

The image is a vertical composition. The background is a sunset over a body of water, with the sun low on the horizon and its light reflecting on the water's surface. The sky is a mix of orange, red, and yellow. In the foreground, the back of a person is visible, with their skin tinted in shades of red and orange, matching the sunset. The person's arm is raised, and their hand is near their head. The overall mood is romantic and serene.

After
Arsenic
and
Rio



D. J. Manly

After Arsenic and Rio

Marshall Calletti has experienced many changes in his life. He's done his time and left his jaded past behind him, gone through therapy, started his own business and even bought a house with his new lover. Life would have been perfect if he could have stopped dreaming about Angelo, the man he'd almost killed over a decade ago, because in spite of all the changes, one thing had remained constant, his undying love for the enigmatic Angelo Farelli.

But just as the evil, manipulative Hal Makin brought Marshall and Angelo together years ago, he was about to bring them together again when it is learned that Hal may be up for parole.

Don't miss the explosive and emotional sequel to Arsenic and Rio.

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By

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Chapter One

The sand was very white. There was music everywhere. The drums beat in rhythm with his heart. He held out his arms. Angel. My Angel. He dropped down into the sand, looked up into the clear blue sky. There he was, his dark hair in his face, the white shirt he wore blown open by the breeze, exposing his honey bronze skin, muscular chest. Marshall reached out to him, but it seemed that no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't quite reach him. Angelo. Angelo. Touch me.

But I'm dead. You killed me. You killed our love.

No. No. Angelo. No. Please. I beg you. I beg you. Don't die. Come back to me. Forgive me. Forgive.

"Marshall? Marshall!"

Someone shook him, but he didn't want to wake up. He wanted to stay in Rio with Angelo, before it all went to hell. He would have given anything to change it, but it, was a fait accompli—done. There was no going back.

He sat up, stared at Roger as if he was a stranger.

"You were dreaming again," Roger said and then sighed.

Marshall knew Roger was discouraged. This wasn't the first dream like this he'd had. In fact, he

had them regularly, sometimes two, and three times a week. They both knew whom he was dreaming about—Angelo. Marshall had told Roger everything about a year ago. He figured that if they were going to try to make a life together, Roger had a right to know that he'd been in jail, and found guilty of conspiracy to commit murder, among other things.

He put his face in his hands, wiped the tears, and said the same thing he said every time it happened, "I'm sorry, Roger. I have no control over it."

Roger nodded silently.

He knew it caused Roger pain to know that he still dreamed about Angelo. But it looked like he was going to go on dreaming about Angelo until the day he died. Somehow, those dreams were double edged. Although they never ended well, at least for the time he floated around inside them, he felt close to him, he was with Angelo again. He'd never confess that to Roger of course.

He looked over at the clock, cleared his throat, anxious to avoid any more discussion of the dream. "Already seven o'clock?"

"Yeah," Roger looked at him bleary eyed.

"What time are you going to the college today?"

"Not until ten."

"I've got to go into the store. There's inventory to do, and Barney's out sick."

Roger lay back down and rolled over in bed.

"Have Christine do it," he mumbled, yawning.

"It's too much for Christine. She hasn't been with me long enough yet."

"You have to let your staff do their job, Marsh. It just makes common sense."

"I know, I know," he mumbled on the way into the bathroom, more to himself than to Roger. He'd bought his own art supply store two years ago, and he'd poured many hours into making it a success. He'd just managed to hire two people to help him recently, and Roger advised him to give them more responsibility. It was difficult to give up the reins.

He stared at himself in the mirror. He was only thirty-five years old, but today, he felt far older. There were dark circles under his eyes. He hadn't been sleeping well, especially since he learned that Hal had a parole hearing coming up. Nat had assured him they would deny his parole, but still, the mere thought of Hal Makin wandering around free terrified him.

