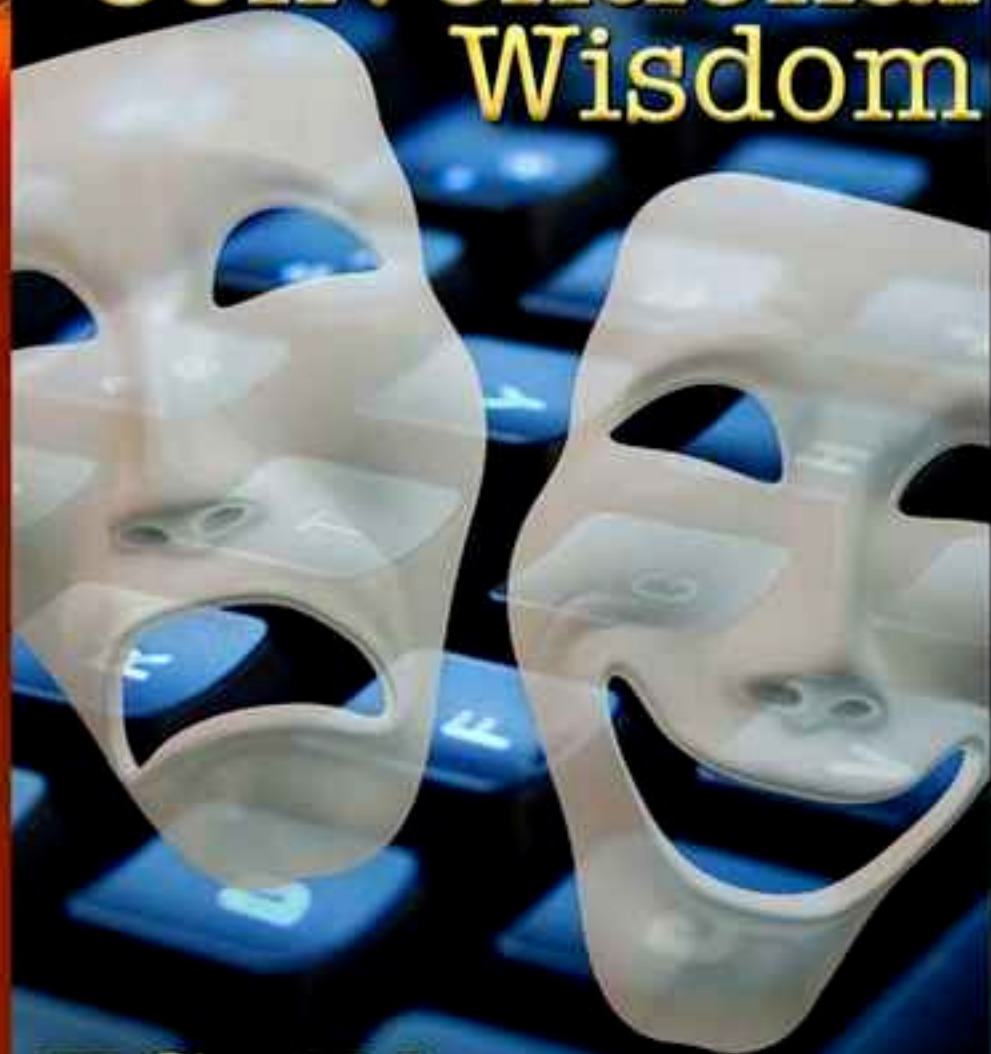


Torquere  
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Highball

# Conventional Wisdom



TC Blue

Conventional Wisdom  
*by TC Blue*

**Torquere Press**

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*by TC Blue*

**Dedication**

To Meg Leigh, with awe and appreciation. Thank you for being such a good friend, as well as one of my favorite authors.

Conventional Wisdom  
*by TC Blue*

## **Conventional Wisdom**

**by TC Blue**

*SciFiCon, Richmond, VA*

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## **Day One, Thursday**

Three hours of driving, and Lucas Merrifield felt better for it. At least, he did in the sense that getting into his car and leaving his grandfather's place outside Raleigh a day early had kept him from wrapping his fingers around the old bastard's throat and squeezing until those too-sharp, too-knowing eyes popped out of that age-seamed, wizened face.

He almost wished he'd decided to fly from California, but it had been so long since the last time he'd made a road trip, Lucas hadn't been able to resist the idea. Stopping to see Gramps, on the other hand? Maybe not his brightest notion.

"You got a good thing goin', boy. Don't you go screwin' it up like you done everything else in your life. And don't be thinkin' you can come crawlin' back here for more than a visit, either. This ain't your home no more. Got it?"

Yeah, those were some damned fine words of love and affection the old geezer had shared with him that morning. True words, yes, butE would it have killed Chadwick Merrifield to have offered him a "good job, boy" or even—in Lucas' dreams—an "I'm proud of you"?

Well, maybe it would, Lucas told himself with a sigh. Gramps had never really been the sort of man to go around offering kind words. Not even to his own kids when they'd been alive, though Lucas had almost gotten a smile from the curmudgeonly ancient once. Exactly once. When Lucas was seven years old and had somehow managed to catch a fly ball that should by all rights have been far beyond his grasp.

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by TC Blue

Of course, he'd landed badly and broken his armE and the almost-smile had disappeared under muttered accusations. Because clearly Lucas had done it on purpose, just to make Gramps shell out hundreds of dollars to the hospital for X-rays and casts and doctor visits. Yeah.

"You done gone Hollywood on me, boy, but even them flag-burnin' liberals you got out there in Los Angeleez won't want nothin' to do with you if you go startin' up again like you did at that fancy school what put you out." The remembered words still stung, damn it.

*Yeah, thanks, Gramps. Like you have any idea of why that happened. You never wanted to know, did you? You always just assumed*

And that was true, too, even if Lucas was only thinking it rather than saying it to the old man who wasn't even there. Of course, even when Lucas had been growing up and Gramps was less than twenty feet away most of the time, the old man had never really been there. Not for him. And definitely not after that night when Lucas had been fifteen. Gramps had walked in at exactly the wrong moment, and Lucas had never felt welcome in Chadwick Merrifield's house, afterward.

Regardless, thoughE. one more not so subtle dig and Lucas really thought he might have done something that would have made the papers.

But screw it. He was going to this convention thing. And that should be interesting. Lucas did like meeting his fans, after all. They usually treated him like a God.

He found himself laughing at the thought, and the amusement stayed with him for the rest of the drive, though that wasn't long. Fifteen or so more miles on the highway, then a short ten minutes of city streets until he found the hotel. He pulled into the valet zone out front and handed the jacketed attendant his keys, even as he pulled his suitcase from the passenger seat.

"Be careful with my baby," he told the man with a grin. "She's had a rough couple weeks." And yeah, his poor car had taken a bit of a beating since he'd left L.A. Fine German craftsmanship wasn't really designed for tooling around the pothole and roadkill infested byways of middle America. He'd have to remember to have her tuned up before he drove back. "I don't know what room I'll be in," he added, "but it's under Bill Speare, okay?"

Less than a moment later, Lucas slipped a twenty into the man's free hand and then he was in the lobby, which was surprisingly nice, considering the sort of event that was being hosted there. YeahE maybe Richmond wouldn't be so bad, after all.

Lucas ignored the stares from the young woman behind the front desk. Partly because he was used to it, but also because he was fairly sure she was usually too professional to giggle and blush. She would have to be, or she wouldn't have the position she did. Besides which, she was extraordinarily attractive, with long, blonde hair and wide, blue eyes. Flawless skin that still held just a bit of sun-kissed glow, though it had been too chilly for sunbathing for at least a



month. She was just the sort of woman he was supposed to flirt with, be seen with, spend time with.

Jason would have been all over him, Lucas knew, just prodding and poking and hinting until Lucas gave in and asked the girl out just to shut him up. But Jason wasn't there. Yet. And what Lucas' manager didn't know wouldn't hurt him. Either of them.

As usual, thinking about Jason made Lucas grin. He couldn't help it. They'd been best friends and roommates in college, and when Lucas' scholarship had been rescinded after that last injury, Jason had jumped right in. Sure, Jason had connections, but that didn't mean he'd had to use them for Lucas' benefit. He had, though, and Lucas knew he would always owe his friend. Forever.

"I know I'm early," Lucas said patiently to the desk clerk who was actually helping him. "I wasn't supposed to be here until tomorrow. I made better time than I thought, so I'm hoping you can maybe find me something. Anything." Lucas smiled, flashing his straight, white teeth and trying to look helpless, which took a hell of a lot of effort. He hadn't been helpless since childhood.

Fortunately, there weren't many problems that a titanium AmEx card couldn't solve, which was how he found himself in the suite that had been reserved for "Bill Speare" a day early.

It was a nice suite, Lucas thought, once the entirely unnecessary bellman had put his suitcase in the bedroom and departed. Not the best he'd ever stayed in, by any means, butE good enough to live in for the next five days, anyway. Assuming room service would deliver full-sized bottles of

liquor, rather than those tiny-ass one-shot teasers that usually lived in the mini-bar.

He would find out soon enough, Lucas promised himself, but firstE he had to make a phone call.

And thank God for voice mail, because Jason wasn't answering, which made it that much easier to just announce that he was already settled at the hotel, with no mention of the drama with Gramps. Though technically it wasn't exactly drama, as such.

Jason just had a way of making everything seem so much bigger than it actually was that Lucas was relieved, as usual, that he didn't have to sit through the copious amounts of overblown outrage on his behalf. He loved Jason to death, and the guy was an amazing manager—witness the fact that Jason had taken Lucas from being a washed-up never-was baseball player to starring in his own show, syndicated or not, in less than ten years—but Jason could be a little bit high-strung. Hell, could be? Always was.

Even so, Jase was the best friend a guy could have.

Jesus, Lucas realized, he was getting sentimental. For no reason. It actually made him laugh.

There he was, in a decent suite. He'd been invited to participate in the convention, and it didn't even start for another twenty-four hours. His show was syndicated, which meant—if Lucas was being honest with himself, which he was right then—that aside from the young woman at the front desk, nobody he might run into that night would know who he was, andE it was too good of an opportunity to pass up. He could go down to the lobby, find the bar and just chill, without

worrying about someone taking his picture or hearing about his supposed *alcoholism* on the E! Channel. YeahE that was a plan. And Lucas had always loved a plan, be it good or not.

This was a good one, though. He could feel it.

"There's internet access in the room, right?" Trent asked yet again, but he needed to be sure. And yes, he saw the sidelong glances the skinny, blonde chick was tossing his way, her perfect little nose wrinkling when she thought he wouldn't notice. And okay, so he was kind of gothic and obviously gay, but was that any reason for the bitch to be all sneering behind that glassy smile?

"Of course, sir," the man behind the counter said again, his tone sounding so amused, but in the good way, that Trent couldn't take offense. "We've recently upgraded our system. The DSL in the guest rooms is rather fast, from what I understand." And the man didn't even seem bothered by repeating that for the third time. Trent blamed the large quantities of caffeine he'd consumed on the drive for his own jitteriness.

Then again, the reason he'd been asking repeatedly suddenly hit him. "DSL? You don't have anything better? Because no matter how fast your DSL is, it won't be up to the speeds I need. I meanE" But the man was shaking his head slowly and suddenly wearing that so-apologetic face that Trent thought front desk managers were required to perfect before being offered the job.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Dennis, but the only faster connections available are in our suites. If you'd like to upgrade, I'll be more than happy to check availability for youE" And damn it,

but the man was obviously being sincere, which sort of made Trent wish he could actually afford a suite. But, hell. He could barely pay for internet access and his part of the double room he was sharing with Tom.

Trent sighed loudly. "No. No, I guess I'll live. JustE yeah. Check me in for the room I reserved, okay? Oh, and if you can add Tom Blake, that'd be cool. Um, he should be here late tonight." It would be really cool to meet the guy he'd been talking to on one of his lists in person. Even if Tom *was* straight. Tom knew his way around gaming, and that was what mattered.

He knew he was imagining it, but Trent thought he heard his debit card whimper when the man behind the counter ran it for approval. Still, he'd been saving all year for this trip, so it was worth it.

Some people went to SciFiCon for the chance to meet authors or makeup artists or even actors or directors, and Trent couldn't blame them. It was one of the largest privately run science fiction conventions in the eastern part of the country, so there was at least some chance of ordinary people meeting and hanging out with their heroes or crushes or idolsE whatever. Hell, he was under orders from his roommate John to get a signed picture of some chick from TV. He had the actress' name in his bag. Somewhere. John had sworn it was for his sister, but Trent wasn't sure he was buying that. Still, how long could it take? John had even given him enough money to cover whatever the fee was, and then some, so Trent figured he could waste five or ten minutes on so-called celebrities whom he'd never even heard of.

Trent was there for the computer and video gaming. In fact, he'd heard from a reliable source that there would be a sneak preview of Neverwhere Games' new one, scheduled for Christmas release, and he was so going to be a part of that. He had to be. And who knew? Maybe he could meet Pete Thornton, or one of his right-hand men. Trent could tell them about his own efforts and the coding shortcuts he'd come up with. And maybe—just maybe—this convention would be his foot in the door of the best gaming company sinceE well, since the dawn of time.

"Not likely," he snorted as he dragged his suitcase, duffle bag and laptop case onto the elevator. "It's a preview. Thornton won't be here. He'll just send some of his minions to do the unveiling. And security. Lots and lots of security. Still, it doesn't hurt to dream, Trent. There's nothing wrong with imagining yourself as something other than a clerk at fucking Mainstream Video." He wasn't sure if it was a goal or a dream, though.

Okay, Trent decided with a tiny, wry smile. One dreamer, present and accounted for.

He got out of the elevator and hauled his things down the hallway, then dragged them into his room, just a bit out of breath, and looked around.

It was a nice room, as rooms he could afford went. No odd smells, thank Christ, and it looked really clean. Pristine, in point of fact. He worried for a moment that the blue and red streaks in his hair would stain the pillows enough that he'd be charged for them, but he thought he could avoid that by wrapping a towel around the one directly under his head

when he slept. Better to pay for a towel than a feather pillow. After all, how much could one towel cost?

That was when the Pentagon crept into his head, of course, and their eight hundred dollar toilet seats, and "God, I need a drink. More than one. But one will help, anyway." Because he was pretty sure that a hotel as nice as the Richmond Argent didn't offer dollar drafts, which was what he could afford, honestly. Still, he could manage a drink or two. It wasn't like he needed to eat every day.

Even so, Trent didn't head to the bar until after he'd set up his laptop, pulled the peripherals from his suitcase and hooked them up, then checked his e-mail quickly before shutting things down again. He closed the computer and shoved it back in its bag, then hid it in one of the dresser drawers, just in case. The peripherals could stay; it was the laptop he was most concerned about, after all. His degrees in graphic design and IT engineering wouldn't do him much good without it. Not that they'd been too useful so far. Then he checked his hair and the small amount of makeup he'd bothered with for the drive.

"I guess I'll do," he muttered as he left the room. "Not like the locals will even bother looking at me past the first 'what the hell is *that*' stare, anyway" God, he wished Con started on Thursday instead of Friday. Hell, he wished Tom hadn't talked him into coming down the day before so they could "get to know each other, man, without the pressure of Con" hanging over them. Still, a beer was a beer, so Trent figured he could ignore all the disgusted looks he was sure to get in the bar that night.

It would be a completely different story the next night, he was sure. Con people wereE unique. And numerous. It would be fine.

He was still telling himself that a good ten minutes later, when he'd finally made his way to the bar, appropriated a stool and had a nice, tall Guinness sitting in front of him, the creamy head perfect and cream-with-coffee pale. Of course, it should be perfect, considering how much he'd paid for it. Eight bucks, for Christ's sake. Jesus. It had better be the best damned Guinness on the face of the planet.

Trent wrapped long, pale fingers around the cool glass and lifted it to his lips, andE oh, yeah. That was damned fine. Worth the money, even, which surprised him a little bit. He closed his eyes, just barely swallowing a moan of sheer pleasure as the chilled liquid slid over his tongue and spilled slowly down his throat. He didn't notice the man standing beside him until the guy spoke, but God. That voice was almost as good as the beer.

"I'll have what he's having," Trent heard, and he found himself setting his glass down and opening his eyes to meet green eyes under sun-streaked, dark hair, and Jesus. He couldn't look away.

It seemed like the other man couldn't tear his gaze away, either, because he was for damned sure doing just as much staring as Trent was, andE maybe that was good. Or maybe, Trent reminded himself carefully, he was about to get his ass kicked. "Uh, sorry. I justE"

"Have really good taste in beer? I hope so. I'm usually more of a Scotch man, myself, but anything that can make a

guy moan like that? I figure it's worth a try." God, nobody should have a smile that sly and sexual. Not when they looked like that, anyway. Jesus, the man was just not Trent's type. Except he was, somehow.

He was little bit older than Trent himself, though probably only by a year or three. Clearly built—as much as Trent could see, anyway—but not in a way that screamed gym-queen. Nice hands, too, Trent noticed when he managed to glance down at the bar. Long, tapered fingers, andE God help him, but the guy had a manicure, which Trent hoped meant the undesired ass-kicking was off the table.

Having a manicure didn't make the man gay, of course, but it seemed to imply a certain degree of metro-sexuality, and in Trent's experience, that usually meant a decent amount of tolerance for the same-sex oriented. Especially in Southern Virginia. He hoped.

"Well, if you don't like it, I guess I'll just have to pay for it," he heard himself saying, andE yeah. He could do that. If he didn't eat until Saturday.

"Cool. So, do you have a name, or should I just call you beer-pimp?" Okay, that wasn't funny—at all—but Trent found himself chuckling anyway.

"I'm Trent. You? Or do you want to go with beer-slut?" Still not funny, but damned if the sex-god wasn't laughing, too.

"Bill," the man answered after a very long moment. "Bill Speare. Good to meet you, Trent."

Lucas hadn't been expecting anything at all when he'd headed into the bar. Maybe a few drinks and some random chatting with the bartender, but that was normal enough.



Especially for a hotel bar in Richmond. Thursday nights weren't likely to be big, after all. That was what made finding Trent there so intriguing.

He'd noticed the hair first, because the random streaks of red and blue had made him look around for the neon that was casting the colors on the otherwise dark head. It was only when he'd realized that there was no outside source that it hit him. The guy at the bar, sitting there so easily, didn't fit in at the Argent's lounge any more than Lucas fit in at the redneck watering hole Gramps loved so much.

