple. Both nipples were hard in no time. Paul continued kissing him lower. The grand prize, Larry's cock was awaiting him. But Paul first moved down to caress Larry's legs. As he did he stopped at Larry's short leg and looked back up at Larry. Larry gazed back with a smile on his face. When Paul came up for breath all he said was, "Larry, you're incredibly striking."

"Paul," Larry hissed softly, "Oh, Paul."

Paul slowly moved up and claimed the prize, Larry's wonderful cock. Paul licked the moist tip with his tongue. As Paul tasted Larry's pre-cum they moaned together. Then he moved his mouth down the shaft and all the way to the base where he could feel the curls of Larry's pubic hair while ravishing his man scent. His hand was gently moving back and forth between massaging each of Larry's balls and the wonderful tight skin between his balls and puckering hole.

Larry propped himself up on his elbows. "Bring me yours too, Paul."

Paul looked up at Larry and smiled, moving into the mutual sixty-nine position.

Michael Zephyr

Larry held Paul's hard and moist dick close to examine it. "You have a very nice cock."

Together they began sucking each other in perfect synchronized bliss; two men, very hard and very determined to please one another while receiving and enjoying the mutual pleasure. Paul could see Larry's balls begin to tighten as Larry moaned around Paul's cock. Paul felt himself getting closer. Instinctively, they knew to speed up. With only a couple of seconds apart from one another, they began to come down each other's throats. As both men continued to moan, they didn't let a drop of each other's wonderful man seed get away.

After they finished licking each other clean, they were back in each other's arms and tightly embraced. As they deeply kissed, the after taste of each other's essence drove them to new heights. Then they parted lips and looked at each other.

"Wow," Larry hissed.

"So? I'm that good?" Paul asked.

Larry smiled and kissed him on the nose. "I'd be lying if I said you weren't."

They both laughed, cuddling tighter into each other's arms.

Larry said, "I seriously hope you know I'd like you to spend the night."

"I seriously hoped you'd ask me that," Paul answered.

Larry reached to the bedside lamp and turned out the light. Paul pulled Larry close while spooning Larry's back against his chest. Within a few minutes, they fell blissfully asleep.

Two entities that had been lonely and adrift had become each other's missing puzzle piece.

"Good morning," Larry said. He was still spooning Paul's back against his chest as he kissed the back of Paul's neck. Larry's hand gently massaged Paul's morning length.

Above and Below the Surface

Paul yawned. "Good morning yourself."

"Can I ask you something, Paul?"

"Hmmm? Sure."

"Spend the day with me?"

"What day is it?" asked Paul.

"Sunday."

Paul turned on his side to face Larry. "I don't have to work today. So, yep, looks like I'm spending the day with you. But only under one condition."

Larry mischievously cocked an eyebrow. "And that is?"

"I'd love to feel you inside me."

Larry gave Paul a passionate kiss. "I'd love to. But...er...well, I've never gotten this far with another man before. I'm not sure I know how to...well you know...be inside someone."

Paul's finger traced around Larry's eyes, nose and lips. "Neither do I."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, I haven't gotten this far with another man either." Paul gave Larry a kiss. "But we can always copy our role models."

Larry gave him a confused look. "Role models?"

"Yep. Between all the gay magazines and Internet porn I'm sure we've both abundantly partaken in, we'll figure out what to do."

Larry laughed. "Why does this feel like I'm taking a pop quiz?"

Paul kissed Larry on his nose. "C'mon, let's at least study for the quiz together. Something tells me we're both about to get an A."

"Will you scorn me if I get a B?" Larry gave Paul a deep kiss. "Okay, how about we start with you lying on your back?"

Michael Zephyr

Paul quickly complied by lying on his back and spreading his legs. "Can you get on your knees between my legs, Larry?"

"Sure." Larry easily maneuvered in front of Paul's spread legs and incredibly hard cock.

"Take your time doing as you please. When you're ready I'll lift my legs while you help hold them. Then...well, I'm sure you'll know what to do. And by the way..."

"Yes, Paul?"

"Rest assured, I'm 'clean.'"

Larry smiled. "Me too." He maneuvered in-between Paul's spread legs and began to suck Paul's cock while massaging his heavy balls. Then he massaged the skin between his balls and hole. Paul was blissfully moaning while calling out Larry's name. Larry reached in the bedside drawer for lube. He greased a couple of fingers, then he gently massaged around Paul's most intimate place that was about to be entered.