In the shower, he tried not to think about Hal, but how could he not? Hal had led him to the one man he would love for the rest of his life, the same one man he'd almost killed. Hal would live in his head forever, just as Angelo would live in his heart.

Marshall liked to think that he was a very different person now than he had been then. He was a businessman, did volunteer work, and was in a stable relationship, but yet, the thought of Hal

showing up on his doorstep mortified him. These years hadn't been easy, what with being in prison, the counselling, and finally having to accept the idea that he was worthy of love. He'd found Roger two years ago, or rather Roger had found him when he'd walked into Marshall's art supply shop. Roger was handsome, intelligent and at the beginning of his career as an art history professor at one of the English language colleges in the city.

Roger had had to work hard to convince Marshall even to have coffee with him, but eventually he'd worn him down.

They had a lot in common. Marshall loved to paint and Roger not only taught art, he was an accomplished artist himself and it was through those conversations that Marshall realised how lonely he was.

If only he could let go of Angelo, then his life would be close to perfect. God knows, he'd tried. A year ago, he and Roger had bought a house together in the West Island, outside Montreal, and even though he was happy with Roger, he had to accept the fact that the dreams were never going to go away.

Roger had nothing to fear from those dreams. The truth was, he and Angelo would never be together, no matter how desperately he wanted that to be true. He'd had to accept that and that was the hardest thing he'd ever done. One couldn't ask a

person to forgive someone for almost taking their life, someone who was supposed to love you.

The last time he'd seen Angelo had been four years ago to this very day. That was why he had trouble sleeping last night. He remembered every detail of that meeting.

He had gone to Angelo's book signing. The Italian Community invited him to Montreal to honour him for the work he'd done on a book, which outlined their contribution to the city. Marshall had been waiting in line to get his book signed, but at the last moment, he'd changed his mind, deciding it was better if he didn't go up to see him. He'd caused him enough pain, and there was another man with him, one that might have been his lover. He'd left before actually getting Angelo to sign the book.

Angelo had spotted him and followed him out, and they'd both stopped to talk in the nearby park. Angelo looked heartbreakingly beautiful as he stood there in the sun, his dark hair blowing in the breeze. He was polite, but distant. He told Marshall to call him before he left the city, but somehow Marshall couldn't bring himself to. He had spent many sleepless nights wondering what might have happened if he had called him.

Marshall had followed Angelo's career through the years. Angelo had moved to Vermont two years ago, which meant he was no more than a two hour

car drive away from Montreal. He'd taken a position at the University in the English department, and continued to write. There was never any mention of a lover whenever Marshall read anything about him, but Marshall knew that a man like Angelo wouldn't be alone for long.

The first time Marshall had laid eyes on him, even in his misguided screwed up state of mind, he knew Angelo was special. He was handsome, and a true gentleman in every way, with a generous heart ...and he made love like an angel.

Marshall licked his lips as he turned off the shower. His cock was already hard, as he thought back to the times when he had been in Angelo's arms. Tender, passionate, all encompassing. He'd never experienced physical love like that and he never would again.

He dried himself slowly with the towel, wiping the water off his face. Hal couldn't leave prison. He'd just find some other poor boy like he'd been, a kid who'd been used and abused, who was looking for something, something Hal would find a way to exploit, to manipulate.

And that's what had happened to him. He'd been so needy, so anxious for someone to love, that Hal was able to use him to seduce rich men, blackmail them. He'd hurt so many people, but none he regretted like Angelo, because he truly loved him. And that love had saved him.

It was supposed to have been easy—get Angelo to love him and get his hands on a huge coffee plantation in Colombia that a big drug lord wanted for his own—the one last score. He'd had no idea that Hal meant for him to kill Angelo. A little arsenic to make him sick, but everything had gotten out of hand. And in the end, all that mattered to Marshall was Angelo.

He finished dressing and gave Roger a quick kiss goodbye. He drove slowly past the park where he and Angelo had met that last time. Three years ago today, the time had gone so fast, yet so achingly slow.