Not that the guy looked uncomfortable, exactly, but more out of place than anything else. Which sort of begged the question of what he was doing there to begin with. *Unless*, a little voice spoke within his mind, *he's here for the same reason you are. Early for the convention?*

Lucas tried to remember who the other celebrity guests were, but he'd be damned if he could. He hadn't paid that much attention when Jason was telling him about it. Still, whoever the guy was, he'd at least be interesting, Lucas figured. And if Lucas was talking to someone, he'd seem less like a lonely, hopeless drunk, out drinking on his own.

Then he'd stepped closer and seen the guy's closed eyes. He'd heard the tiny, hitched moan as the man swallowed the dark fluid in the glass, and Lucas had spoken. The guy—Trent—had answered, and next thing Lucas knew, he was having a conversation. With someone who had no idea of who he was, which became clear the minute Trent's wide, dark eyes locked on his own. There had been no widening, no

surprise aside from what someone would expect at being approached by a stranger.

Not that he was approaching, so to speak. Or flirting, Lucas reminded himself. He didn't flirt with strange men in public. Not even oddly attractive semi-gothic men who weren't actually his type. Except the more they talked, the more Lucas found himself liking Trent. The guy wasn't gloom-and-doom like the few goths Lucas had run into in L.A. He was smart and funny. And damned if Trent wasn't just fucking pretty, in a manly sort of way.

Yeah, the guy was thin, but he was slender, not skinny. And pale, sure. That sort of avoid-the-sun paleness, which did nothing to hide the subtle gold-tones to the man's skin, even through the small bit of make-up.

"So, why D.C.? Doesn't it get really cold?" Lucas frowned as he asked, mostly because even the winters in North Carolina had been fairly frigid when compared to Los Angeles. He hadn't even considered going back there once he'd gotten to college and discovered how nice it was to be able to hit the California beaches in November.

"I don't know," Trent answered. "I mean, I've lived other places, sure, but not anywhere that doesn't have seasons. Besides, too much sun wouldn't really work for my lifestyle. Um, the goth one, not the other."

Well, that cleared up the question Lucas hadn't been sure how to ask. Yes, it had seemed obvious that Trent wasn't a lady's man, but it didn't hurt to know for certain.

But he wasn't perving on Trent, even knowing the man was gay. Lucas couldn't afford to do anything about what was

probably a one-sided attraction, anyway. Not when he was working. The convention was paying him to be there. He was supposed to be promoting the show and being appreciative toward the *Black of Night* fans who would be in attendance. Besides, Trent wasn't flirting at all and had no clue about who Lucas was. The younger man had accepted "Bill Speare" without a single hitch.

Lucas felt a little bad about that, actually, but he hadn't known what else to say. He also *didn't* feel bad, since Trent had told him—literally minutes after they'd exchanged names—that he was there for the convention and was meeting friends. A friend. Whatever. The point was, this mystery friend might not be as oblivious as Trent was, and the last thing Lucas needed was for Trent's friend or friends to decide that Trent was their way to Lucas. So. He was lying. But hadn't his assumed-namesake said it best? A rose by any other name, blah-blah-blah?

"I'm in promotions," Lucas said in answer to Trent's curiosity about Lucas'—Bill's—presence. *Self-promotion. Show promotion. Yeah.* "It lets me travel sometimes. A few days here, a few days thereE at least it isn't boring."

Trent grinned and shook his head. "Must be nice, man. I'm in that particular variety of hell known as retail. Thrill a minute."

Then Trent told him about some of the customers he dealt with, and Lucas found himself laughing and cringing in turn. People could be justE amazing. And not in the good way.

Lucas had no idea of how long they'd been talking, but he knew he was on his fifth Guinness, and how was it that he'd

never tried the stuff before? It wasn't like any beer he'd ever known. It was thick. Rich. Strong and smooth and just a little bit heavy under the cap of foam that served as its head. It wasn't even remotely like the beer he used to sneak from Gramp's fridge on the rare occasion that the old bastard was too wrecked from a night at the VFW to remember how much he'd had.

Trent was still talking, and Lucas tried to pay attention, but he had never been big with the computer stuff, and Trent obviously knew his way around a server-mom-board-whatever better than Lucas ever would, so it was just so much white noise. Still, Lucas admitted silently, he liked Trent's voice. The way he spoke.

He was still liking it a good twenty minutes later, when the lights slowly brightened.

"Sorry, guys," the bartender—Lucas couldn't remember the man's name to save his life—said, setting the check down between them. "I'd love to let you stay, but state law says everyone's out byE well, now."

It didn't take long to hand over enough cash to cover his and Trent's drinks. It took even less time to drain his glass and stand.

"SoE" Lucas mumbled once the bartender moved off to do whatever bartenders did to close up for the night, "did you need to get to bed, or do you want to hang out for a while? I'm pretty sure there's some sort of booze in my room. Uh, champagne, at least." There was. One of the hotel staff had been wheeling a welcome basket in when Lucas had been heading down to the bar. He'd seen the foil-wrapped top of

the bottle, plain as day. "I justE I'm having a really good time talking to you, Trent." And God help him, but that was true.

He blinked a little when Trent stood up, because while they'd both made trips to the bathroom and such over the course of the night, they'd never actually been standing at the same time. Trent had been shorter than Lucas when they'd been on the bar stools, but nowE well, the man had almost a full inch on him. Most of it leg, Lucas realized, and damned if that didn't have his cock twitching with interest.

He closed his eyes and forced himself to relax. Just because Trent was gay, that didn't mean he wanted Lucas. Hell, Trent probably wanted a guy like himself. Gothic. Cutting-edge. Able to do more with a computer than send e-mails and do web searches for his own name.

He almost missed Trent's answering words, but when they registered, Lucas was glad he'd already finished his beer. It would have been shooting from his nose if he'd still been drinking, because apparently Trent *had* been flirting and Lucas hadn't known.

"Sure," Trent said, those dark eyes just burning into his own. "I'd like that. Um, if this is out of line, then I'm sorry, butE you have champagne, which is okay, I guess. I've never turned down a free drink before, and I'm not likely to start now. But if we're going to drink much more—together, I mean—then I need to ask you something. Do you have condoms, or do we need to stop by my room on the way?"

Lucas still nearly choked, on nothing, really, and he actually saw the moment when Trent figured he'd gotten it

wrong. God, the blush looked good under that light skin. It actually made Lucas itch to touch it.

But Trent was backing away, all of a sudden, and even if Lucas hadn't been deliberately thinking along those lines, his body for damned sure was because that earlier twitch in his jeans became a full-blown surge, just like that.

"Look. Bill. I didn'tE I mean, IE Christ. You know I'm gay. I mean, it's kind of obvious, right? So, I guess I was hopingE I mean, God, you're just so damned sexy and IE but it's cool. I was wrong. It was fun, and thanks for the drinks, and I'll justE"

Babble. Babble was good, Lucas decided. Except when it was combined with Trent backing away like he was afraid, all of a sudden. And Lucas had been flirting, too. He just hadn't realized it until right then, though the fact that he'd listened to Trent going on about things that were incomprehensible to Lucas' brain should have clued him.

"No," Lucas said, soft and slow, stepping closer to lift one hand and rest it on a black-denim clad hip, which he wouldn't usually do in public, but the bar was empty, thank God. Aside from him, Trent, the nameless bartender and a small, Latino-looking man who was sweeping up, anyway. He could take a chance for once. A tiny one.

"You weren'tE aren't wrong, Trent. IE" Lucas chuckled, feeling just a bit sheepish when he felt the heat spreading over his skin that signaled his own blush. "I think stopping by yours for a minute might be a really good idea. I wasn't planning onE well, it's been a while." A *while* meaning more

than two years since he'd found someone discreet enough and far enough off the Hollywood radar to take a chance.

God help him, but watching Trent go from looking freaked out to thoroughly pleased had Lucas even harder. At this rate, he figured he might just come in his jeans before they even got to the elevator. "SoE? I mean, if you've changed your mind aboutE"

"No!" And damned if Trent didn't sound just as needy as Lucas suddenly felt. "No, let's uhE" He saw one pale hand start to reach for him, then watched it drop to Trent's side again, and that was good. Lucas wouldn't have been able to take Trent's hand in his own for the walk through the lobby. After all, if Trent was there early, who was to say there weren't other convention people around? And the last thing Lucas needed was to out himself after years of hiding so successfully.

"Yeah," Lucas murmured, stepping back slowly, "let's."

Trent couldn't help the little sideways glances he kept giving Bill, mostly because he couldn't really believe that the word condoms had come from his own mouth when he hadn't planned on saying anything like that. Also because he just didn't have the kind of luck that he was clearly experiencing right then. Bill was fucking gorgeous. Way out of his league, and Trent knew it. Of course, that was all the more reason to just go ahead and see how far the other man would let things go.

He'd packed condoms in the hopes of maybe breaking his six and a half month dry spell, though, and actually having the opportunity to use them so soon? Well, that was

unexpected, but entirely cool. Of course, he had no idea of what Bill was into, butE

That was actually an interesting question, Trent suddenly realized. What was Bill into? Because maybe Bill liked things that Trent wasn't willing to do, or wasn't interested in experiencing. *And this is exactly why I don't do this sort of thing much*, Trent told himself harshly. Thinking with his dick almost never turned out well. By the same token, though, he hadn't gotten that sort of creepy and weird vibe from Bill, and they'd been talking forE God, hours.

He waited until they got onto the elevator before he said anything, of course, because it was nobody's business what he and Bill might—or might not—get up to. When the doors finally closed, Trent bit his lip and turned. "Uh, okay. I just realized thatE well, what do you like, Bill? I mean, there's things I won't do because they're sick and kind of weird, so if you're into that sort of stuff, maybe I should just go to my room and stay there, okay? I meanE"

"Hey, you're the one who brought up condoms," Bill said, and Trent almost thought he sounded hurt. "You're the one who actually has some, too, so saying that using them is sick is justE fucked up, man. So, yeah. Maybe you should just go hang out with your friends."

Oh, there were definitely hurt feelings in Bill's voice, but also anger, and Trent thought maybe he could understand that. He'd basically just implied that there was something wrong with being gay, especially since Bill obviously didn't know about the kind of sick and twisted Trent was worried about.



"That's not what I mean," Trent announced, frowning when the elevator slowed, then stopped on his floor. "Shit." He pushed the button for the top floor, then waited while the doors closed again, somehow sure he was going to need at least that much time to explain. "Look, I just meantEOkay. I've got this whole goth thing going on, so sometimes people assume I'm into some weird shit. Literally." Trent shuddered for effect. "But I'm not, okay? I mean, kissing, touching, sucking, fucking? That's all good. Great, even. But I don't much want to be tied up and beaten until I bleed. And I really don't want to do anything that makes that seem tame. That's what I meant. Because you seem like a really cool guy, but I barely know you. I figured we should just lay out what we're into before it's too late, you know?"

He actually saw the moment when Bill understood what Trent was saying, and it was a good moment, because the tightness around those green eyes eased up. Then Bill chuckled, soft and low, and Trent liked the sound just as much in the elevator as he had in the bar.

"So," he tried again, once Bill stopped laughing, "what are you into, Bill?"

God, Bill could blush bright. Of course, Trent figured the man wasn't used to talking about sex. Not with a virtual stranger, anyway. "I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours," he added with a wink, trying not to laugh when Bill's blush got even deeper.

"I, umE Jesus. Nothing weird, okay? I don't want to whip you orE or piss on you, or anything like that." Well, that was a relief . "But, um, the rest of it soundsE really good, Trent,"

Bill went on. "I. The, umE touching and stuff. Kissing. F-fucking."

It was damned hard to resist teasing the man, but Trent somehow managed it. Instead, he nodded quickly, ducking down to catch suddenly sheepish eyes with his own. "Good. And I'm guessing you really meant it when you said it's been a while for you, too, so the next question isE are you more comfortable with pitching or catching, Bill? Because I can do either. Whichever you like. Or neither. I just really, really want you, okay? Soon. Hell, now."

God, when had he gotten so good with the talking? Usually, Trent stammered his way around, maybe babbled some, until whoever he was talking to—hitting on, whatever—either walked away or shut him up with their mouth. Or their cock. Something. But this time, with Bill, wasn't like that. Oh, sure Trent had started off awkwardly, but now that he knew Bill was nervous and possibly a little bit anxious, Trent feltE calm. Certain. It was bizarre, but welcome.

"IE can we figure that out later?" Bill sounded a little less tentative now, and that was a good thing, so Trent nodded, letting one hand shift enough to brush the backs of his fingers over the obvious bulge in Bill's jeans. Trent actually had to swallow a moan at the whimper it earned him, but he had a feeling Bill heard him anyway, judging by the way those bright eyes got steadier, more bold. The way they'd been in the bar, in fact.

Trent pulled back as the elevator stopped, then gave Bill a small, hopefully heated smile. "Yeah. I still need to go by my room, though, so maybe you could push eight for me." He

noded at the panel of buttons, then frowned when Bill stepped out through the open doors.

"This is actually my floor," the man murmured. "Why don't you go get theE um, the stuff, then meet me back up here? IE well, you have friends downstairs andE" And Bill was likely closeted, at the very least, Trent translated.

Oddly enough, that didn't bother him. He wasn't looking for a relationship with Bill, after all, no matter how funny and gorgeous the man was. This was going to be strictly a one-time event. *Well, maybe two times*, Trent told himself, *assuming the sex doesn't suck in the bad way*. And God help him, he was thinking in clichés, which meant he was too fucking horny for words that could ever pass as clever.

"Yeah, okay," he muttered. "Twenty minutes. Which room?" Because suddenly Trent could hardly wait to get downstairs and back up again. Or not so suddenly.

The doors closed, Trent whispering "nineteen twenty-three" under his breath repeatedly, though there was just about zero chance of him forgetting that number. Ever. Or for the next few days, anyway, if all went well and the convention didn't scare Bill off. But it would definitely go well. It had to.

Trent just needed to get to his room, make his excuses to Tom, who Trent was sure would be there and would understand, then haul ass back up to the nineteenth floor. He might even be able to make it in less than the twenty minutes he'd promised. He was for damned sure going to try, in any case.

Jesus fuck, was he really going to do this? *Well, yeah,* Lucas answered himself, even as he stripped quickly and stepped into the shower. He was absolutely going to do it, and he was going to enjoy every minute.

Trent was fucking amazing, even if he did have that whole cyber-geek thing down pat. He also had the whole stunning as fuck and easy to hang out with thing happening, so yeah. There was no way Lucas was going to change his mind. Blow off some steam with the game-guy, hopefully get a few decent orgasms out of itE and Trent wasn't there for TV stuff, so there was about zero chance of the hot as sin goth stumbling on to who Lucas really was. He doubted Trent would even know where the autograph room was, much less do anything but snort if he were to walk past it while Lucas was inside doing signings.

Lucas washed quickly, rinsing the sweat and dust of his drive away, careful not to touch his cock. He was harder than he could remember being before, so it took a hell of an effort, but damn it. When he came, it was going to be because Trent was touching him. He'd jerked off enough over the last two years, Lucas thought with a frown. He'd be damned if he was going to do it now, when those long, pale fingers were less than fifteen minutes away.

He shut off the water, then shivered just a bit in the cooler air outside the enclosed shower stall. The towel sucked most of the wetness from his hair in mere moments, and Lucas made a mental note to ask about the manufacturer. His towels at home, regardless of how much they'd cost, were nowhere near as absorbent. Or soft. Hell, the cotton felt

almost like silk against his cock when he wrapped the damp fabric around his hips.

He was standing in the living room area of his suite a minute or two later, trying to decide whether he should put on jeans again, or maybe just the soft, worn flannel pajama pants he'd brought, when he heard the soft knock at his door. It was swiftly followed by a slightly harder, louder attempt, and Trent was early.

No, Trent was early and obviously having second thoughts, because when Lucas peered through the peephole in the door, he saw the man standing outside, shifting from foot to foot. Saw Trent's hand rise to knock again, then drop without touching the door, and that wouldn't do.

The towel would have to be good enough, Lucas decided when Trent started to turn away.

He yanked the door open, then shot one hand out, grabbing Trent by the shoulder. "Hey," he said to wide, surprised dark eyes. "You're early. I'm, umE not dressed. Um, obviously." Lucas chuckled just a little, suddenly nervous again. "Sorry. I wanted to take a shower. I was driving all day, and I already told you that, soE Shit. Come in?"

Lucas could almost feel—literally—the weight of the stare he got then. Couldn't help the shiver that raced through him when those dark eyes went from shocked to hot in less than a second.

Lucas sucked his stomach in just a bit, letting the towel droop around his hips as he pulled Trent forward and slammed the door, shutting the world outside. He didn't want to think about the world. In fact, he didn't really want to think

at all. He just wanted to feel, and fortunately Trent seemed to be on the same page, because it was less than a moment later that Lucas found he'd been turned, somehow, his naked back against the door while Trent's eyes devoured him.

Then those full, pink lips were pressing against his own, and Lucas couldn't help moaning right into the cavern of Trent's mouth.

Lucas' hands were moving without conscious direction, sliding, pushing, shoving at layers of fabric, and the only reason he didn't groan when his fingers found flesh was Trent's tongue sliding into his mouth. That tongue was demanding, wanting, pressing and sliding roughly, as though Trent wanted to crawl into him from the lips down, and Lucas didn't have even the smallest problem with that idea. Hell, he thought it was possibly the best notion anyone had had. Ever.

He pushed Trent's T-shirt higher, his fingertips dipping down under the waistband of Trent's black jeans, and Lucas moaned again when his not so careful explorations had him brushing just the very tip of Trent's seeping shaft. His long-ass time without showed a little in how long it took him to finesse the button and zipper, but Trent wasn't complaining, so it didn't much matter. Then there were hands sliding from Lucas' arms, fingers that weren't his own trailing a rough path down ribs to the towel, and Lucas realized he was naked right about the same time he pulled Trent's cock from behind imprisoning denim.

"Shit!" he hissed, hips pushing away from the door to press his own throbbing flesh to Trent's. "Shit, Trent!" And there was a hand on his hip, holding him steady while Trent's

other hand wrapped around Lucas' cock, pressing it hard against Trent's rampant prick, the slick dribbles of fluid coming from them both easing the way as they rocked and slid, shivered and shook and finally exploded wildly, filling the air with the smell of sex and come and him and Trent.

It was a damned good scent, Lucas thought blearily, his heart racing a mile a minute. Hell, it was almost as good as the nearly knee-buckling intensity of coming with Trent's hand around them both. Only almost, though and it was going to get better. Lucas knew that much, because even with just having fired like a damned automatic rifle, his cock was twitching again. Much as Trent's was against him.