"Larry...oh...Larry...yesss..."

Slowly Larry penetrated Paul with one finger followed by a second one. He began the motion of moving his fingers in and out then back in and around. He found Paul's magic spot. Instantly Paul's waist jutted up while he audibly moaned. Larry took his time concentrating on massaging Paul's pulsating gland.

Paul was leaking like mad while Larry continued to suck on him while devouring Paul. He leaned up to look into Larry's eyes. "Make love to me, Larry."

Paul lifted his legs up high for Larry as Larry began to position himself. Paul placed his ankles on Larry's shoulders.

Larry lined the tip of his cock against Paul's prepared opening. With care, he began to push in.

Paul's teeth began to clench from the ring of pain.

"Oh God, am I hurting you, Paul?"

"Just a tad...so...big...please...keep...going...in..."

Above and Below the Surface

“Paul...so...tight...feels...incredible...like...warm...silk.” Suddenly Larry’s hard cock slipped the rest of the way in. When it was fully seated he looked down at the union. “Oh, Paul, this is so beautiful.” Very slowly he began to pull backward, then gently he pushed inward.

“Oh, Larry...yess...feels...so...good...”

The tip of Larry’s cock found Paul’s prostate as Larry’s rhythm began to increase. In a short amount of time Larry was pumping as Paul helped push his ass towards Larry. Paul held his arms up to Larry and pulled him close. They kissed deeply as skin was slapping against skin. Paul reached up and began to tweak both of Larry’s firm nipples with each hand’s thumb and index finger.

Larry moaned loudly and then gasped, “Paul!” as he began to come deeply inside Paul. His whole body convulsed while experiencing the most incredible orgasm he ever had in his life. After he caught his breath, he slowly started to pull out of Paul.

“No, please, Larry. Keep it in.” Paul began to jack himself.

Larry swatted his hand away. “No, Paul, let me.” Larry put more lube on his hand and passionately jacked Paul’s incredibly hard cock.

“Larry! Oh...*Larry!*” Paul shot high arcs of white ribbons on his chest while his ass tightly squeezed against Larry’s cock. Together they blissfully moaned.

Larry slowly pulled out while smiling at his lover.

Paul leaned up on his elbows. “I’ll be right back after I clean up.”

Larry wouldn’t have it. He gently pushed Paul back down, leaned forward, and began to lap up every last bit of cum from Paul’s chest.

Paul looked down while watching Larry. *God, what an incredible sight.*

Michael Zephyr

As they embraced, Larry had a contented smile on his face.

“What?” Paul asked.

“Feel good?” Larry replied.

“I’d be lying if I said I didn’t.”

Together they laughed in each other’s arms.

Paul and Larry didn’t get out of bed until early evening when both their stomachs began to rumble from hunger. They ended up at Larry’s favorite Chinese restaurant sitting side by side while expertly feeding each other with chopsticks, making goo-goo eyes at one another, and laughing together.

They didn’t care about the looks they were getting from the other customers. All they cared about was enjoying each other’s company.

Chapter Three

Six Months Later

It was an incredibly mild day for autumn. The sun was shifting into mid-afternoon while glistening on the bay. A warm zephyr was rustling the leaves of the large redwood trees as people were enjoying walking along the Bayview Redwood Trail.

Paul and Larry both in t-shirts and shorts, slowly walked along the trail together arm in arm on the way to its breathtaking vista point.

As Larry limped, he looked at the panoramic view of the bay with San Francisco laid out in the distance. “Wow, it’s incredible.”

“This is my favorite place to go. Especially for special occasions.”

“Oh? And the occasion is?” Larry asked. Triumphantly he added, “And for your information, this is now *our* favorite place to go.”

“*Our?*”

“Yes, Paul. Ours.”

Paul smiled at his lover. “It’s so good to hear that.”

Michael Zephyr

A group of senior citizens walked by in the opposite direction, smiled, and waved.

Suddenly a woman holding her young child's hand passed them by from behind. "Mommy, that man walks funny. And the other man's arms and legs look funny."

"Suzy!" her mother scolded, "That's not nice."

Paul and Larry came to a stop.

The mother turned towards them. "I'm sorry..." she said, "She didn't mean to say all that."

Larry was the first to smile and say to the little girl, "It's not that I walk funny. It's that I walk differently. And as for my partner's arms and legs, they're quite stunning."