He pulled over to the side of the road and got out of his car. He walked over to the park bench where he had laid Angelo's book. He remembered kissing it. He remembered the sound of Angelo's voice, the wind in his hair. Why hadn't he called him at the hotel? What could it have hurt? It could have hurt a lot.

His cell phone rang. He slowly dragged it from the pocket of his jeans and checked the collar ID. It was Nat. He smiled and opened his phone. "Hey, beautiful," he sang.

"Beautiful," she bellowed, "I feel like a beached whale. Why didn't you talk me out of doing this, Marsh? I hate you."

He laughed. "No you don't."

"No I don't." She giggled. "Where are you?"

"On the way to the store."

"Breakfast!"

"I have to open up."

"No, Christine can open up. Come on, indulge me, I'm eight months pregnant for Christ's sakes."

"Aren't you going into your office, today?"

"Later this afternoon."

"Is Jason working?"

"He's on two, twenty-four hour shifts. Left this morning."

"Ah ha, you're lonely. You want to stay with Roger and me tonight?"

"Yes," she whined. "I want to beat you at Gin again."

"Okay, pack up your stuff. I'll pick you up and we'll go for breakfast. You want to leave your car in the garage? I'll pick you up at the office later."

"Okay," she said. "I want a big breakfast."

Marshall checked his watch and headed back to his car. "Okay. I'll call Christine and make sure she opens up. I'll be there in about twenty minutes."

"Hurry, I'm hungry."

He laughed. "Okay."

He was going to get coffee and a breakfast sandwich on the way, but Nat had changed his plans. She had a habit of doing that. Jason was a firefighter and Natalie was often alone, and since she'd become pregnant, she had become needier, but that was all right. He loved Natalie. She'd stuck

by him through thick and thin, been his lawyer at the trial. She'd never abandoned him. And now they were like brother and sister. He was even going to be the godparent of the baby. He couldn't wait.

When Marshall drove up in front of Natalie and Roger's condo in Cote Des Neige, she was impatiently standing outside with her overnight bag. He laughed.

"What?" She hit him in the arm when he took the small bag from her.

"Nothing. You look dangerous."

She got into the car. "Don't mess with a pregnant woman when she's hungry."

"I'll remember that." He got behind the wheel.

"How's work?"

"Dull. I'm on slow down workload, which means I get all the uninteresting crap."

"You asked for that."

"No, my doctor insisted on that. I'm too old to be pregnant. I think I'll not be pregnant."

Marshall grinned at her. "I don't think you can do that."

"I will if I want."

"Okay."

She giggled and reached over to smooth back his hair. "How are you?"

"Um, so so."

"What do you mean by so so?"

"Comme si, comme ça."

"I don't need a translation, stupid. I want an explanation."

"Oh, there's the breakfast place," he muttered as he put on his flasher. "Almost missed it."

"Um, yeah, let's eat."

There was a line up, but someone noticed how pregnant Natalie was and they gave up their place in line.

When they sat at a table, Natalie said, "See, its magic. It's like they think I'm going to keel over or something. One of the perks of being with a prego."

Marshall smiled. "They're probably worried you're going to fall on them."

She grinned and stuck out her tongue. "Ha, ha."

The waitress brought the menu. "Don't go anywhere," Natalie said in French. "I know what I want. Order," she told Marshall, "so I can eat, and I don't have to wait."

"Yes, boss," he said, ordering a traditional breakfast with one egg. Natalie had the deluxe.

When the food arrived, Natalie seemed peaceful. She ate, drank her coffee, and chatted on about Jason's excitement over the baby. "Okay," she said suddenly, "enough about me. Why do you look so tired?"

"Do I?"

"Yes. I thought Roger convinced you to let the employees do their job finally."

"He did. I do."

"Bull. Another lie. It's because of what I told you about Hal Makin, isn't it? Don't lose sleep over that, honey," she touched his hand, "he's not getting out."