"Jesus," he groaned, leaning harder against Trent's slender, surprisingly strong form. "Fuck, Trent. That wasE"

Trent moaned, and Lucas felt it in his gut. "Yeah. God, Bill. That wasE hot. So damned hot. I. We should try that with both of us naked, next time." And Jesus, Lucas couldn't help laughing at that, even though a part of him was somehow jealous of "Bill"E who was him. But not. Christ.

Lucas pushed the thought away and let his arms do what they'd been wanting to do ever since he'd opened the door. He let them wrap around Trent's waist, pulling the man closer still. "Is next time going to be long?" he murmured after a moment, his lips brushing Trent's pale neck lightly. "Because I'm thinking we should, umE"

And there he went being nervous again, which Lucas knew was just stupid. Trent had come to the room. He'd come all over Lucas' stomach, even, so clearly the man was interested. Plus, he could feel what seemed like a long, thick cock

growing hard again against him. "Maybe we should move to the bedroom," he managed. "Unless you'd rather justE"

Jesus, Trent could kiss. And maybe it was only to shut him up, but Lucas doubted it. Not with the way Trent was grinding him into the door, anyway.

The heated slip and slide gave way to something slower, simpler, and Lucas found himself responding in kind, his hands roaming up and down Trent's spine, then pushing under denim to cup Trent's tight, rounded buttocks. God, the man's ass was like a dream. Firm muscle covered in layers of soft flesh and even softer skin. Not a bubble-butt by any stretch of the imagination, but Lucas had never been drawn to those, anyway.

No, Trent's ass was just about perfect. Masculine, but with just enough padding to make touching it a treat. And Trent seemed to like Lucas' ass, too, if the way those strong, mobile fingers were kneading and clutching was any sort of indication.

"NnnnnghhhhhE" and yes, that was a sound of appreciation, but they weren't moving, damn it, and Lucas didn't want to ruin the moment, but he for damned sure wanted to be horizontal with Trent for the next round. There was so much more they could do lying down. Things that would require far too much balance if they stayed where they were.

"Come on," he breathed, trying not to moan at the loss of that hot mouth against his own. "Bed, Trent. Now, okay?" Because damn. Just damn.



They could deal with the scattered trail of Trent's clothing later, Lucas decided. In the morning, even. Or afternoon. Whichever. Because he was for damned sure not letting Trent out of bed until they were both so worn out they didn't even know their own names, much less each other's.

Trent didn't know what he'd been expecting when he'd knocked on Bill's door. Well, yes he did. He'd expected pretty much exactly what had already happened, but there was something just too damned hot about discovering that Bill waxed. Trent figured Bill must, the man's chest was so smooth. No stubble at all, just smooth, silken skin stretched tight over muscles that were even more appealing than Trent had hoped. It almost made Trent ashamed of his own less toned physique. Only almost, though, because while he was nowhere near as chiseled and stunning, Bill didn't seem to have a problem with that. In fact, the man was currently driving Trent insane with those lips, those perfect teeth, that wet, strong tongue that was drawing circles around Trent's tight little nipples, first one, then the other, in turn. He'd never felt anything like it.

He'd had lovers before. Of course he had. Skilled lovers. Usually of the one or two night variety, but even so. Nobody had ever paid the sort of attention to his chest that Bill was paying, and Trent knew he'd for damned sure never reacted to anyone the way he was reacting to Bill's touches, licks, small sucking motions. Christ, he thought his nipples might jump from his body and just stay with Bill forever, which was stupid, but it really did feel that good.

"God," Trent moaned, fully aware of the fact that he was writhing on the bed from just the small touches he'd received so far. Well aware that he must look like an enormous slut. He didn't much care when he thought about it, though, because for whatever reason, he actually was a slut for Bill. Especially when that warm, wet mouth moved farther, sliding down his chest to his navel. "God, Bill!" he grunted, hips rocking against the mattress, "Don't be kidding, okay?"

Trent actually heard the "as if" in Bill's amused snort, just like he heard the crinkling sound of a condom being opened, but he couldn't manage to say much of anything other than "Thank GodE" And then there were fingers on his bobbing shaft, more fingers smoothing the latex over his flesh, and he said another *thank God*, though silently this time, that Bill was as serious about safety as Trent was. Then Trent wasn't thinking or speaking, even to himself, because Bill's mouth closed over his tip, and Trent was reduced to moans, groans, some indefinable sounds that he'd probably be embarrassed about later but knew were just right, in the moment.

Trent's eyes closed, fingers digging into Bill's hair as Bill swallowed him deep, and while Trent was rocking harder, faster, between sheets and mouth, Bill didn't seem to mind. Hell, the rumbling hums around his cock made that much entirely clear, even while shorting his brain out in ways Trent hadn't experienced in far too long.

"GnnnnhhhhE" he grunted, legs spreading wider as Bill's fingers stroked his balls, giving Trent's sac one small squeeze after anotherE and then those fingers slid back to play at his

hole, taunting and teasing while that hot, tight throat flexed around him.

God, it was going to be over soon, but Trent didn't care. They had all night, he hoped. At least, Bill hadn't said anything to the contrary, and while Trent might be past those teenage years when he could come ten times a day, he knew he was good for at least two more rounds; maybe three. Bill just affected him that much, which was a damned fine thing in a one night stand.

He was making too much noise to notice the snap of the tube when Bill opened the lube. He didn't even hear the tell-tale squelching sound of viscous gel being squirted too quickly. Even so, Trent knew those things had happened by the almost humorously large dollop of lubricant that went everywhere when Bill pressed one finger slowly against him. But Bill's wicked mouth was still working him like a champ, and the last thing Trent wanted to do was laugh.

Instead, he groaned and moaned and muttered noises that were supposed to be *yes* and *more* and *now*, and somehow—thank God—Bill understood him, because that finger sank deep, pushing into Trent's body with as little resistance as Trent could manage. He figured it was a sign of things to come when Bill spent mere seconds sliding that long digit in and out before adding a second.

The small burn was welcome, wanted. Needed, even, after going on seven months of nothing but silicone in him. There was nothing wrong with Trent's dildos, but they weren't anywhere near the same as having a hot, horny man touching him, wanting to get inside. Trent's toys couldn't suck him off

while fingering him, either, and that very thing was just fucking amazing after going so long without.

Trent grunted again, his body shifting wildly when a third digit pushed in alongside its friends, and when Bill spread them, stretching him so well, he finally whimpered, trying to convey *God, so good, going to come, Bill, can't help it*, though once again the words were garbled, unintelligible.

Except to Bill, apparently, because those bright green eyes just sparkled up at him, and it was only then that Trent realized his own eyes were open. Open and watching Bill's red, kiss-swollen lips stretched around him. Watching that hot, wet mouth drop over him again, Bill's throat working his tip, his glans, likeE well, like a man worked a cock when he wanted someone to come.

Trent's fingers tightened on Bill's hair, his hips moving faster still. He felt Bill's mouth tight around him and the long, slippery fingers moving inside him. And God, did he ever feel it when Bill pegged his gland hard. Not that he could say so, of course, because just like that, Trent was far too busy moaning and grunting and even keening to speak.

He arched hard, cock buried deep in Bill's throat as he shot roughly, spurt after spurt of thick, hot fluid filling the condom as Bill swallowed around him, those fingers stilling as Trent's body clamped tightly around them.

"G-god," Trent managed to whisper a moment later, his heart still racing and showing no signs of slowing in the near future. And Bill's hand was at it again, and Trent's cock was slipping from that fine mouth, which should have been insured by God himself, or at least Lloyd's of London. "You

sure it's been a while?" Because Bill seemed to be in damned good practice.

Of course, Bill seemed to be amused, too, because those eyes were clearly laughing at him, even with the blistering heat they still bore. "Oh, yeah. You just feelE Shit, you feel so damned good, Trent. You're inspiring."

And okay. One ego, firmly stroked. Much as Trent's prostate was being stroked. Rubbed. Pressed.

"God, justE damn, do it, already." And if asking nicely didn't work, Trent was fully prepared to beg. Now. Later. All night long, if he had to. "Come on. Please." Okay, now won. Now was good.

Then there was that crinkling sound again, and Trent couldn't help watching as Bill rolled the new latex over that rampant, dribbling cock that was going to feel so good in about a minute. Not overly long, but easily as thick as Trent's favorite toy, and maybe more. "Yes," he hissed, knees up and grasped in his own hands without prior thought or plan. "Yes. Now, okay?" Oh, yeah. He was definitely a slut for Bill.

Luckily, Bill didn't seem to mind, because those strong, chiseled arms were on the mattress at either side of Trent's head, and he could feel that hard, thick shaft rubbing up and down his spread crack, the covered tip pressing against his hole every few seconds, and Bill was trying to drive him insane. That much was obvious.

"Please," Trent groaned, not caring that he must look as desperate as he actually was, lying there spread out, legs up and wide as he writhed, tried to push up onto Bill's cock, his own prick still spent but already starting to twitch back to life.

"Love the way you beg," Bill muttered, and Trent wanted to scream, but then Bill shifted even closer and that thick head pushed against him with actual intent.

Trent held his breath, then let it out in one sharp burst as he felt himself opening around the not so gentle pressure.

God, it burned. Hurt, even. But it felt so fucking good, too. Opening like that, letting Bill in, the girth of the man's cock spreading Trent wide while Bill's length pushed hard into his body. Yeah, that was exactly what he'd wanted. What Trent had missed, even if he'd never had it so good before.

"Harder," he demanded, making it sound like a plea. "God. Harder, Bill. Want to feel you for daysE" And damned if Bill wasn't giving him just what he'd asked for, because Trent had never known anything like the ferocious need Bill was slamming into him with. At least it felt like need, and it was definitely fierce, and that was good enough for him.

"Make youE" Bill grunted, hips snapping hard against Trent's ass, and Trent thought he might have bruises from it later, but that was fine. "Make youE comeE again, TrentE feelE 'round meE Fuck!"

And yeah, Trent wanted to come around Bill's cock, too. Wanted to feel that hefty prick holding him open even while his body did everything it could to expel it. Hell, he wanted to come so hard, Bill would think Trent was squeezing that thick cock off to keep inside his body forever.

"Soon," Trent growled, his own shaft bobbing against his stomach in time with his heaving breaths, small dribbles of nearly clear fluid dripping onto his skin. "Just needE God. Yeah. That!" Because Bill was holding himself up higher now,

slamming deep and hard into him, and that amazing cock was battering away at Trent's prostate with a force and speed that was mind-numbing and shattering at the same time.

His fingers dug hard into the backs of his own knees, and Trent felt it building—or building more, because it had never really stopped after that first session at the door—and he couldn't have tried to stop it, even if he'd wanted to.

His back arched, his head grinding back against the mattress beneath him as his spine stretched, hips lifting to take Bill deeper, to have the man's cock so far inside him that it lodged in the back of his throat, regardless of how impossible that might be.

His eyes slammed shut, even as his balls exploded, spilling small but violent splatters of come over his skin, and Trent cried out with satisfaction as Bill's shaft swelled inside him, spreading him still wider as the man thrust once more, so hard and rough that Trent knew he really would feel it for days; maybe weeks, if he was lucky.

Bill's roar was still echoing in his head, ringing in his ears and possibly from the walls of the bedroom when Trent finally forced his clenched fingers to release his own legs. They dropped slowly to the bed, and his moan was matched by Bill's when the motion had Bill's cock shifting inside Trent's happily aching hole.

Jesus Christ, Trent thought as his hands found Bill's strong, now-relaxed back, that had been one hell of a one night stand. And it wasn't even over yet, because Bill hadn't really said that he only topped, so maybe there was a chance of Trent getting into that tight, chiseled body.

He almost thought he heard his cock whimper at the idea of waking up again any time soon, butE give it a few hours, Trent figured, and then they'd talk. Him and his cock. Not with words, of course, because that would be stupid, but he was fairly sure that a little bit of rest—maybe a nap—would have him and his dick in agreement. And if not, wellE maybe he could talk Bill into having him around for another night, though with as good as the sex had been, Trent had a sneaking suspicion that it wouldn't require much convincing.

The soft rumbling beside his ear brought him back to the present, as well as the oddly gentle kiss Bill pressed to his temple. "HeyE you okay?"

Trent shivered just a bit as Bill's breath brushed his skin. "I'm fucking perfect," he murmured back, his hands sliding slowly up and down Bill's long spine. "God. You've got one hell of a cock on you. Or, you know. In me." His hands slowed, and Trent frowned when he felt Bill sigh. "How about you? Okay?"

Trent felt the nod, more than saw it, but he couldn't keep himself from moaning in some odd combination of relief and disappointment when Bill rose up a bit to pull away. Then Trent noticed that Bill had one hand around the heavy shaft that was still partly inside him, and he sighed again. Right. Condom. Fuck.

Bill finally nodded, those green eyes darting sheepishly to Trent's as the latex was removed, tied off, discarded. Then that strength was stretching out beside Trent on the incredibly comfortable bed and there were strong arms pulling



him closer to Bill's heated, sweat-sheened skin, and Trent went with it.

He wrapped himself carefully around Bill's body, ignoring the twinges from his own anus as he found a position that wouldn't crowd the other man but still let them have some contact. It was strange, how attuned he was to Bill, but after sex like that, Trent didn't care. Finally, he found himself curled against Bill's side, one leg resting across Bill's groin. His own arm was stretched over a golden-tanned stomach while Bill held him close to that chiseled form, one long-fingered hand on Trent's hip.

"I'mE really, really good," Bill answered after a few minutes of comfortable silence. "That wasE well, it definitely took the edge off." Then Bill laughed, and Trent joined him.

"God." Trent chuckled. "I doubt I have a single edge left, right now. Of course, we're still young, so you never know." That earned him another laugh, and Trent was amazed by how quickly he'd come to like the sound of it.

"And we haven't even touched the champagne yet," Bill reminded him, and the man was smiling when Trent lifted his head from one broad shoulder to look. "They say it's an aphrodisiac, you knowE"

God, that wagging-brow look was fun. And hot. StillE "God help us, then, because if we get any more sexed-up, I'll probably have a heart attack and die right here," Trent joked.

Bill nodded sharply, the smile still right there in his eyes. "Makes two of us, butE fuck, Trent. What a way to go. You know, aside from the headlines. Because that would be embarrassing."

Trent snorted, pushing in closer while he let the hand on Bill's stomach slide up, fingers dancing over ribs until they were close enough to trace around Bill's far nipple. "We'd be dead, so who cares, right?"

He almost thought Bill was going to disagree, because he felt the man's body tense a little bit, but the moment passed and Bill gave him another laugh.

"TrueE" Bill agreed. "So, I guess we should enjoy the little time that's left. Before our imminent demise, I mean. I'm thinkingE nap, then champagne, then maybeE I mean, if you want to, IE you could, uhE"

God, that was too damned cute. And made it really clear that no matter how much of a demon Bill was in the sack, it really had been a while for the guy.

Trent sat up a little. Just enough to stare down into Bill's wide, green eyes. "You want me to do you?" he offered with a tiny smirk, "because if that's what you're trying to say, I'm totally on board." He grinned. "I'd love to fuck you. I'll make you scream. In the good way. But first?" Trent slid back down to his earlier position, one arm resting on Bill's perfect abs, his head on a tanned shoulder. "First, I think we could both use that nap you mentioned. I doubt we'll need the liquid aphrodisiac—I could probably get it up for you while naked in a snowstorm—but it's good to know it's there."

Bill's soft, snuffling laughter followed Trent down into slumber, and he couldn't find any reason for that to be a bad thing. It was strange to feel so comfortable about sleeping—in the literal sense—with a guy he hardly knew, but screw it. Trent wanted round two. Soon enough.

Conventional Wisdom  
*by TC Blue*

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## **Day Two, Friday**

Jesus, he was sore, Lucas noticed with a moan as he stretched in the small kitchen of his suite. Sore and possibly bruised, and he was pretty sure there was a huge hickey on the back of his shoulder, but he didn't care enough to check. Well, he cared, but he didn't mind, Lucas qualified, trying not to grin at the memory of Trent fucking him after their brief rest. He couldn't help it, though, because even with the way his entire body ached, it was the good kind of pain. It was the complaining of muscles—one in particular—that had been worked to their limit after too long a period of inactivity.

And it really had been too long, he acknowledged. Too long since Lucas had felt the sweat-slick slide of a male body against his own. Too long since he'd looked at the person he was fucking and liked what he saw. And definitely too long since the last time he'd been opened, plundered, taken and given the sort of full-body workout he'd experienced with Trent. Hell, maybe he'd never been fucked so good. Or maybe it was just that the memories had faded over the last couple of years. Either way, though, it had been a damned good night.

It might be a damned good morning, too. Trent was still asleep in the bedroom, but there was every chance that he'd be interested in a shower, which Lucas was sure would lead to still more heat and slick and touch. More kissing, anyway, which was something Lucas was surprised to find he wanted. He'd never really been big on that sort of thing, but Trent was

just so good at it. The best kisser Lucas had ever known, actually, along with the other things Trent had no peer in.

He was fairly sure that he should be worried by just how easy it was to admit that to himself, but Lucas could flog that horse later, after Trent was gone. For the moment, he was just going to revel in his own soreness and satisfactionE and hope for a bit more of both. Of course, that meant Trent needed to be awake, which was exactly why Lucas was standing naked in the suite's tiny kitchenette, making coffee.

He watched the water drip-drip-drip through the filter and grounds and into the small, glass pot. When it was finally ready, Lucas placed the carafe carefully on the counter and grabbed two mugs from the granite surface. He didn't know whether Trent would want cream or sugar, but he couldn't carry much more than what he already had, which was fine. He could come back for anything else they needed, after all.

On the whole, Lucas decided with a small, pleased chuckle, he was liking this whole convention thing a hell of a lot. Of course, he had a feeling that he would be much less happy if he hadn't met Trent the night before, soE yeah. He'd resisted attending conventions for just long enough.

Lucas stopped to check his phone, then groaned softly at the six missed calls. He was sure they were all from Jason, considering the fact that he hadn't bothered to call his friend and manager after that initial voice mail. *And speaking of voice mailE* yeah. Six of them. Lovely. But he could listen to them later. He had a hot, pale game-geek to debauch first, didn't he? Yes, Lucas answered himself with a grin, he did.

Which made it that much more surprising when he heard the front door of the suite open.

He turned quickly, phone still clutched in one hand, mugs on the table and the handle of the pot of hot coffee gripped tightly in the fingers of the other. Jesus, he was about to be caught naked by some poor maid-service girl, not that he had anything to be ashamed of. Except maybe his naked and hard cock being all out in the open because it had been rising more with each step closer to the bedroom and Trent's ass.