Suzy hid behind her mother. The mother looked relieved. "Thank you. You both enjoy your day."

"You too," Paul said as mother and daughter resumed their walk ahead.

"I'm proud of you, Larry."

"What's to be proud of? It's me that walks right. It's everyone else that walks funny."

They laughed as they continued their stroll.

When they reached the trail's vista, there were a number of people there as well. Several of them glimpsed at Larry and Paul who 'politely' looked away, pretending not to notice. Most didn't pay attention. As for Larry and Paul, all that mattered was being with each other while enjoying the incredible view laid out in front of them. They sat down on a bench together to rest.

Time had passed as the sun began to make its slow descent for the day. The sky turned into a brilliant crimson and gold color as the lights of Oakland below and San Francisco across the bay began to twinkle to life.

"Larry?"

"Yes, Paul?"

Above and Below the Surface

“Reach into my left pocket.”

“Are you nuts? Not here. We’re out in the open. We can do that back home.”

“Just reach into my pocket,” Paul said with determination and a slight smirk on his face.

“Whatever.” Larry reached with his right hand into Paul’s left pocket. “You’re hard, Paul.”

“I’m always hard when I’m around you.”

Larry carefully pulled something out. It was a gold ring. He looked back at Paul with a stunned look on his face.

Paul was beaming. “Read the inscription inside.”

Larry looked at the inside of the ring closely. “To the one I love Above and Below the Surface.” He continued to look at the ring as tears of joy began to form in his eyes. “But what about a ring for you?”

“I had the jeweler set a second one aside. Tomorrow we can go back and you can buy the other one for me. That is if...”

Larry tilted his head. “If?”

“You’ll marry me.”

Larry was astounded. “I’d be lying if I said ‘no.’”

Together they laughed arm and arm, then they kissed for a long time.

The sun finally slipped behind the Golden Gate Bridge. Tomorrow they would go pick up Paul’s ring. But for now and beyond, two very lucky men had come to enjoy life together—above *and* below the surface.

The End

About the Author

Michael Zephyr grew up for the first twenty-six years of his life in and around Orange County in Southern California. The past twenty-five years he has been living in Northern California near San Francisco which he happily calls home. In 2008 when same sex marriage was briefly legal in California, he married his long term partner Edwin with his family and close friends that also attended their amazing ceremony.

His favorite passion is teaching. He was previously employed in Adult Education teaching the economically disadvantaged how to prepare for entry into the technical workplace. Michael currently works as a Technical Trainer. In his spare time, he also campaigns for Human Rights especially for Gay and Lesbian marriage equality.

He is also an ardent fan of romance novels. A whole new world opened up for him one fine day last year while surfing Amazon.com. Much to his surprise, he discovered that an uncountable amount of erotic Gay romance stories existed. One of the first novels he came upon was *Exposure* by G.A. Hauser. Touched by this story, he contacted the author which turned into an on-going correspondence between the two. Much to his delight their contact continues to this very day. From this connection, G.A. Hauser invited him to write a short story which would be included with her 50th published novel, *Heart of Steele*. What a delight and opportunity for him!

You can reach Michael, who always welcomes your contact at: mzephyr@yahoo.com

The G.A. Hauser Collection

Available Now

Single Titles

All Man

Unnecessary Roughness

It Takes a Man

A Man's Best Friend

In the Dark and What Should Never Be, Erotic Short Stories

The Physician and the Actor

For Love and Money

The Kiss

Naked Dragon

Secrets and Misdemeanors

Capital Games

Giving Up the Ghost

To Have and To Hostage

Love you, Loveday

The Boy Next Door

When Adam Met Jack

Exposure

The Vampire and the Man-eater

Murphy's Hero

Mark Antonious deMontford

Prince of Servitude

Calling Dr. Love
The Rape of St. Peter
The Wedding Planner
Going Deep
Double Trouble
Pirates
Miller's Tale
Vampire Nights
Teacher's Pet
In the Shadow of Alexander
The Rise and Fall of the Sacred Band of Thebes

The Action Series

Acting Naughty
Playing Dirty
Getting it in the End
Behaving Badly
Dripping Hot
Packing Heat

Men in Motion Series

Mile High
Cruising
Driving Hard
Leather Boys

Rescue Series

Man to Man
Two In Two Out
Top Men

G.A. Hauser
Writing as Amanda Winters

Sister Moonshine
Nothing Like Romance
Silent Reign
Butterfly Suicide
Mutley's Crew