"I don't understand how bail is even an issue at this point."

"He gave some evidence against another inmate who confessed something to him. He tried to cop a deal. I guess they agreed to move up his bail hearing."

"Fuck."

"Marshall, it's not going to happen. They'll never let him out. Angelo and I will make sure of that." She looked away.

He looked at her, his heart slamming into his ribs. "What do you mean, Angelo and you? You've heard from him? You're in touch with him?"

She looked down at her hands, fiddled with her napkin. "For a while now."

"And you didn't tell me?"

She sighed. "I've been meaning to tell you. You know all there is to know about him, sweetheart. He's in Vermont at the university. He's writing another book."

"And he contacted you?"

"No, I contacted him."

"Why? What for? You have Jason now, Nat."

"Marshall! What I felt for Angelo happened a long time ago. And I was confused and..."

"You wanted to sleep with him."

She sucked in some breath. "I told you, I was caught up in things. It was a hard time for all of us. I was acting as a liaison between the two of you and we got closer. He's a hard man to resist. But nothing even happened between us, so forget it."

"So why contact him now?"

"I wanted to know how he was doing."

"Oh."

"Marshall. Listen, when you told me you read that article about him and that he had joined the faculty at the university in Vermont, I went to the university website."

"Why?"

"I was curious. Anyway, I found his email at the school, and on impulse, I emailed him."

"You shouldn't have."

"Why not?"

Marshall looked down at his plate. "It's better just to...let it all go."

"But you haven't let it go."

"I'm trying."

"If you haven't let go after all this time then..."
She threw up her hands.

He fell silent.

"Still having the dreams?"

"Yes. Did he answer?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He thanked me for writing, and he said he liked

his job."

"That's all?"

She nodded.

"He didn't ask about me?"

"No. But that doesn't mean he didn't want to."

"Oh Nat," he shook his head. "He would have if he'd wanted to. You shouldn't have written to him. It must have brought back bad memories. Is he alone?"

"He didn't say."

"You corresponded only the one time?"

"In the beginning, it was only the once. Lately, we've been emailing back and forth quite frequently, discussing Hal Makin."

"You told him about the upcoming bail hearing?"

"I figured he had a right to know, Marshall. And this is what I need to tell you. Angelo is coming to Montreal next week to face the parole board and make clear his feelings on the subject. I think it would be even more effective if you were there with him."

He swallowed. "With Angelo?"

"Yes, with Angelo. I've already told him I think that the two of you should present your argument together."

"And he agreed?"

"Yes."

"He wants to see me."

"He didn't say that. He said he'd be willing to

attend the meeting with you.”

“Will Hal be there?”

“I’ll try to make arrangements for you to meet with the board before Hal Makin gets his hearing.”

Marshall put a hand through his hair. “I can’t do this, Nat.”

“Why not?”

“Because, God damn it,” he said, tears choking off his words, “I still...love...him.”

Natalie grabbed his hand and held it tightly in hers. “I know.”

“Seeing him will rip out what’s left of my heart. And what about Roger?”

“Roger has nothing to do with this. Listen, we all want the same thing, honey, to make sure that Hal Makin rots in that jail cell. This is the best way. Parole boards have always had a tendency to take the victim’s feelings into account.”

“Angelo was the victim, not me.”

“No, you both were victims. That’s why you’re out of jail, and Hal isn’t. The man is a sociopath, Marshall. This is far bigger than your feelings for Angelo, so try to put those feelings aside and concentrate on keeping Hal behind bars.”

Easier said than done. “What should I tell Roger?”

“The truth. Look, I won’t come home with you tonight. I’ll give you a chance to talk to Roger alone.”

He sucked in some breath. “Okay. And if it

keeps Hal in prison, I'll do it. When is Angelo coming?"

"He said he'd drive down on the weekend. He's going to meet me at my house and we're going to go over what he'll say. I want you to be there."