"What the fuck?" he heard, and it actually took him a moment to recognize Jason's voice, but when he did, Lucas blinked. Okay. Not the maid, after all. Jason. Christ. Even worse, maybe, what with Trent's clothes still scattered across the floor.

"Um, hey," Lucas answered. "Coffee?" *And God, let Jason say no. Please.*

God was obviously listening, because Jason got that look on his face. The one that bypassed the appreciation of a friend, even a straight friend, and went straight into manager-mode. "No, no. I can tell I interrupted something so I'll just go next door, andE what's her name, Luke? Because you know the media's been going crazy since you broke up with Amber. Even if this is just something casual, it'll be great if the fucking papz catch you with another chick, right?"

God help him if he knew what to say about that becauseE well. "Um. I don't think we want the press knowing about this, buddy," Lucas managed to say, even while he took a sip of strong, black coffee directly from the lip of the pot. God

help him, he needed it. "It's kind of a bad time. Even for you to be here, okay? Maybe especially you."

Jason blinked, looking for all the world like a confused puppy, and Lucas nearly laughed. He didn't, though, because he was too busy watching realization explode in his friend's eyes. Apparently the masculine nature of the scattered clothing had finally registered.

"Oh," Jason said, blue gaze wide and worried when it darted to meet Lucas' again. "Oh. Okay. How much damage control do I need to get in place? Fuck, Luke. It's been E years. I thought you were over that!"

And that was Tracy's influence, Lucas knew, because before Jason had married the homophobic bitch who literally thought Lucas was the Anti-Christ, the man had understood that it wasn't just a phase. Hell, Jason had been the only one who'd known about him, aside from Gramps. And just because Lucas could function with females, that didn't mean he preferred to. Or wanted to.

"I'll never be 'over that', Jason, and you know it," he grumbled. "But I'm not about to throw my hat into the 'out and proud' ring, either." And yeah. That was true. "I know which side of my bread is buttered, okay? Besides," and Lucas felt like an asshole even as he was saying the words, "he doesn't have a clue about who I am. He's some sort of computer guy. Goth. Geek. Whatever. No risk. Got it?"

Jason's frown was deep, but not so deep that Lucas couldn't tell he'd talked his way out of the shithouse, and that was a good thing.

"It's one night," Lucas finished, smiling when he saw his friend's expression lighten. "Just one night, and nobody knows. Well, one night and the morning you're interruptingE" And yeah. That made it pretty clear that he wanted Jason to leave, didn't it? Preferably before Trent woke up and asked about the stranger in their living room. *His* living room, Lucas reminded himself. Not "theirs", though he wouldn't mind sharing the suite for the next few days. Not if Trent would be as accommodating as he'd been so far, anyway.

He barely registered whatever he might have said when Jason left, but then Lucas found himself wishing Jason had spent even less time, because when Lucas turned away from closing the door—still naked—he saw Trent, standing there in the doorway of the bedroom and staring at him.

"Um," he muttered, sheepishly. "That was, uhE"

"Your lover?" Trent offered, sounding completely undisturbed by the notion, which for some reason had Lucas a little bit angry. "It's cool. I would have been sure to be gone by now if I'd known you had someoneE"

"No!" Lucas nearly shouted the word. "No," he said again, softer this time. "Best friend. So he worries. Not my lover. Or boyfriend. NotE well, Jason's just my best friend, okay? He justE Coffee?"

And yes, he'd asked that same question a little while earlier and been shot down, but Trent was obviously less caffeinated than Jason had been, because the man gave him a grateful smile before collapsing—naked, as well—on the couch.



"Fuck, yes," Trent answered. "Black and hot and strong, if you haven't already ruined it with cream and sugar. Light and warm and weak, if you have."

And just like that, Lucas knew he was going to do everything he could to have one more morning just like this one. Without Jason's presence, hopefully.

It had been strange to wake up in Bill's bed. Even more so to hear the rumblings of two voices through the half-open bedroom door. Trent had almost wanted to hide right where he was, but he'd never been a coward, damn it, and if there was some sort of confrontation coming between Bill and whoever the strange man was, well, Trent thought he'd be better off just grabbing his clothes and getting the hell out. But the man—Bill's best friend, apparently—had been leaving and that was fine.

Trent wouldn't have cared much if Bill had been cheating on a lover, because that was often the reason for one nighters, but Trent thought he might have been disappointed in Bill, somehow. Fortunately, it hadn't been an issue, what with the whole friends only thing. Likely co-workers, too, what with Bill being in Richmond on business.

The hotel room coffee had been pretty good, Trent remembered, trying not to grin like a loon as he stood on the incredibly long and slow-moving line to get his badge for the convention. Strong, hot, and just what he'd needed to start his day. Of course, that applied to Bill, too. Hell, if he hadn't still been too sore for it, he would likely be in Bill's shower even then, with that thick cock jammed up inside his swollen hole.

It was probably a good thing that he wasn't, of course, because Trent knew he'd have to sit down at some point that day, which would have been difficult if he'd given in to Bill's—and his own—desires. So instead, he'd sucked Bill off, making use of the condom Bill had brought into the bathroom with such high hopes. That had been good, too.

God, everything was good with Bill, which definitely made the whole short-term thing a hell of a lot of fun. Because Trent couldn't call it a one-night stand anymore. Not when he was meeting Bill up in the suite after the gaming panels were finished for the day.

He had no idea of what Bill was going to do to amuse himself until then, but it didn't really matter. The man obviously had some sort of plans, probably involving that friend of his, so Trent couldn't quite force himself to be overly curious. They'd both do their own thing, then meet later for hot sex after Trent spent the day checking out new games that he wouldn't be able to afford until the next year, by which point they'd likely be obsolete. "Assuming this line ever moves, anyway," he muttered. "Because I'm starting to think *I* might be obsolete by the time it does."

The woman standing in front of him in line—all five foot three and two hundred pounds of her, including what had to be at least four cans of hairspray holding her bleached blond 'do stiff enough to possibly survive a hurricane unscathed—laughed. "Oh, honey," she offered, smiling, "this is nothing. It'll be much worse in about five hours, which is when most of the other people will be getting here. That'll make this look

like the express lane at Wal-Mart at midnight on a Wednesday."

"God, that's a horrifying thought." And it was, even if Trent had never actually seen the inside of a Wal-Mart in his life. He was more of the crappy thrift store type. Except when it came to underwear, of course.

Forty-five minutes later, Trent knew that the woman was from somewhere called Yazoo City in Mississippi, that she'd been married to the same man for twenty-three years, had four children—only one of whom was actually in college—and had been a science fiction fan ever since her oldest son had gotten hooked on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. She was a school kitchen supervisor, had once been crowned Miss Yazoo, back before the kids and all, and her husband Earl was a manager at their local grocery. She'd been coming to SciFiCon for eight years and considered it a welcome break from her normal life and apparently she'd decided that Trent was her new best friend.

Of course, Cindy Lou had managed to pry some of his own story from him, which was surprising. Trent usually didn't talk much about his family. He definitely wasn't the sort to just share things like the way his parents had cut him off when he'd told them he was gay. Luckily, that had been after he'd finished school. But he'd told her about that, for some reason and how his kid brother and little sister had turned their backs on him, too, which was the part that had hurt the most. Still did, most days.

Even more surprising was the fact that this older woman, because she had to be at least forty-five, who had been born

and raised in a very small city in the middle of the Bible Belt, of all places, hadn't even batted an eye when Trent had outted himself to her. No, she'd just grinned and shrugged, saying "I can't say I understand it, Trent, but I don't see the harm. At least you're not married to some poor girl who's going crazy trying to figure out what's wrong with her that you can't love her. Besides, we have Showtime. I know some things."

Cindy Lou winking suggestively was a scary sight, but the woman obviously had a good heart and an open mind, and if Trent hadn't already had plans, he would have been fine with the idea of joining her in the bar for drinks later that night. As it was, thoughE "Sorry," he said, still a little bit amazed that he actually meant it, "but I'm sort of, umE busy later. How about tomorrow?"

Dark blue eyes wrinkled around the edges as Cindy Lou laughed, and Trent could suddenly see the former beauty queen still lurking there, just below her skin.

"Hot date?" she teased, laughing again when Trent's cheeks grew hot. "Oh, you do move fast, honey. Sure, tomorrow night's fine, but I'll be in costume." She blushed a little, too, which actually made Trent feel better about his own betraying skin. "My youngest two helped with it, so it's a little bit simple, butE" She shrugged and moved forward as the line advanced a few more feet. "So you're a quick one, hmmm?"

"Faster than you know," Trent answered truthfully, then added in a mock serious tone, "and I'm obviously good at it, because look at me." He grinned. "Two hot dates, now." Even though it wasn't really a date he had with Bill. More of an

appointment, considering the fact that they weren't likely to be going anywhere other than bed. Or couch. OrE hell, even floor. Trent could get behind floor-sex. Or in front of it. Either way was good.

The conversation and laughter carried him through the remaining fifteen minutes or so of waiting, and then he had his shiny, laminated badge and said goodbye to Cindy Lou for the moment. He was sure to run into her later, after all. The next night at the bar, if nothing else.

He didn't delude himself that this new friendship was going to last past the end of the convention, but that was okay. Spending time with Cindy Lou was sort of like hanging out with the kind of mother he'd always wished for but hadn't had. A little bit of that was likely to go a long way.

Trent looked at the thoroughly confusing map of the hotel he'd been given along with his badge, then shrugged and picked a direction at random. He would eventually hit a wall and have to backtrack, or he'd find the gaming rooms. And if not, he could always ask that smug, sneering little bitch at the front desk how to get where he was going. Hell, that might even be fun. Or, he realized when his hotel roommate appeared in front of him, seemingly from nowhere, he could just ask Tom.

Tom did know where the gaming rooms were. Mostly because the guy had been up and out of their room while Trent had still been sleeping in Bill's bed. Damned early risers. Still, it made things easier, and Trent was soon ensconced in a reasonably comfortable chair, listening to Tim Darby talk—in graphic, excruciatingly exact detail—about his

journey from writing code in a basement to working as lead designer for one of the best game manufacturers in the world. God, it was so damned cool.

*Jesus, what a long-ass day,* Lucas groaned. Everything after slamming his tongue down Trent's throat by way of "see you later" had been excruciating. Either excruciatingly dull or disheartening.

First, the forty minute wait for Jason to finish whatever the hell he'd been doing, then having to find the "guest" registration, which was apparently what the convention people called people like himself and his manager. Then hours of green-room chat with others of his own ilk while they waited for whatever interview sessions—called panels, for some unknown reason—to begin, and God help him, but the questions some of the fans had asked!

Lucas really hadn't minded the numerous requests for hugs. Hell, that was part of the job, as far as he was concerned, and he'd always handed them out happily when he was stopped on the streets in L.A. or even repeatedly interrupted over restaurant dinners, which had been the final nail in the coffin of his unlamented "relationship" with Amber DuPres, thank God. He'd almost despaired of doing anything "bad" enough to drive her away before the fateful six month mark when he would have had to marry her or sleep with her sister to shake her loose. Her last scene had given him the perfect excuse, though, and he would have been a fool not to take advantage of it. Lucas had never been a fool. Foolish, maybe, but a fool? No.

He also hadn't minded the "will you marry me" questions, one of them coming from a twelve-year-old girl who'd been blushing hard enough that Lucas almost thought he'd been able to feel the heat of it from twenty feet away.

But that one woman—she must have been thirty or so—who'd asked the last question of the Q&A session *for Black of Night*, had really just shocked him. How did she know? *Did* she know? But how could she? Still, she'd looked so calm and composed when she stood there at the microphone that he'd been completely blindsided by her words.

"How much is Christina's introduction as Mason Black's love interest meant to distract us from his obvious attraction to Roark?" she'd demanded, referring to Amelie, the pretty but arrogant actress who'd been brought on in the last season as just that—Lucas' character's sort-of girlfriend—and Richard Baxter who played Roark, Mason's right-hand man. Or right-hand werewolf, to be more precise.

Richard was laughing, then, and so was Amelie, that bitch. Of course, Lucas was pretty sure Amelie was just being nasty because she'd only had three questions directed her way and she really was a bitch. Probably from missing so many meals in order to remain a size zero, but that question. Damn.

God, he'd actually frozen for a moment, but then the rest of the people in the chairs before him were laughing along with his co-stars, and the woman herself was grinning like she'd done something clever, so Lucas had slipped into character, answering "depends on how much you'd *like* to be distracted, doesn't it? Roark's a good-looking enough guy,

after all. Could be I'm setting things up for a bit ofE" And then he'd remembered the extremely young girl who'd begged to be his child bride and he tempered his words.

"Well. Might be the three of us could play checkers *together*, if you see what I'm saying." He'd winked and abandoned the pseudo-whenever accent 'Mason Black' used. "Seriously, though, that's a good questionE but I doubt the writers had any idea of the subtext you've read into things. To the best of my knowledge, Christina appeared because viewers like you thought my character needed something hopeful. I mean, he's a vampire who works as a short order cook on night-shift at a diner, for God's sake. He spends his few non-working night-time hours solving the supernatural crimes the local police are baffled by. And Roark is a good friend to him, but that's all."

He ignored Amelie's muttered "yeah, right," because she directed it toward him and away from the microphone, though he had no idea of why she'd said it. It didn't matter, anyway. The fans weren't responding to the Christina character as well as the producers had expected, which meant Amelie might find herself unemployed sometime soon. Couldn't happen to a nicer girl, in Lucas' opinion.

It was pretty much a blur after that, with the guy in charge of the session thanking him and what seemed like a thousand flashes going off when Lucas stood and waved his goodbyes. Hell, Jason had to take his arm and guide him until he stopped seeing spots and Lucas was actually glad for the help. Right up to the point when Jason took him to yet



another waiting area, though this one held someone he hadn't seen in close to three years.

"Jesus!" Lucas said with a real grin. "Mitch? What the hell are you doing here?" And if Mitch looked less than thrilled to see him, well Lucas was happy to pretend he didn't notice. "Christ, man! It's been ages!"

Mitch Lancaster, star of *The Secret Books*, which Lucas had guest starred on for three episodes over its final season, gave him a wry grin. "I'm paying the rent, Luke. I do maybe six of these things a year. It doesn't pay as well as having a show again, but at least it keeps Jeanette from crying, right? Keeps the kids in that private school, too."

The man let out a laugh that didn't sound even a little bit amused to Lucas. "The real money is in the signings. I spend maybe a couple hundred bucks for a thousand eight by tens, then I can charge twenty a piece to sign them." He looked thoughtful. "Tell you what. When your show goes belly-up, I'll put you in touch with my handler. She's a real go-getter."

"Uh, okay. Cool. Thanks," Lucas managed to mutter before convention staff urged them both toward a curtain-shrouded area. Then he was walking onto yet another stage and there were an insane number of flashes again, and when Lucas finally managed to find the chair that was meant for him, he was still frowning. Jesus, when had Mitch become so bitter? Okay, the guy looked older than he had a few years earlier, but everyone did. Mitch was an amazing actor. But the fact that he'd been reduced to doing just conventions seemed to imply that he couldn't get paying work, and that was just wrong.

Lucas made a mental note to talk to the writers about possibly creating a role for a somewhat older man. Maybe a beat cop. Someone who stumbled onto the truth of Mason Black's existence and realized what the vampire was doing. A sympathetic character who would fight against his own nature every time he offered up details of a case that seemedE unnatural.

It was a good idea, Lucas figured, and he thought so even more when almost every question during his and Mitch's shared session was directed toward *him*E and had nothing to do with *The Secret Books*. Still, he did his best to steer the questions toward the defunct showE and toward Mitch. Hell, the whole fucking panel was supposed to be about *Mitch's* show, not Lucas'. It was exhausting, start to finish.

He was a little bit fascinated and a little bit freaked that several of the people asking questions were dressed as Mitch's character from the showE and some wore costumes almost identical to the pseudo Victorian garb Lucas' character had worn. He'd seen similar things in the *Black of Night* Q&A, too, but it hadn't really registered. And some of themE Lord only knew what they were supposed to be, because Lucas didn't have a clue. Especially the people of all ages in what looked like lab coats with some sort of weird, giant goggles on their heads.

The few girls clutching stakes Lucas understood, though that show had been over for yearsE but the people in long, brown coats baffled him, as well as the one girl dressed as a giant hat. And that was just there in the room. God knew

what he'd see if he actually paid attention between there and his suite.

God, Lucas needed this day to end already. Needed to be back in his room with his cock down Trent's throat. Or Trent's cock up his ass. Either one would work for him. Both would be even better, though not at the same time, of course, because that wasn't physically possible. It might be fun trying, though, and Lucas held on to that thought until he was standing again, the flashes blinding him once more.

*This is definitely more like it*, Lucas thought a few hours later. Bed and Trent and Trent's long, slender fingers inside him won out over everything else that had happened that day, both good and bad.

"Yeah," he groaned. "Jesus, Trent. Just like that." Because Lucas figured he could go another few hours before overwhelming exhaustion would make him beg Trent to stop. Take a break, he meant. But Trent was laughing that soft, knowing laugh, and okay. Maybe Lucas could go minutes before the need to come swelled and crashed down like a ton of really welcome bricks.

"Christ. Yeah, IE" and he was writhing just a bit already, even as Trent pushed another finger into him alongside the first two. Fuck, it was good. Almost too good, even with the small, lingering bits of soreness from the night before. "Trent. Trent, don't. Jesus, in me, okay? Need toE"

God. He really did. And it really was need. Not just want or heat or fire or any of the things Lucas usually convinced himself of, on the rare occasion that he found himself in that position. He *needed* this. Needed *Trent*. And that was fucking

terrifying. It didn't stop him from arching and pushing onto Trent's fingers harder, though. Hell, Lucas thought nothing could have stopped him. It all felt as necessary as breathing.

Trent nodded, and Lucas heard the low groan the man had clearly been holding in, then that plastic-foil sound and "Oh. Oh, yes. Fuck, Trent. Yes."

The words were obviously some sort of call to action, because Trent pushed against him once, then harder, the tip of his long cock sliding on lube. "Right now," Trent muttered into his ear, and Lucas only then realized that they were actually going to do it face to face. That Trent was over him, eyes on his as that pink mouth opened, letting out a loud moan as Trent surged forward, forcing Lucas' body to open too quickly and not even close to fast enough.

The contrasting emotions were confusing enough that Lucas couldn't manage to speak. Couldn't find the words to say *no* or *stop* or *not like this*. He had no idea of how to explain, even if he'd been able to control his voice, that he didn't do that. Didn't get fucked on his back with his legs over a man's shoulders and a cock pushing deeper and deeper into his body while intent eyes stared at him, clearly catching every nuance of emotion that crossed his face.

He wouldn't have been able to say why, in any case, because Lucas honestly didn't know. He had no problem with being the driver in that position, so to speak, but the other? *This*? No, he never had. He'd never wanted to, except Christ, Trent was so deep. So deep Lucas thought he'd taste latex if he exhaled hard enough. And it was frightening, petrifying, exciting, and just so damned good.

Some of that must have shown on his face, because Trent was holding still, small tremors visibly shaking the pale, lithely-muscled arms holding the man above him. "Hey. Hey, youE God. You okay?" Trent murmured.

And Jesus. Trent was actually concerned, which was surprising. In the good way, and that was just as much of a shock to Lucas' mind. His body, on the other hand, was trying to give Trent a rousing chorus of "hell yes, just fine thanks, now could you move that thing that's making me want to do a little dance?"

Then Trent shifted just a tiny bit, those lean hips moving from side to side by maybe an inch, and that was the end of rational thought—or semi-rational thought, anyway—for Lucas, aside from the grunted "Uh-huh, uh-huh," he knew was spilling from his lips.

"Good," Trent whispered, leaning down to let the word brush across Lucas' lips, and Jesus fucking Christ, it was.

Lucas lost himself in the slip and slide of tongues and bodies. Lost all sense of time and place. All he knew for sure was each moment, the *now* moving with him, replacing the second before in his mind with no thought, no regret, no concern for the moments to come.

His body bent, knees at his own chest as Trent rose, dragging those swollen lips from his, and Lucas could have cried for the loss. Except Trent was moving so slowly all of a sudden, and Lucas could see one purple-tinged bead of sweat sliding down the side of Trent's face from that streaked hair.

Lucas did cry out when that droplet fell from Trent's chin and scalded a sweet path across his cheek. Then there was

another bead and the slow, deep thrusts, the careful rolling of Trent's hips against Lucas' ass didn't speed, didn't slow, didn't do anything but become somehow more intense, and Lucas was lost. Utterly and completely lost.

The moments stretched out, pulling like taffy at some boardwalk stand, and when Lucas felt the tightening in his own sac, his body at its limit, that seemed to stretch, too. Subjective hours in mere seconds, during which Trent's cock introduced itself repeatedly to Lucas' prostate, and he hadn't needed that, even, but Lucas wasn't complaining. Wouldn't complain. Couldn't, when that slow, smooth glide offered the perfect reason for the way he was groaning, gasping, spilling strong, slick bursts of viscous seed between himself and Trent.

And then Trent was there, too, that lean body pushing against him again, Trent's long cock sliding deep and easy until the man stopped, balls-deep in Lucas' ass.

He felt Trent shudder. Saw those dark eyes close for just a moment. Then they opened again and stabbed deeply into his own, penetrating him just as thoroughly as the pulsating shaft inside him.

Trent's mouth opened, but no sound emerged, though that throbbing intensified, Trent's cock swelling just a bit thicker. And then Trent's back was arching more, the man's hips even tighter against him while Trent gasped and stared into his eyes like Lucas' gaze held the secrets of the universe, and fuck, it wasE Lucas didn't know what, other than what the whole thing had been.

Unexpected. Scary. Exhilarating.

Conventional Wisdom  
*by TC Blue*

Comfortable, too, he realized with a silent bit of panic, because once Trent pulled away and got rid of the used latex, Lucas reached out and dragged that pale, gold-limned body onto his own again, and it wasE good. So good. *Too* good, for what they were doing.

Damn.

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### **Day Three, Saturday**

Trent wasn't bothered by waking up in Bill's room alone. He wasn't. In fact, he was so not bothered that he kept reminding himself of the fact for hours after he slipped into the hallway and down to the room he was actually staying in.

"NW panel moved to 3 in the Arlington Ballroom," Tom had written, leaving the note on Trent's unused pillow. "Hope you had fun. Don't feel like you have to give me details. Please. Ever." was the rest of it. And yeah, that was Tom, Trent thought, chuckling to himself just a little bit.

It sort of sucked that the Neverwhere thing was changed, though, because Trent wouldn't have minded a few more hours of blissfully peaceful sleep before waking up to find himself ditched. Was it still being ditched when the guy left you at his place, though? Trent wasn't sure, but he figured it either wasn't or it was the biggest ditch in the world. Like Bill had wanted to get away from him badly enough that Bill had just run, probably hoping Trent would be gone by the time he got back.

Well, if that was the case, it had obviously worked, Trent realized, because he'd left Bill's room, hadn't he? And he had nothing to do for the next five hours, either, except right.

He spent a few minutes pawing through his bag, letting out a triumphant "Yes!" when he found the paper he'd been looking for. "Amelie Jeroux? What kind of name is that for an actress?" Well, an unusual one, obviously, and maybe that was the point, not that it mattered to Trent, either way. He



had free time and nothing to do. Might as well get that autograph for his roommate's sister taken care of. And some lunch, maybe, if he could find anything for less than ten bucks.

Trent was freshly showered and suitably made up by the time he left his room nearly forty-five minutes later, and he wasn't thinking about how much nicer Bill's shower was than the one he'd just used. He wasn't. Except he was, really. How much better and how muchE well, even better than just plain "better" when Bill had shared it with him.

Damn it, he needed to stop thinking about it. Either Bill was through with him or not. Brooding over it wasn't going to make a difference either way. Trent would just have to wait and see whether he ran into the man at some point and see how Bill acted. That would tell him something, at least, and he wouldn't have wasted his day on being allE nervous.

Trent really was nervous, he realized, which was strange. Trent didn't *get* nervous. Not about random guys he picked up wherever. Of course, he also didn't generally like the guys once the immediate physical interaction was finished, soE Yeah, Trent decided, with a good bit of satisfaction at solving the mystery, that was it. He liked Bill. Liked his company. Liked that they could have a conversation, andE Jesus Christ. He wanted to be friends with the guy. Huh.

He mulled over the notion, paying just enough attention to his surroundings to get down to the lobby and follow the signs to the "Walk of Fame," nodding slightly to the pair of Klingon Men In Black with their enormous and shiny guns that looked damned real. The Storm Troopers he ignored, mostly because

Trent didn't see anything too original in buying the official armor, but whatever. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, and that was pretty much the point.

So okay, Trent thought, putting the costumes from his mind. He liked Bill. As a person. Unexpected, but not really a big deal. Trent could be friends with people he'd slept with. It didn't happen often, but it wasn't a completely alien concept. He wasn't sure of whether Bill would want to keep in touch, but Trent could suggest it. After being sure to let Bill know it was just that. Friends, maybe, who talked every now and then, possibly met for drinks and a good, hard fuck. And if Bill wasn't interested, well, that was fine, too. Come to think of it, Trent realized he didn't even know where Bill lived. Not really. But Bill had asked about D.C. being cold when they'd first met, so maybe it was pointless to even be thinking about it. The meeting for drinks and sex part, anyway. Crap.

"Well, now! Hey there, Trent, honey! I thought that was you ahead of me!" The voice interrupted his thoughts, and Trent hadn't been so glad of anything in a long time. At least a day or so, anyway. "I didn't know they had your game-people signing in here, too!"

Trent groaned, then laughed at the sudden, strong hug he was enveloped in. "Hi, Cindy Lou," he said with a smile. "Actually, I told my roommate I'd get him—I mean, 'his sister'—a signed picture." He shrugged. "Some girl he's all hot for. What about you?"

The woman blushed, and even though it made her lipstick clash with the sudden rose-tone of her skin, Trent didn't mention it. "Oh, my neighbor's girl has a huge crush on that

cutie from *Black of Night*. I thought she might like a picture, too." But that blush was darker.

"Uh-huhE Same show, I think. Any chance the girl next door's name is Cindy Lou, too?" Trent teased.

"I. But. I. Oh, you're a cruel, cruel boy, Trent!" Cindy Lou was giggling, though, and that was something Trent didn't experience too often. Someone who not only admitted their embarrassing secrets, but could find humor in being caught out. It just didn't happen amongst the crowd he knew back home, andE maybe he'd been set in his ways for too long.

Or maybe not, because Cindy Lou was looking at him with her head cocked, a curious expression in her blue eyes. "You think a few of those red and blue streaks might get Earl all riled up when I get home, honey?" she asked quietly, the curious shifting to hopeful all of a sudden. "'Cause I look around at some of these gals, and I think maybe I could do a little something to surprise him."

Okay, and whoa. Strange thing to be asking a virtual stranger out of the blue like that, and Trent almost said as much, but thenE then he remembered. Mississippi. Married forever. And none of Cindy Lou's friends back home were into the whole Con thing, while her convention friends would maybe push her to go too far. Trent was probably the closest Cindy Lou could get to "Queer Eye", though for the Bible Belt Con-Maven.

The thought gave him a chuckle, but he cocked his head in return and gave her a glance up and down. "HmmmE" he hummed, considering. "I'm not sure they'd be right for you. Too bright against the blonde. But maybe a few black

streaksE and I've been meaning to check out the dealer's room. There's a book on coding I've been meaning to find, but I'm pretty sure they sell clothes and stuff, too. We could check it out after this, if you want."

They fell to discussing the various possibilities, both of them becoming more and more outrageous as the minutes flew by. "Maybe something in leather," Trent offered, teasing just a bit more.

"Oh, no. My Earl just wouldn't understand about bondage things," Cindy Lou answered, blushing again, but wearing a smile so wicked, Trent actually envied her. Then her words sank in and he sputtered.

"B-bon-bondage? Cindy Lou!" God, he would be mortified if he wasn't so surprised and amused andE well, yeah. Mortified. "You're from Mississippi!" *And forty-five years old*, though he didn't say that part out loud.

The woman grinned, the wickedness growing just a bit. "Well, sure, honey. But I told you I have Showtime, right? Well, we have Cinemax, too." A pause. "Earl doesn't watch them. Just the ESPNs. But leather might be okay. Biker babe, y'know?"

God only knew what he would have said to that, because some tall, scary-looking woman grabbed his shoulder and pushed him toward the tables he hadn't even noticed were in front of him, and there she was. Amelie Jeroux. At least, Trent assumed it was her, because that was what the sign in front of the little brunette said, and God. The woman looked like she hadn't had a meal in days. Maybe months.

He grabbed a photo at random from the stacks on the table and handed it over. "If you could make it out toE oh, hell. He *said* it's for his sister, butE" Trent bit his lip.

The woman—Amelie—laughed. "Perhaps I shall simply make it out to 'my biggest fan', then?" And wow. That contralto voice was a surprise, considering. The accent, not so much, what with the woman's name sounding French. "And I will sign it 'with all my love,' yes?"

The thirty-five dollar fee for the signed photo was a little bit of a shock, but John had given him forty, which Trent had assumed would be far too much. Still, it covered the cost, and maybe he could get a bag of chips or something at the incredibly overpriced Stop-n-Shop in the lobby with the extra five.

He waited with Cindy Lou while she got her own signed picture, then trailed along as she went to the next actor in lineE and the next. Trent wasn't really paying attention, just keeping her company until they could get out of there and find the dealer's room. That was why he was so surprised to hear Bill's voice. Then he heard Cindy Lou answering and the content registered.

"So, who should I make this out to, pretty lady?" OhE so sincere. Not even a single bit of condescension there, which made sense, Trent supposed. Cindy Lou really was pretty, even if she didn't fit in with the current definition of attractive. She wouldn't be blown away by a light breeze, in any case.

"I. Oh. I. Cindy Lou. Lucas, IE" God, Cindy Lou sounded like a teenager, and Trent thought he would find it funny and charming at any other time.

"ToE CindyE LouE" Bill's voice said slowly, and Trent didn't want to look, but he couldn't help himself. "ThanksE for everything." God. Bill was saying what he was writing, and Cindy Lou was obviously loving it, because she was blushing and giggling like a schoolgirl. "LoveE Lucas Merrifield. There you go, Cindy Lou." And damn that sincere smile on Bill's face, too, because it was the same smile the man had given Trent as recently as the night before.

He honestly didn't know what to do. Considered turning and walking away, letting Cindy Lou catch up or not. But then Bill was looking at him, eyes wide and shocked and maybe even a little bit ashamed, and Trent couldn't help himself.

He snatched a random photo from the tablecloth and shoved it at Bill. Lucas. Whoever. "Make it out to Trent," he suggested harshly. "Maybe put something on there likeE thanks for the memories. Oh, and could you sign it 'Bill' for me? You just *look* like a Bill."

Something inside Trent actually enjoyed the panic on Bille Lucas' face. The rest of him was wondering what the fuck was wrong with him. There had been no promises, noE anything, other than really good sex. It was a very temporary arrangement, and Trent knew as much. Hell, he'd known it from the start. He didn't even want it to be anything more, for God's sake, and yet he was upset. Angry that Bill, Lucas, *whoever*, had lied about something as simple but vital as his name. Shit.

"You know what?" Trent grated out, still staring hard into those green eyes he'd seen from so much closer just hours earlier. "Never mind. I don't even watch your show." And with that, he mustered whatever dignity he had left and walked away, leaving Cindy Lou to follow or not, as she chose.

"Okay, you want to tell me what the fuck's wrong with you?" Jason demanded.

Lucas could barely hear him through the rushing in his ears. It was like when he'd been a kid and Gramps was still growing corn. He'd stood out there in the field many a time, and when the wind blew, all he'd hear was the shushing slide of stalks and husks, long grass whispering in a voice so loud there had been nothing else.

"Damn it, Lucas, I'm talking to you!"

Okay, he definitely heard that. Then again, so had everyone else backstage, judging by the way they were staring.

"Sorry," Lucas finally answered, shaking his head just a bit. "Sorry. What?"

And thank God Jason was apparently finished yelling, because Lucas figured he'd already suffered enough for one day. He didn't need Richie Baxter and that bitch Amelie staring at him any more closely than they had when Jason first shouted.

"I said, what the fuck is your problem, Lucas?" Jason hissed, pulling him along by the elbow to follow the handler assigned to Lucas by the convention. "One minute, you were fine. The next? Fuck, man. It was like you wereE Christ. What was on that T-shirt the blonde with the enormous tits was

wearing? Oh, yeah. Brain on vacation, body on autopilot. What the fuck happened?"

That was the question, wasn't it? What the *fuck* had happened? More to the point, why in the hell had Trent been getting autographs? Hell, Trent had said he was there for the video games shit, and Lucas had believed him, butE what if Trent had been lying the whole time? What if he'd known exactly who Lucas was from the very beginning, andE God, what if Trent was going to blackmail him? It had happened to other gay actors who hadn't been careful enough, and Lucas had always thought they were stupid for letting themselves get into those situations, and now he'd gone and done it himself, and he *felt* stupid. Like he needed to crawl into a hole and pull it closed after him.

"IE God, Jason. I'm such a fucking idiot," Lucas finally whispered. "I thoughtE Jesus. Fuck. I screwed up, man. IE shit!"

He couldn't even look at Jason, and maybe that was what convinced the man that Lucas was serious, because the next thing Lucas knew, Jason was telling the convention guy that they'd be going upstairs for dinner.

He was still lost as Jason steered him onto the elevator. Didn't say a word until they were in his suite, and God help him, but Lucas thought he could still smell Trent, even though maid service had obviously been and gone.

"Okay. Tell me," Jason demanded, and Lucas couldn't hold the words back when his friend pushed him down onto the couch. He just sat there with his head in his hands and spilled everything, giving Jason a full summary of the last few days.



"So, how screwed am I?" Lucas finally asked, still afraid to look at Jason and discover that his friend was as disgusted with him as he was himself.

The silence continued for what seemed like an eternity, though Lucas thought he could actually hear the gears turning in Jason's head. Eventually, though, Jason spoke, and when he did, his words weren't anything like what Lucas had been expecting. In fact, Jason sounded amused, the bastard.

"Aside from the activities I'm really glad you didn't tell me the details about, I don't think you are. Screwed, I mean. *Bill*." And yeah. Jason was fucking laughing at him. Clearly.

"Look," Jason went on, "If you ever tell Tracy I said this, I'll deny it until my dying day, but Trent was that punk-ass guy with the streaks, right? The hot one who said he doesn't watch *Black of Night* and asked you to sign yourself as Bill?"

Jesus, Lucas hadn't had a single clue that Jason was paying that much attention. He still nodded, though. "Yeah, IE fuck."

Jason just shook his head when Lucas finally looked at him. "You said the guy's not an actor, so I don't think he was faking being surprised. It was way too good for a play by an amateur. Much better than you were that first year on 'As the Stomach Churns'."

Jason winked, and Lucas nearly laughed at the reference to the soap he'd done for two years, back in the beginning.

"And you got a daytime Emmy for that," Jason added. "So you were both just in it for the sex, right? You and this Trent. I'm pretty sure he wasn't filming you or anything. In fact, I think—and this is another one of those things you never tell

my wife I said—the only way you're screwed right now is that the guy you've been fucking thinks you're a big fat liar."

And yeah. Jason was right. Trent hadn't been setting him up. But Trent for damned sure knew Lucas had been lying to him, and that wasn't good. Or was it?

He'd known that he'd be saying goodbye to Trent sooner or later. Maybe it was good that Trent was all pissed off. It would spare Lucas another night or two of amazing sex with a guy he actually *liked*, and while that being a good thing sounded weird even to him, it also made sense.

Lucas would be heading back to Los Angeles on Monday, and Trent livedE way the hell over in Washington, D.C. And that was good, too, because now that Trent had walked away from him, Lucas knew. He'd been getting too attached. He'd been starting to want things he shouldn't. Things he couldn't have without losing his career, and he'd worked too damned long and hard to get where he was to throw it all away just because he liked Trent. Liked Trent's cock.

So, he could trust that Trent wasn't going to blackmail him, and that was the best good thingE and he could manage to be on his own for the next couple of nights, too. He'd been on his own before, after all. He could do it again. And so what if he felt lonely? It was lonesome at the top. Everyone said so.

And it was worth it, Lucas reminded himself. He had a decent bit of money, a good investment portfolio, and a house in the hills that he really loved. He was getting ready to film season three of the hit syndicated show he starred in. He

was still young and healthy and damned good looking, if he believed his own hype. Things could be worse.

"You're right, Jase," Lucas said a moment later, feeling better already. "So is he. I *am* a liar. Hell, I lie professionally, right? And he's got nothing on me. No pictures, not a phone number, not even a note." He gave Jason the best smile he could manage. "So we're good. Safe. Trent doesn't matter. I'm glad he's mad at me now. I mean, it was just sex."

Jason's wry gaze had Lucas smiling even more. Then Jason spoke again, and Lucas sighed.

"Uh-huh. And who are you lying to now, Lucas? Just me, or the both of us?"

"Neither," Lucas grated out, trying to sound normal. But E both, his inner voice said. Both. And damn Jason for knowing him so well, anyway.

Well, he wasn't mad anymore, though Trent had a sneaking suspicion that was due to the steady flow of shots Cindy Lou had been buying him. He just didn't have the energy to be mad. And why should he be, he asked himself as he slammed back another tequila, not bothering with the lime or salt this time. Okay, Bill E Christ, Lucas Merrifield. Not Bill Speare.

Okay. *Lucas* had lied, but now that he'd had a few hours to stew, Trent couldn't say he blamed the man. Yes, he'd had no idea of who Lucas really was, and he'd probably made that abundantly clear by asking his name in the first place. Still, Lucas had to have been thinking something along the lines of E what if Trent mentioned his new friend to Tom or one of the guys in the gaming panels? There was no guarantee that

*they* would be as ignorant as Trent was. And if that had happened and anyone had put two and two together and come up with "Lucas Merrifield is a giant homo," the guy's career would definitely have been affected. Possibly destroyed, even with Hollywood becoming more accepting of the same-sex oriented in the last few years.

So, no. Trent wasn't angry anymore. But he was for damned sure drunk. He rarely drank anything stronger than Guinness, so six shots of tequila on an empty stomach? More than enough to have him swaying in his seat.

"You okay, honey?" Cindy Lou asked him, and Trent nodded at all three of her.

"I'mE good," he said after a moment or so. "Sorry about before. I just gotE" He shrugged. He couldn't even try to explain without telling Cindy Lou why he'd freaked at Bill's table, and that wouldn't be fair to Bill. Lucas. Shit. Even drunk, Trent wasn't about to out a man whose livelihood depended upon the closet door staying firmly shut, at least in public.

His eyes were bleary enough that he couldn't decide whether Cindy Lou's stare was considering or knowing. It didn't matter, he finally realized. He hadn't said anything about Lucas. Only Bill. And nothing to link the two men who were actually one and the same.

"Drunk?" the woman offered, and it actually took Trent a minute to remember what she was responding to, but when he did, he nodded. It was true enough, after all.

"God. Yeah." Trent nodded slowly, glad they were at a table rather than sitting at the bar. He doubted he could have

kept himself from toppling over if he'd been on one of those tall, backless stools. "Meant to get something in the lobbyE and sorry, CL. Think I need the little goth's room."

He knew he was stumbling a little while he wove his way between the tables toward the small sign in the corner of the bar, but what the hell. It was Con, and the fact that the waiters didn't even look at him twice told him that it wasn't exactly unusual behavior, so why stress?

Of course, once he was inside the men's room, his body decided that pissing wasn't going to sober it up fast enough, and by the time Trent was finished expelling sour-smelling liquid, then dry heaving, he was remembering exactly why he didn't drink liquor. He was also feeling much better, aside from the embarrassment of knowing anybody who'd come in while he was in the stall knew exactly how much he couldn't hold his booze. That didn't stop him from leaving the enclosed space, though, and his blush faded at the commiserating nod the only other occupant gave him.

Minutes later, he was back at the table, mouth rinsed and face still damp from the splashes of cold water. His mascara was fine, what with being waterproof, but the rest was pretty much a lost cause, so he just ignored it. "What's up?" he asked, nodding toward the napkin rolls that hadn't been there before.

Cindy Lou shrugged and blushed a little, herself. "I'm hungry, honey. Tequila always gives me an appetite. And since you're being nice enough to hang out with an old broad, I figured you'd be even nicer and help me out with the food."

She lowered her voice and murmured, "I think I ordered too much, but it all sounded so *good!*"

Trent had a feeling that Cindy Lou somehow suspected the state of his finances, but damn it, now he'd feel guilty if he didn't "help her out." Which was probably why she'd put it that way to begin with, he realized, andE and nothing. There was nothing he could say that wouldn't either offend her or imply that she was lying. Possibly both.

"Cool," he answered, "but next time, I'm buying. Got it?" Assuming they went to the MacDonald's down the road, anyway. A dollar menu was a beautiful thing.

The nachos were good. So were the chicken wings. But it was the spinach dip with the white corn tortilla chips, still warm from the fryer, that had Trent moaning. "GodE I so need to marry the chef. Even if he's a woman." Of course, then he nearly choked on his next bite because Cindy Lou laughed and winked at him.

"I don't think *Bill* would like that much, honey. Not with the way he looked like he wanted to eat you up. Once he got done gaping like a fish, of course." She laughed even more when Trent felt himself doing that gaping thing, as well.

"Oh, honey," she added, her voice soft, but so sly it was astonishing. "I might be forty-five, but I know a thing or two about how young men look at the objects of their desire. It wasn't so long ago that my Earl looked at me the way LuE um, you know whoE was looking at you." Cindy Lou cocked her head for a moment, then grinned hugely. "Earl still looks at me like that, you know, but I'm still thinking that leather we talked about could be fun."

There were so many things wrong with what Cindy Lou had just said that Trent didn't even know where to begin. That didn't stop his mouth from opening, though. Didn't stop words from coming out, either. "I. But. He. You. HowE"

Then there was a plump, tanned hand with frosted pink nails patting the back of his own, and Trent forced himself to breathe. God, he'd just basically told Cindy Lou that she was right and what if it got out? What if Lucas' career was ruined, all because Trent hadn't thought quickly enough to deny it? "I mean, it's notE what you think, it'sE"

A snort cut him off. "Trent, honey. It's exactly what I think. I'm from Mississippi, not the moon. Besides, I don't think I told you this before, butE the reason I have Showtime and Cinemax at the houseE and that gay channel, too, isE well, my oldest boy is like you. And he's dating the Mayor's son. Now, Bobby's planning to run for Councilman, so anyone knowing he's gay would pretty much end that. His Daddy doesn't even know. Just like Earl doesn't know about Jimmy. But I see how the boys look at each other, so maybe that's why I knew what I was seeing in LuE your Bill's eyes."

Maybe that did explain it, butE God, Cindy Lou was talking like he and Lucas were *involved*, and they weren't. It wasn't some big romance. Just two guys who liked each other and had a damned good time fucking. Which was finished, after the way he'd acted earlier, Trent was sure. Of course, he couldn't tell Cindy Lou that. It would probably scandalize her. Or make her keep talking about it, which would be even worse.

"You know, I still think I need to marry the chef," Trent announced, scooping up another chip-full of spinach and cream cheese and whatever the hell else was in there to make the dip so damned good. "But not until after we get you that biker-babe gear you want, CL."

And thank God Cindy Lou didn't push it any farther. Trent didn't think he'd be able to handle it. Not when the woman's words had something inside him feeling so warm and fuzzy all of a sudden. *What the fuck?*

The last thing Lucas was expecting was the loud, hard knock at his door. Partly because he knew Jason had already headed off to bed, but also because it was after midnight.

Hell, he'd been about toE well, not go to sleep, because even with driving cross country, he was still more or less on L.A. time, but he'd been planning on kicking back on the couch with another beer and seeing what he could find on the pay-movie channels. No porn, of course, because there was about zero chance of finding the kind he liked showing on TV, even in a very nice hotel. *Especially* in a nice hotel, not to mention in Richmond. And even if they'd had any available, it would have shown up on his bill, and that way led straight to outing himself, damn it.

So, no. He wasn't expecting the loud banging at his door, but if whoever it was didn't stop, they'd be waking up his temporary neighbors, and that was the kind of press he couldn't afford, either.

"TV Hunk Disturbs the Peace" would be the kindest headline, he was sure, because that damned Inquisitor rag



had been out to get him ever since they'd missed out on the whole debacle of his stormy break-up with Amber.

"What?" he snarled, throwing open the door without even checking through the peephole, which Lucas realized was a stupid move even before the door was fully open. "People are trying to sleep, youE Trent." Okay. Annoyed to pleased, just like that. Damn. "Um. Hi."

He felt like an asshole, but then again, Lucas realized, he'd been feeling like that ever since Trent had walked away from him earlier that day. He just hadn't wanted to admit it. But now—with Trent right there in front of him—Lucas couldn't deny it. He felt like an asshole. An ashamed one.

Trent looked every bit as sheepish as Lucas was, though, rather than pissed off and aching for a fight, and that was justE weird. Then "Hey, BiE Lucas, I meanE uh, can I come in?" pushed it beyond weird and into the realms of the outlandishly strange.

"UmE sure?" Lucas heard himself saying, even as his body took over and stepped back from the open doorway, his hand still holding the door lever like it was a life rope.

"Are you asking me or telling me?" Trent asked quietly, but the guy was smiling just a little, and he for damned sure stepped inside, so Lucas decided there wasn't any need to answer.

He closed the door and turned, staring that scant inch up to meet Trent's deep brown gaze, and suddenly Lucas was laughing at the nervous-worried-sorry he saw there, mostly because it so exactly matched what he was feeling himself.

"Um. So," Lucas started, then he stopped, with no idea at all of where he'd been going with those two short syllables.

"Yeah. Exactly," Trent said, shaking his head and laughing a little, too. "Look. I know it's late, but I needed to wait until I sobered up to come here, and if I waited until tomorrow, I'd probably chicken out. IE Christ, Bill." Trent's eyes rolled.

"Lucas. Sorry. I just wanted to tell youE I get it, okay? And I'm not mad or anything. You were protecting yourself, right? I mean, I guess it's easy for me, you know?"

And that didn't make any sense at all, Lucas decided after less than a second of processing the words. Well, okay. Some of it did. Like the part about him lying to keep his real name a secret. But how the hell was it that Trent understood? And why the fuck wasn't the guy angry? Lucas would have been furious, if their positions were reversed.

'WhE what's easy for you?" he demanded, though that wasn't what he'd been planning to say. "Being gay? Being out? What, Trent?"

It wasn't until he was sitting on one end of the couch that Lucas realized he'd followed Trent there. He was just soE baffled and relieved. That Trent was even there, yes, but for other reasons, too. Reasons Lucas didn't want to look too closely at just then.

Those slender, black-clad shoulders shrugged, then Trent looked at him again, and Lucas could see just how much Trent meant whatever the man was going to say next. It was right there, clear and plain as day.

"All of it, BiE Lucas. I mean, I was fucking pissed off, after I saw you. For a little while. But then I got to thinking."

Another little laugh came from Trent's mouth. "Okay, to be honest, I got to *drinking*. When I finished puking up tequila, that's when I started thinking, andE you're famous, I guess. I mean, I never heard of you, but there was a huge line in that room today. A long fucking line of people waiting for you. For a word or a glance, even more than a signed picture. And I already knew you were passing. I knew that even before I found out that you weren't just some guy here on business."

Then Trent laughed again and those brown eyes were crinkling just a little at the edges and Lucas thought he could handle seeing more of that. Maybe forevE For another day or two.

"What's so funny?" he demanded, a little bit freaked by his own thoughts.

Trent shook his head and laughed a little more, then leaned forward, elbows resting on the knees Lucas remembered seeing all the way up by Trent's ears. "Well, it's funny because you really *are* here on business, right? So I wasn't wrong."

And put like that, Lucas figured it was sort of amusing. Only sort of, though. But he really needed to pay attention to what Trent was saying. Needed to stop staring at the way those pink lips moved.

"My point is," Trent went on, "I'm nobody. I don't mean that like I don't matter or anything, butE no one knows who I am except my friends. I can be as gay as I want and it doesn't matter because I work in a video store in D.C., right there on the Fruit Loop. I don't have to worry about losing my

job if someone finds out I like cock, you know? Because it's pretty damned obvious that I do. But it's different for you."

Trent frowned like he was trying to figure something out, and Lucas waited, even though he didn't really want to hear what Trent might say next. The things Trent had already said had hit just a little bit too close to what Lucas had been thinking about Trent without even knowing it.

"It'sE being gay is all tied up with who I am, BE Lucas. It's a defining aspect of my self, my psyche. And I have no idea of what it must be like for you, okay? I mean, I've been out—and I mean really, really *out*—for years. It's just natural for me. But I can't say that I wouldn't be hiding it if I were in your shoes." Trent grinned and took a deep breath, then released it. "So I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry I acted likeE God, like whatever the fuck I acted like. It was a stupid, knee-jerk reaction. I would have lied about my name in your place, too; especially here. Even to some random fuck I picked up in a bar. So I'm not going to be telling anyone anything. I just wanted you to know that, okay?"

He should be relieved. Lucas *knew* he should be relieved. And yet, there he was, nearly vibrating with the urge to hit Trent. To punch the guy right in the face for thinking so little of himselfE or maybe for thinking so much of Lucas. For forgiving him, because that's what Trent was doing. Trent was just letting it slide that Lucas had lied to him, and had pretended to be someone he wasn't by offering up a false name. It really was exactly what Lucas should have wanted.

And it *was*, because what was the alternative? Trent being angry and upset? Being vindictive and cruel and maybe

announcing Lucas' true bent to the world? Because even without any sort of proof, the accusation alone would likely have Lucas marrying some woman just to disprove it, andE And when he looked at it like that, Lucas was still kind of pissed off, but not too much.

Lucas took a deep breath of his own, then let it out. He did it again. Nodded. "Okay. IE thanks, Trent." Then Lucas did something he'd never imagined doing in a situation like that, though he'd imagined being found out more than once. He told the truth. "In case you were wondering, I never thought you'd out me. Not for more than a few minutes, anyway. IE you're a good guy, Trent. And even when I was freaking out after you saw me today, IE" He shrugged. "I guess I trust you, God knows why. Anyone else wouldE fuck, I don't know."

"Blackmail you," Trent said simply, and the way the man's lips twisted as he said the words told Lucas everything he'd already known about Trent. "Yeah. Well, people are fuckers, sometimes. But even if I hated you, I'd never do that, Lucas. It's nerve-wracking. And fucking wrong. Besides, making someone else that scared would probably kill me, afterE" Trent blinked, then shook himself like a wet dog, only not quite as violently. "Anyway. I don't hate you, so we're good, right? We'reE cool?"

Fuck, there was some sort of a story there. Lucas knew it. Some kind of drama or trauma in Trent's past that involved betrayal.

The actor in him wanted to poke and prod, see whether the scab that had grown over the emotional wound could be

peeled off, just so he could quantify it, learn it, taste itE file it away to use on a job at some point.

But the human being in Lucas wanted to hug Trent, hold him, help that scab heal to a healthy, pink scar that would soften and fade over timeE and fuck, Lucas had no idea of when he had become such a Goddamned sap.

"Yes. Yes, Trent. We're good. Cool. Friends. Whatever you want to call it," Lucas said, trying to smile. "I'm glad you came by, okay? IE thanks."

Trent's sigh was long and heavy and sounded relieved, and that was good. Trent really was a decent guy. In fact, if Trent lived in L.A., or anywhere near it, Lucas figured he probably would try to keep in touch with the man.

Then Trent was looking at him again, and there was a very clear question in those warm, brown eyesE and even though Lucas knew he should let things stand as they were and count himself lucky for dodging the proverbial bullet, he couldn't help nodding.

"You could," Lucas said to that unspoken query, and he knew—deep down *knew*—he'd never seen a smile as bright as the one Trent gave him then. It should have looked odd with the somewhat smeared goth make-up, but it didn't. It just lookedE right. Good. Like exactly what Lucas had been wanting ever since he'd opened the door to see Trent waiting there.

Then there were soft, hot lips on his, and Trent's hands were sliding up under Lucas' T-shirt, down the back of his flannel pajama pants, and there was denim on the floor, the

black looking even darker against the light carpeting, tangled with Lucas' flannel and cotton, and yeah. Yeah. Just like that.

Skin and sweat and heat and slickE and Trent's tongue, sliding over and around and into Lucas' hole, and it was more than he'd ever had, more than he'd ever planned on, butE he'd never had sex with someone he considered a friend before, Lucas realized, and that was the difference. Even with how they'd started out, he and Trent were friends. Friends who fucked, obviously, but still. Then Trent's tongue pressed deep again, and Lucas lost all ability to think clearly.

He was writhing, shaking, moaning on the couch with Trent's tongue buried in his ass, and it was fucking good. Better than anything Lucas had felt before. And there was a finger pressing in, though God knew where Trent had come up with lube, but he clearly had because that single digit was slick and cool andE oh, God, it had a friend that snuck in, too.

"Trent," Lucas gasped. He knew because he could hear his own breathless voice over the wet lapping and squelching. "Fuck, Trent. Please, justE" And there was that plastic-foil sound, and a soft hiss against his hole, and then he was empty. No tongue, no fingers, just empty, and that was wrong, so fucking wrong, and God, Lucas felt like he was drunk, or stoned, maybe, even though he hadn't done drugs in ages, andE

There was that blunt heat, pushing at him, pressing slowly until it eased through, and Lucas didn't know how it had happened, but he was sitting up, legs folded on the couch to either side of Trent's body. That long, heated shaft was buried

deep inside him, and Trent was right there, staring at him with hot, hooded eyes.

Hands gripped his hips tightly, holding him still while Trent did something beneath him. Something that pushed Trent's cock deeper, even while the man himself didn't seem to move at all, and when Trent did it again, Lucas felt himself relaxing. Opening more than he ever had before. And Trent was so deep, so fucking deep. Deeper and hotter and harder than Lucas had ever thought could be possible, but it was good. So good. So fucking *good* that he had to move.

His fingers tightened on the tops of Trent's shoulders, and Lucas groaned, low and deep, as he forced his legs to flex, to lift him until he could feel the ridge of Trent's bulbous tip dragging at the inside of his hole. Lucas met those suddenly wide, brown eyes and leaned forward just a bit, taking Trent's lips with his own as he let himself fall, swallowing Trent's cry and feeding his own into that wet, open mouth. Then he did it again. And again.

He couldn't stop, didn't want to stop. Wanted to ride Trent until the both of them were nothing but shuddering puddles of pure sensation. Wanted to make Trent scream just as much as Lucas knew he would be doing, himself.

He wanted to wrap himself around Trent like a fine cloak and let the man wear him forever, but that wasn't something he would ever admit out loud, so Lucas buried it deep. Even deeper than Trent's cock in his body.

*Oh God, now,* he demanded silently, just as Trent's grip on his hips tightened, and Lucas knew he'd be wearing purpled marks in the morning, but he didn't care. He'd wear whatever



marks were necessary, just to feel this. To feel *like* this. Because Trent was holding him still, only three quarters of that long prick inside Lucas' body, and Trent's hips were moving in fast, tight circles, and it was killing him, Lucas realized. Killing him a little bit more every time that hard shaft ground against his prostate, which it seemed incapable of missing, andE

"Oh, oh fuck! T-t-trent!" he cried, not sure of when he'd lost Trent's mouth, but not caring much, either. "Oh f-fuck, again!"

Dear fucking God, Lucas realized blearily, through the fuck-drugged haze he was experiencing, Trent was that rarest of all creatures. A man who actually listened. Because Trent was for damned sure doing it again. And again. And God help him, *again*.

Trent just kept going, the man's breath bursting out as fast, hot gusts against Lucas' neck, and it was too much. "OhE fuckE" Lucas managed to gasp, and then he was coming.

He felt it in his balls first. Felt them growing even tighter, harder, and on a deeply buried and rational level, Lucas was amazed that he'd lasted so long. Then Trent's cock made another fast, hard circle, and Lucas wasn't thinking at all.

He was grunting and straining, rocking and heaving. He was spurting long, wild streaks of white between his own body and Trent's. And then Trent was moaning, dragging Lucas down again, pulling him fully and firmly onto that long, hot cock, and Lucas lost whatever sense of self he'd managed to retain. It all disappeared in a white-hot burst as he pressed

himself down hard, meeting Trent's rough, upward thrust, and when he felt Trent's hands gripping tighter still—hurting so damned good—Lucas came even more, not stopping until his balls were literally aching. Even then, he could feel Trent's cock throbbing, pulsing inside him, spilling long and hard and deep into the latex covering that amazing prick.

Jesus. Jesus Christ.

"You're staying, right?" Lucas mumbled later, though he had no idea of how much time had passed. He didn't know why he wasn't freaking out yet about fucking face to face with Trent while riding the man's cock, but he was sure that would happen at some point. In fact, if he was being honest, Lucas wasn't entirely sure of how they'd gotten to the bedroom, and yetE there they were.

"Yeah," Trent answered, shifting beside him and pulling the covers up over them both. Lucas thought he smiled when Trent dragged him closer, but he couldn't be sure. He was more worn out than he'd ever been in his life. "You said I could," Trent added, yawning so big, Lucas felt it in the way Trent's chest moved under his cheek.

"Want you to," Lucas agreed, just as sleep crept up behind him and bashed him over the head with a mallet, leaving his 'g'night, baby' unspoken, which he was sure to be thankful for later.

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## **Day Four, Sunday**

Jesus, Trent thought, watching the other Con-goers milling about in the lobby, it was like a mass exodus. It was almost funny, really, to see the multitudes scampering about, doing their damndest to check out of their rooms before noon. It was even funnier to look at the concierge's desk, which was surrounded by mounds and mountains of all sorts of luggage, piled haphazardly on the floor, against the wall, even on bellman carts lined up six deep.

Of course, he reminded himself, he would likely have been one of them if Lucas hadn't been nice enough to let Trent store his shit in the suite early that morning. It was only because of Lucas that Trent had beat the rush and been able to go through his own check-out before nine a.m.. Tom was out already, too, because there had been a crazy-early panel on some game Trent didn't actually like and Tom had been cool with lugging his shit along with him, which really only consisted of a bag that could be used as carry-on luggage—not that Tom was flying, but still, a small bag—and a laptop.

Even so, there was something incredibly disturbing about the way all those people were just moving in waves. It reminded him of that documentary they ran at the video store at least once a day because it was "family friendly," though Trent still thought there was something creepy about showing thousands of lemmings leaping to their deaths, but whatever. He didn't have kids; maybe rodent suicides really were less

disturbing for children than seeing a woman's panties on screen.

"Hey, there! Trent, honey!" he heard, and Trent was already grinning when he turned. "You promised to come shopping with me," Cindy Lou called, her voice growing softer as she reached him. "And it's Sunday, so I'll be able to get a real deal! Unless you're, umE busy with you know who." Then Cindy Lou wagged her brows, and Trent couldn't help laughing, it was so exaggerated.

He shook his head and offered his arm like a gentleman. "Now, CL, do I look busy to you? Besides, I'm sure you knowE *Bill's* schedule better than he does himself. He's likely to be somewhere doingE something." Which was true enough. He and Lucas were meeting back at the suite for dinner around seven, but Trent had no idea of what Lucas was doing until then. Con stuff, he was sure, but beyond that, it didn't really matter.

Cindy Lou seemed to think he was being subtle, going by the sudden, swift widening of her eyes, though. "Oh, of course. Um, probably waiting for, umE autographs and stuff. You know, from the stars us normal folk don't get to see every day, andE"

And it would have been entirely amusing to let Cindy Lou go on and on, but Trent actually liked the woman, and if she blushed any brighter, he thought she might have a stroke or something.

"We'll just leave him to it, CL. Now, come on. We've got some Earl-bait to buy you, right?" He winked, and she laughed, and off they went.

He might even get a chance to check out that book he'd been planning on hunting down. If they had any left, Trent told himself with a purely internal frown. He hadn't made it to the dealer's room even once yet. Then again, he'd been sort of distracted. Hell, make that a lot distracted. In the good way, which had his hidden frown becoming an equally invisible smile.

Better late than never, though, and even if nobody had the book on the last day of Con, Trent couldn't bring himself to care much. Hell, fucking around with Lucas had been worth it. Would maybe be worth it again, later, if Trent had his wayE before they both had to head off to their respective homes.

"Earl-bait!" Cindy Lou giggled, dragging Trent from his thoughts as they made their way across the lobby. "Oh, I like that, honey. You're mighty clever. Earl-bait."

"Well, it seemed appropriate, CL," Trent answered with a grin. "If you're going fishing, it never hurts to bait your hook, right? And you're going to reel that husband of yours right in. We'll see to that." And who knew? Shopping with Cindy Lou might even be fun.

As long as he made it to the Neverwhere Games sneak preview at four o'clock, then Lucas' suite by seven, Trent was fully prepared to just enjoy the day and Cindy Lou's company. He'd probably never see the woman again, after all.

"So, what did you think?" Tom asked excitedly as they wandered out of the small ballroom that had been set up for the big reveal of Neverwhere's new game. "Man, it was so fucking cool!" he went on, clearly not that interested in Trent's response. "You could see, likeE every ring in that one

dude's chain mail, and did you see the way the slime dripped off that first alien? It looked real, man! Like I could reach out and fucking touch it! Shit, that game's gonna break all kinds of fucking records! And it looks like it's gonna be fucking *hard* once you get past the tenth level!"

Trent strolled along beside his friend, carrying Tom's laptop while Tom held his other bag. Trent tried not to roll his eyes, at least not visibly, because Tom's words were true, as far as they went. Which wasn't far enough.

"I think they're going to have problems with the graphics on some of the higher levels," Trent finally said, trying not to be too loud. "Not within the game itself, necessarily, but becauseE who really has that much graphics capability on their home computer? Other than people like us," he added, holding up his free hand when Tom looked like he was going to object. "We're not normal, Tom. Most people have regular graphics programs, and with everything that was going on in even the first three levels, I think there's going to be a lot of disappointed people when their factory-loaded, out-of-the-box systems either freeze up or prove unable to display everything once they get past level five or so." Trent shrugged. "So, I'm guessing it'll be crazy-popular with the hard-core gamers, but not so much with the rest of the world." He shrugged again. "I could be wrong, but I doubt it."

Tom snorted. "Whatever, man. Who cares about that? My computer can handle it, and I'm gonna love every damned minute."

Trent chuckled and shook his head. "You *should* care. That's my point. Because if Neverwhere sank anything like

the kind of money into that game as it looks like, what with the R&D and that insane promotional blitz they've already started, and only likeE ten percent of the people who buy it are happy? Well, you do the math, Tom. That's all I'm saying. But you're right about the rest. It's going be a wicked-cool game for gamers."

Apparently, being right was all Tom wanted, because the guy was grinning again and striding along with a bounce in his step. "Cool. And man, it's likeE five-thirty. Gotta hit the road. Trent, man, cool to meet you for real. Catch you online soon, right?"

Back-slapping buddy shit, then Trent was on his own, shaking his head slightly at the suddenness of Tom's departure. Then again, the Con was over, for the most part. There wasn't even much of a crowd left in the lobby.

"Excuse me," someone said behind him, and Trent jumped a little, then shifted to the side, blushing when he realized he'd been blocking the bottom of the escalator.

"Sorry. I wasE nothing. Sorry, man." Except the guy wasn't walking past him, which wasE weird. "Uh, can I help you?" Because now that he'd actually looked at the man, Trent realized he seemed sort of familiar. Maybe he worked for the convention, though, because that would explain it. Trent hadn't really paid much attention to the people wandering around in headsets and staff badges, but if this guy had been on the doors of the gaming rooms, Trent had probably seen him enough times for some vague sense of recognition.

"I hope so," the man said, then stepped closer, holding out his hand. "I'm Mac." And okay. Light brown hair, blue-ish eyesE kind of cute in a way, even if this Mac was clearly in his late thirties. In his late thirties and staring at Trent like he was something surprising and rare, and that wasE well. Come to Con and get hit on by Lucas, which was cool, and now this guy, which was not so cool. Though Trent figured he might have given Mac a *maybe* if he hadn't already made plans with Lucas.

"Trent," Trent answered, shaking that hand quickly, then releasing it. "Uh, I'm sort of busy, and I guess you're cute, but I'm really not interested, uh, Mac. Nothing personal, it's justE" But then Mac was laughing, and Trent knew he had it all wrong, which had him blushing in a way most goths just didn't do.

"No," Mac said, still chuckling under the words. "I'm not trying to pick you up. Not at all. I like women, but thanks for the cute. I'm ignoring the 'I guess' portion of that statement, okay? I just couldn't help overhearing what you were saying to your friend, and I wanted to ask you if you really believe that. That 'Avatars and Aliens' is gonna tank with the masses."

Okay, Trent was blushing even more. "IE look, that was a private conversation, okay? I wasn't announcing it to the world or anything. It's just my opinion, so if you're going to get allE pissed off because I said something you don't like about Neverwhere, just forget it. I'm sure Tom already has, so your favorite game company is safe from me. It's a great game, it'll sell millions, and I don't know what the hell I was



talking about. How's that? Better?" Because he was going to see Lucas later, damn it, and the last thing Trent wanted to do was show up at the man's door with a black eye. Or even worse, a bloody nose. Gamers could get incredibly emotional, after all. Even more than big old queens.

"Hell, you're touchy, aren't you?" Mac answered, still grinning but not laughing any more. "I'm not mad, okay? I really want to know." He sounded sincere, even to Trent's suspicious ears. "Look. Let me buy you a drink. Trent, right? I really do want to hear what you have to say. It'd be good to have an honest opinion on a game that's gonna cost a lot of money."

And when Mac put it that way, Trent sort of understood. Trent had probably been the only one to leave the preview with doubts, after all, so maybe Mac wanted to know as much as possible before plunking down a hefty chunk of change for a game that might not even work for him. Or his kid. Whichever.

"IE okay," Trent said after a moment or three. "I guess I have time for a drink. I'm meeting someone for dinner later, though, soE" He shrugged.

Mac grinned, and it lit up that tanned face. Made the man's faded-blue eyes sparkle a bit. "Give me half an hour, Trent. You know, the bar here pours a damned fine Guinness."

Trent snorted. "As if I haven't been there and done that. Please. What kind of a man do you take me for? Being gay doesn't make me the Queen of the Mai Tais."

Then Mac was laughing again, and so was Trent, and at least he wasn't going to be bored until seven, which Trent had

thought he might be. Even Cindy Lou was gone, though he had a slip of paper with her address and phone number in his pocket.

"Guinness it is," Mac announced, and Trent shook his head ruefully as he followed the man to the bar.

Christ, it had been a long fucking day.

Between the swarms of fans who'd waited until the last day of the Con, hoping for discounts on pictures and autographs, and the three panels about the show that had been scheduled back to back, Lucas was wrung out. And that one woman, the first day, seemed to have unleashed some psycho-sexual part of his fans, because Lucas had found himself defending his character's heterosexuality more times than he could count, or even remember.

Which wasn't made any easier by the fact that Lucas had really just been waiting for his obligations to be fulfilled. Waiting to go up to his suite and order a couple of steaks with whatever for himself and Trent, then spend however many hours they had before Trent needed to leave justE devouring Trent. Fucking him. Sucking him. Whatever.

And when he was finally finished, finally able to go upstairs, expecting to see a long, lanky goth there by his door, Lucas had gottenE nothing. No Trent, even with it being a quarter after seven. No note under the door, no message light blinking on the room phone; justE nothing.

Trent's bags were still there, which told Lucas that Trent hadn't actually left, but damn it! Those bags were a poor substitute for the man himself, and where the fuck was Trent?

Then again, Lucas decided, maybe Trent had gotten there early. Maybe he hadn't wanted to take a chance on someone seeing him hanging around outside Lucas' room, and why hadn't he just given Trent a key?

Because that might have made it seem like something it wasn't, Lucas realized. Might have implied things that justE weren't. So if he were Trent, where would he be?

Not in the room Trent had checked out of that morning. That much was a given. And all the game shit was done, soE lobby, maybe, except Lucas had passed through there on his way up, and while he hadn't been looking for black hair with red and blue streaks, he was sure he would have noticed if they'd been there. The crappy and incredibly overpriced restaurant with the worst service ever wasn't really a possibility, considering they'd planned on dinner in the room. And that left only one reasonable place. The bar.

It was comfortable, not too cavernous. And the staff were already used to the convention people, so Trent wouldn't feel as out of place as he'd looked on Thursday night, andE yeah. The bar. Lucas would go down there and find Trent. Let him know that they could come up to the suite andE eat. Fuck. Whatever.

It was a plan, Lucas thought with a grin. A good plan. And it was their last night in Richmond, so they really should make it count.

Lucas was grinning as he left his suite, but he didn't care. Everyone who might notice was long gone, really, so what did it matter? He was going to find Trent, and they were going toE yeah, he'd said that already. Both out loud to Trent, and

silently, to himself. There was no point in repeating it yet again. It was all good. *All good*, Lucas repeated like a mantra. He believed it, too. Right up to the point when he stepped into the bar and looked around, because that was when he saw Trent.

Sitting at one of the so-intimate little tables in the far corner, his head bent toward some fucking guy. Saying something that had the man laughing, and when the stranger's head tilted back because Trent was so fucking *funny*, Lucas noticed how damned hot the man was.

Older, sure, but that had nothing to do with anything.

Light brown hair. Eyes that lookedE Christ. Gray or blue or maybe just some pale variant of hazel from across the room. Tanned skin. And hands—big hands—that gestured broadly, sketching something or other in the air while Trent looked on, seeming dazzled, fascinatedE bewitched, even.

And now he knew why Trent hadn't been waiting for him. Trent had found someone else to spend time with. Someone older and less closeted, apparently. It was enough to have Lucas turning on his heels; enough to have him walking away, exceptE fuck. Trent's bags were still in his room.

That realization spawned an entirely different set of emotions in Lucas' chest. Disgust. Anger. Disappointment, though he didn't know why. One thing he did know, though. If Trent thought he was bringing his latest pick-up back to Lucas' suite, then Trent was out of his fucking mind.

That decided, Lucas steeled himself and turned back around. This time, Trent and whoever were just sipping their drinks and leaning back in their chairs and talking about

whatever they were discussing, but Lucas knew what he'd seen, exceptE

Trent looked up and over right then, and those deep brown eyes lit up at seeing him, and Lucas knew he was being an asshole. He tried to shake it off, even as he crossed the nearly empty bar.

"Hey," he said, giving Trent's new friend a smile. "I don't think we've met. I'mE"

"Bill," Trent broke in, and while the man's voice didn't sound frantic or anything, there was a gravity to it that Lucas couldn't ignore. "Bill Speare. And this is Mac, Bill. He's with Neverwhere Games. We were talking about their new holiday release, andEoh, fuck. What time is it? Shit. We were supposed to have dinner with Jason and the girls, weren't we? Did they send you looking for me? I'm not surprised that you found me, though. I mean, bar. Where else would I be, right?"

Lucas was actually puzzled for a minute or so while Trent rambled on, but finally he got it. "YeahE sorry about that, Trent," he answered, offering a sheepish grin. "We ran a little bit over. But if you're ready, we could, umE go meet them. You know, unless you want to stay andE"

"No!" Trent said forcefully. Then Trent frowned and took an obvious moment to calm himself. Trent *wasn't* an actor, and if Lucas had ever doubted it, that one moment would have convinced him. "No, IE I'll be right there, okay?"

Lucas nodded and retraced his steps to the door that led into the lobby. Waited. Tried not to look like he was watching.

Trent said his goodbyes quickly, which Lucas had to admit was flattering. But then that fucker Mac stood up and handed Trent what looked like a business card, and if the man had tried to do anything more than shake Trent's hand, Lucas didn't know what he might have done.

Trent was his, at least until later. After they both left the hotel, Trent was a free agent, granted. But they had plans for that night, and Trent was walking toward him, walking away from Mac, and that was good.

Lucas figured he should walk away, himself, and if he moved fast enough he'd make the elevators. Maybe even look like he'd been there since he'd stalked off. But what would be the point? He wanted Trent. Trent knew it. And it was their last night together, so what was the use of pretending?

Even so, he didn't take Trent's hand when the man came out of the bar. He didn't let himself look at those pink lips that were going to be swollen in just a few minutes from kisses and God knew what else. In fact, Lucas didn't even rub his hand lightly over Trent's jeans, front or back.

Instead, Lucas just nodded and headed for the elevator, imagining he could feel Trent's hot, brown eyes on his ass with every step.

Steak was good. Even better when Trent had been existing on junk food, for the most part, aside from that drunken appetizer feast with Cindy Lou. In fact, steak was likely to be one of the best things ever, because just thinking about it had Trent's stomach grumbling.

"Sorry, man," he said sheepishly. "I haven't had any real food for a while."

Okay, how could Lucas look so amused and disappointed at the same time? It wasn't fair; especially because Trent had no idea of how to react to the odd mix of emotions. But then Lucas seemed to pick one, and apparently the amused won because the guy laughed.

"It's been that long since lunch, huh?" Lucas teased, but those green eyes were raking up and down Trent's body so hard that Trent thought he could feel it. Like a touch, almost. "I guess we really should eat first, anyway. We're gonna need the energy," Lucas added, sounding smug.

That was true enough, Trent knew, because out of the last three nights, there hadn't been a single one that had left him anything but wrung out and panting, barely able to move. It was a pattern he was sure would be repeated later, too. After steak.

"It's been that long since Thursday," Trent found himself saying. "Real food is going to beE amazing, Lucas. Uh, thanks, by the way. For dinner. Because it's going to beE yeah." He almost missed seeing Lucas' brow furrowing, but not quite. He caught it from the corner of his eye. "What?"

Lucas frowned more deeply and shook his head. "Thursday. Shit. Guess I could have been feeding you before this, then. You could have said, Trent. It's not like I don't have to eat, too."

And that explained the frown, Trent decided, but the sudden pity in Lucas' eyes took him by surprise, and not in the good way. "Look, I've been keeping myself fed, okay? I just didn't know the restaurant would be so expensive, so I've been getting by on sandwiches and shit from that shop in the

lobby is all. Food, but not *real* food. Not the kind someone cooks for you and all that."

Because he didn't want Lucas pitying him. Trent might not be rich, but he did okay. Most of the time. Just not so much when he was paying for a hotel room and gas and shit.

Then Lucas was laughing, and that was good, Trent decided, because otherwise he'd have to be pissed off at the man. Since getting mad at Lucas would probably derail the sex Trent was hoping for later, laughter was entirely acceptable. "Besides," Trent added with a grin of his own, "If I hadn't eaten in four days, I would have passed out by now, considering how much we've been fucking."

"True," Lucas agreed, still laughing just a bit, "and I definitely would have noticed that. But I didn't mean it like you need a keeper or something. I just meantE" Lucas shrugged, looking a little embarrassed. "Besides Jason, you were the only one here that I could just be myself with, y'know? It might've been fun to kick back and eat. Shoot the shit. Maybe watch a movie or something. I never really get to do all that normal stuff. Especially not in L.A., where everybody I meet has some kind of agenda. Hell, I never even know if someone likes me or just likes what they hope I'll do for them."

Trent blinked. God, that was just sad. There really was a downside to fame. Aside from the whole staying closeted so he could keep his career going thing, Lucas couldn't even trust that anyone he met wasn't trying to use him. People looked at Lucas and saw the money and the notoriety. Saw the trappings of success and envied him. And all the while,



Lucas probably never got to relax for even a minute, except maybe in the privacy of his own home. He was constantly on display.

Add in the fact that Los Angeles was such an entertainment industry town, and Lucas was probably right. Chances were, everyone he met wanted something from him, on some level, and yeah. It was fucking sad.

Even so, Trent offered up a smile. "I'm no exception, man. Just like everybody else, I want something from you. A couple of things. First, I want that steak dinner you promised me. Then," Trent waggled his brows, trying for sexy, but likely only managing comical, considering the way Lucas was chuckling again, "then I'm hoping you'll shove that thick prick of yours up my ass until I scream. Uh, we could watch a movie if you really want to, but I'm more in the mood for a good, hard fuck."

Trent was laughing, too, all of a sudden, just from the way Lucas was staring at him. Then neither of them were laughing at all, because Trent found himself stretched out on the couch with Lucas' heavier body pressing him into the cushions, and their mouths were entirely too busy for anything as trivial as laughter.

The loud knock at the door and the call of "Room Service" a short while later had them breaking apart with a gasp on Trent's part and a low, heavy groan from Lucas. He could almost see the urge to tell the delivery waiter to leave the cart in the hall right there on Lucas' face, so Trent shook his head and pulled himself from under that hard body with a grin.

"If they leave it out there, we'll never eat, Lucas. You know it as well as I do." Because that was the truth. The damned food would still be sitting in the hall at four a.m., which was when Trent figured he'd have to leave if he was going to make it to work on time the next day.

"Shit," Lucas grunted, then he nodded. "Be right there," Lucas called toward the door.

He stood, trying to adjust himself in his pants, and Trent didn't have the heart to tell Lucas that there was zero chance of hiding the raging boner in those jeans. Instead, Trent moved quickly into the tiny kitchen area, just in case the waiter was the nosy type.

Lucas had no idea of how Trent managed to make something as simple as eating a steak seem so fucking sexy. Hell, Trent didn't even look like he was trying, and that was the fucked up part. There Lucas was, throbbing in his jeans and eating out of habit more than interest, and Trent was apparently unaware of just how fucking suggestive his every move was.

Slow back and forth sawing at the steak held pinned by Trent's fork, then that meat-laden utensil rising. Sliding into Trent's open mouth, past those white teeth. Pink lips closing around metal, holding that piece of tender flesh inside. Trent's eyes closing each time in what looked like a moment of sheer bliss before the fork pulled back and Trent chewed slowly, then swallowed with obvious pleasure, andE Jesus fucking Christ, Lucas had never seen anything like it. And the fact that it wasn't even slightly deliberate made it that much hotter, that much more sensual.

He tried to convince himself that he was watching so closely because he wanted to learn the motions, use them in his work, and while Lucas was sure he probably would, some day, that wasn't the reason. Christ, he needed to fuck. Needed to fuck Trent, in point of fact. Soon.

Then Trent moved on to the baked potato, first sliding in some of the softened butter, which melted into a slick, shiny mess, then pushing thick, white sour cream into the cleft cut across the top of the brown tuber, and Lucas moaned.

"N-nothing. JustE good food," he grunted in response to Trent's questioning gaze, and *God help me*, Lucas moaned silently when Trent simply nodded and went back to his meal. If Trent ate the asparagus still on his plate with anything like that level of sexual delight, Lucas might burst. That was even more likely if Trent actually dipped the long spears in the hollandaise sauce the kitchen had so damned thoughtfully provided, the bastards.

Or Lucas would possibly fuck the man right there, bent over the room service cart. There was only so much a man could take, after all.

Okay, Trent had no idea of what was going on. Not that he minded, of course. All he knew for sure was that just as soon as he'd nodded in answer to Lucas' growled "you done yet?", Lucas had him by the hand and was dragging him to the bedroom. So, yeah. He had no idea of what was going on, but he wished he did. If only so he could make sure it happened again, the next time he met a guy who made him as hot as Lucas Merrifield. There was just something in Lucas' needy,

desperate groans that did it for him, deep down. Something that turned Trent on more than anything else ever had.

Then Lucas pressed him hard against the wall just inside the bedroom door, and Trent stopped caring about anything but that mouth, those lips. That tongue and teethE and the hands that moved over Trent's body with purpose, pushing and pulling at cotton and denim, battling buttons and zippers and winning.

His own hands were anything but still, sliding and searching, finding heated skin stretched over tight muscles, and it was fucking amazing. Close to too much, and still not enough. Then Lucas pulled away, green eyes mostly pupil, and fabric was flying, and Trent didn't waste a moment in shedding his own clothes. His chest heaved, breath coming in short, rough pants as he stayed there, up against the wall and naked, just as Lucas was.

"Fuck," Lucas groaned, and it sounded almost pained, but then Lucas was right there again, all that skin up against Trent's, and that mouth. Fuck, that mouth was hot and hard and wet against him, just like Lucas' cock where it pushed against Trent's hip.

"Fuck!" Trent echoed, head tilting to the side, giving Lucas' lips and teeth more room, more skin, moreE anything Lucas wanted, and that knowledge didn't freak Trent out even a little, for whatever reason. Probably because he was too busy moaning and rocking the scant inch he could manage between the wall behind him and Lucas' heated flesh.

His cock was pounding, pulsing wildly, but so was his heart, and Trent didn't care. He just wantedE neededE God,

he needed. Did he fucking ever. Needed like he needed breath, it was so immediate, so right fucking there. "God! Luke!" and that was his own voice, rough and strained, but definitely his.

"Yeah," Lucas ground out against his neck, and just like that, Trent was staring at the wall from less than an inch away, Lucas behind him, rubbing that thick, dribbling cock up and down Trent's crack, and it wasE fuck, it was unbelievable. Hotter and slicker and better than anything ever. So fucking good that Trent didn't want it to stop, butE

"Latex," Trent groaned, almost disappointed when Lucas stopped moving, that thick, wet tip right there against Trent's hole. "Fuck, Luke. Condom. Now. Need it now."

"Where?" Lucas snarled, and Trent could feel the effort to hold back in the way Lucas' body was trembling; in the way Lucas' cock was so very, very still.

"Computer bag. OutsideE fuck, outside pocket. Hurry." Because just the thought of having Lucas inside him without a fucking rubber had Trent even more on edge. That and the knowledge that he might have let it happen if Lucas wasn't heading back to L.A., which was just fucking wrong, since they'd probably never see each other again. "Hurry," he moaned again.

Then Lucas was back, that thick prick already covered, and the man had brought lube, too, which Trent hadn't even thought about, he'd been so desperate for Lucas' cock. He still was, too. Still desperate and aching, wanting to feel that hard heat filling him, spreading him wide. And Lucas seemed to know it, because one gel-slicked finger pushed deep, became

two and then three, just like that, and it would be enough, Trent decided. It would have to be, because he couldn't wait any longer. "Now, Luke. Fuck me now."

"Hard," Lucas agreed, though Trent couldn't remember saying that. It was true, though, and what he needed, so Trent groaned and pushed back, arching his spine as he offered himself more fully.

"Now," Lucas growled, and that bulbous tip was there again, just pushing, stabbing into Trent's body, and it was fucking perfect.

A loud shout spilled from Trent's throat, forced out by Lucas' fast, strong invasion. Like there wasn't room inside Trent for that sound and Lucas' cock at the same time. And Lucas wasn't stopping, not even to give Trent's body a chance to get used to him.

He was just driving deeper, then pulling back slowly once he'd shored up against Trent's ass, and when that flared head dragged at Trent's hole from the inside, Lucas slammed forward again, pushing another cry from Trent's lips.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fucking fuckE" Trent heard Lucas grunting, groaning behind him, and those big hands were on his hips, holding him still while Lucas did it again, and againE and again.

It was the best sex Trent had ever had, and it wasn't even close to being done yet. He thought he might die of it, but right then, Trent didn't care. Lucas was fucking him. Making him scream. Doing him so fucking right. And if that meant Trent had a heart attack or a stroke or whatever the fuck else

could kill a guy who was experiencing so much pleasure at one time, that was a price he was willing to pay.

"G-god!" Trent yelled, Lucas' next deep, hard thrust pushing all along his prostate. "God! Luke! Y-yes!"

"FILLE you upE Trent," Lucas was snarling, his words coming in time with those fabulous, harsh thrusts. "Fill youE the fuckE *up*!"

Yes, Trent pleaded silently, because Lucas was moving faster, harder, fingers digging so deep into his hips that Trent thought they might be making dents in his bones, and that was fine, too. Then that pistoning cock grated against that spot inside him again, and Trent couldn't help it. Didn't want to help it.

He cried out, some variant on *God* or *Luke* or *Yes*, he thought, but he didn't know for sure because his ears were ringing, sparks dancing in front of his eyes as he came suddenly, roughly, heat and fire and sex exploding from him to hit the wall without a single touch to his cock.

"YeahE yeahE fuckingE come, TrentE fuckingE feel youE so fuckingE GodE tight!" And Lucas was still moving, still pumping in and out, in and out, hips moving so fast and furious, Trent didn't know how the man was still standing. But Lucas was, and he was still hard, still plunging and grunting and breathing in explosive bursts against Trent's back, and it was too fucking much. Too big and fucking wild and God damned perfect. And Lucas' cock was still battering away at Trent's prostate, andE

"OhEshit," Trent whispered, whimpered, when Lucas moaned and stabbed deep again, but this time there was no

reverse, fast or slow. This time Lucas held himself there, heavy balls against the back of Trent's sac, that thick, hot cock buried to the root and pulsing, swelling just a tiny bit more. Then Lucas shuddered, arms wrapping around Trent's waist, holding him tightly as those hard, tight balls throbbed, contracted, sent spasmic bursts of hot seed through Lucas' equally throbbing cock and deep into Trent's spent body, stopped only by the latex between them.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Trent groaned, what could have been hours later, or just minutes. "That wasE fuck. Intense, Luke. Uh, thanks." He grinned against Lucas' chest, sure the man could feel it. He wasn't lying, either. Not even a little bit. Trent had never been fucked like that before in his life. So good and right that they'd collapsed on the bedroom floor, even.

It had been truly amazing, but it was one of those things Trent just knew would never happen again. One of those things that would drive a guy crazy if he kept trying to find it. An anomaly, really, because he and Lucas had for damned sure been fucking for four days, and it had never been like that. Every single time had been amazing, just not thatE yeah. "Intense," Trent said again, shifting on the floor, then pulling a sock from under his side. His own sock.

"Hell, yeah," Lucas agreed, still sounding a little bit out of breath. "Jesus, you took it like a champ, though. I didn't hurt you, did I?" And that explained why Lucas had been silent. He'd been waiting to see what Trent would say, apparently.

Trent chuckled and shook his head, enjoying the way Lucas' smooth skin felt under his cheek. "Nah. Or not any



more than I wanted you to, anyway. I'll definitely be remembering you for the entire drive home, though. Probably for days after, too."

Lucas' soft chuckle sounded pleased, and maybe a little bit surprised. Like Lucas was possibly amazed that Trent was so obviously happy about it. "I doubt I'll be forgetting you any time soon, either, Trent," was what Lucas said a moment later. Then, "Y'know, I should get your number. Give you a call next time I'm in D.C."

If it hadn't been for the tiny trace of nervousness Trent was sure he heard in Lucas' voice, he might have been offended at Lucas just assuming that Trent was a sure thing. But he did hear that bit of anxiety there, so Trent nodded slowly. "YeahE if you don't mind me calling *you* the next time I jet out to La-la Land for a charming little soiree." And that had them both laughing, which was what Trent had been going for. He'd hated that touch of uncertainty in Lucas' voice. It made him wonder just what kind of guys Lucas was used to.

Users, Trent reminded himself. The kind of men who were only in itE or not only, because Lucas was a damned fine looking manE but the kind who would blackmail Lucas if they thought it would get them what they wanted. Those kinds, and whatever few and far between guys there were who were interested and in Lucas' own situation, most likely. Closeted for the sake of their careers, and therefore just as discreet as Lucas had to be.

Christ, it was a grim picture. Trent actually felt sorry for Lucas.

Then Lucas grunted and shifted around a bit before pulling a shoe out from under his own body, and Trent laughed again. "You know, maybe we should think about crawling to the bed," he suggested. "Not as muchE random shit lying around, there."

"Sounds like a plan. And maybe a nap. Then a shower," Lucas suggested. "And if you want to, you could do me again before you leave."

Trent groaned. "Shit, Luke. You did hear me say 'crawl to the bed,' right? Because that's about all the energy I have left."

Lucas chuckled again, and this time the sound was playful. Possibly even teasing. "That's where the whole *nap* part of the plan comes in handy, Trent. Besides. I have faith in you."

And if Lucas sounded as surprised at saying it as Trent was hearing it, wellE Trent wasn't going to say a word. Instead, Trent yawned just a little. "Cool, Luke. Now get crawling. I'll be right behind you."

Lucas laughed again, softly. "You just want to watch my ass, right?"

Trent smirked as he pushed himself from Lucas' chest, then gave him a smug grin. "Well, yeah. It's a damned fine ass, man." Because it really, really was. No question.

Lucas stood outside the Richmond Argent at the ungodly hour of four a.m. and watched Trent drive off in an old shit-box of a car that was hopefully more reliable than it looked.

His body was still aching, both from the hard fucking he'd given Trent and the slow, easy screw they'd shared in the

shower less than an hour earlier. It was a good ache, and one Lucas probably wouldn't be feeling again any time soon.

He felt a little bit empty, but that was to be expected, really. After all, he'd spent at least part of each day at the convention with Trent's cock buried deep inside him. It would probably take at least that long for his body to stop expecting more of the same.

Even so, it had been a good weekend, and he figured Jason would be happy when Lucas said yes the next time there was a Con wanting him to attend. After all, he'd met Trent at one, so who was to say he wouldn't meet other, equally accommodating guys at future events?

In the meantime, he'd made a new friend, and that was always a good thing. Especially when it was someone who didn't give a flying fuck about whether Lucas was famous. Hell, he was about ninety-nine percent sure that Trent would have spent just as much time with him if Lucas had been a desk clerk at the hotel. No, make that a hundred percent, he decided. Trent was just good people, as Lucas' Gramps would say. Genuine.

And, Lucas remembered with a grin as he slipped one hand into the pocket of his jeans, he had Trent's phone number and address and e-mail, too. It was Trent's home number, which was weird, but the guy didn't have a cell phone. Lucas had never known anyone who didn't have a cell. Even his Gramps had one, though Lucas couldn't imagine who the old man talked to, or about what.

"You'll have to call me first," Trent had said before they'd left the suite. "If you decide you want to, once you're back in

L.A. I won't be waiting by the phone or anything, but I really like talking to you, Luke. You know even when we're not naked, though I guess we haven't really tried that yet. But if you don't want to, I'll get it, too. So, you have to call me first, just so I don't end up feeling like some weird-ass fucking stalker."

Lucas had laughed and kissed Trent hard, mapping the interior of that smart, hot mouth with his tongue. "Weird ass-fucking stalker?" he'd replied, making Trent grin, just like he'd hoped. Then they'd grabbed Trent's bags and headed down to the lobby, and Trent was in his car and going, going, gone.

Lucas watched the faded red tail lights turn out of the hotel's parking lot, then tracked them until Trent's car rounded a curve and disappeared.

It was only then, when Lucas knew Trent was really and truly on the way home, that he pulled the slip of paper from his pocket while he dug his cell from the other. It took less than thirty seconds to enter Trent's number into memory; then he dialed through, cringing when he remembered that Trent had a roommate. But voice mail picked up, and Lucas smiled his relief.

"Hey, Trent," Lucas said, still grinning, "I'm calling first. Not sure when you'll get this since you have to work today, but I hope you made it safe. Give me a call when you can, okay? Oh, and there's gonna be something coming in the mail for you. Within a week or so. Just letting you know so you won't be too surprised. Later, man."

Okay, Lucas thought as he flipped his phone closed, Trent was probably going to be mad at him for a little while, but eventually the guy would just have to accept that it was stupid not to have a cell phone. And while Lucas knew it was a money issue for Trent, it didn't cost hardly anything to add a second line to his own plan. He would even let Trent mail him the ten or fifteen bucks a month, if the guy insisted.

Because Lucas finally had an actual friend who didn't want anything from him other than his company, and that was worth far more than Lucas could ever say.

Well, his company and his body, Lucas qualified a moment later as he waited for the elevator to reach his floor, but that was fine, too. More than fine. It wasE easy.

With Trent, it was just so fucking easy. And easy was good. Very good.

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