Marshall nodded. "I'll be there."

Marshall spent the rest of the day in a dream. And that evening over dinner, he desperately searched for the right words to say to Roger.

Roger talked about some new student in his class and Marshall could barely make sense of the words coming out of his mouth.

Finally, Roger said, "Marsh, where are you?"

"I'm sorry. Roger, I need to talk to you about something."

"Okay. What?"

He took a deep breath. "I have to speak in front of the parole board soon. Hal Makin is up for parole, and Natalie thinks that Angelo Farelli and myself should..."

"Angelo Farelli?"

"Why do you have to focus on that? That's not the most important..."

"Yes, it is. He's coming here?"

"He's coming only to say what he has to say and..."

"And you're going to see him." He put down his fork.

"I don't have a choice."

"Is this some little plan of Natalie's?"

"Plan of Natalie's? What are you talking about?"

"I'm not stupid. I know she'd rather you be with him than with me. She's never liked me."

"That's not true. Natalie loves you."

"Natalie loves you, Marshall. And you love him." He stood. "I don't want you to see him. In fact, I forbid you to see him."

Marshall narrowed his eyes. "You can't forbid me to see anyone."

"Yes, I can. This is the man you dream about every God damned night."

"I don't dream about him every night."

"You've never gotten over him. So now he's coming, and what, you're going to run into his arms and beg him to take you back?"

This was a side of Roger, Marshall had never seen before. It was ugly. Marshall looked up at him. "That's not going to happen."

"But what if it could happen? What if Angelo Farelli opened up his arms and told you he still wanted you, still loved you, don't tell me that you wouldn't go with him in a heartbeat."

Marshall said nothing.

"Tell me, Marshall," Roger demanded. "Look me in the eye and tell me that's not true and I'll believe you."

Marshall lowered his head. He couldn't do that.

“That’s what I thought,” Roger sneered and walked out of the room.

Later when Marshall crawled into bed beside him, Roger said tersely, “I meant what I said. If you meet with him, it’s over between us.”

“Roger,” Marshall turned to him. “Be reasonable. You don’t want to see Hal Makin out of prison, do you?”

“No. However, you can write your statement and let that Farelli guy read it. It will be just as powerful.”

Marshall laid his head down on the pillow. He stared at the ceiling, and when the sun came up, he was still looking at the ceiling.

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Two

Natalie called him the next day at the store around three o'clock. "Hey, how did it go with Roger?"

"It didn't. I can't do this."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll prepare something and Angelo can read it at the hearing."

"No. That's not a good idea."

"Well, it's either that or Roger leaves me."

"You're kidding."

"Nope. He gave me the ultimatum. If I meet with Angelo, it's over. And you know... I can't blame him."

"He's bullying you."

"Maybe. But..."

"Don't let him do that."

"I've made my decision. And I got to go." He hung up.

* * * *

Angelo arrived late Friday night at his hotel on Sherbrooke Street. He could have left early that afternoon. He had no classes scheduled, but he kept delaying his departure time. At one point, he actually sat in the car for a half hour, then got out

again and went back into his house.

The decision to go hadn't been an easy one. He knew he'd have to see Marshall again, and that would be painful. Nevertheless, he had to do it. He couldn't allow Hal Makin to get out of jail.

It had been close to ten PM before he finally got into the car and left the driveway. It was after midnight when he arrived. It was too late to call Natalie now.

He checked in and lay down on the bed, fully clothed. The last time he'd been in this city, he'd been promoting his new book about the Italian community here.

He'd spotted Marshall standing in the line. He would have known him anywhere, that curly dark hair, the boyish good looks. He'd found it hard to concentrate, scribbling nonsense on people's books. Then suddenly, Marshall bolted and ran. He understood the compulsion. But he'd always taught himself to face his fears. Marshall couldn't hurt him anymore. He had to keep telling himself that.

He'd gone after him. They'd talked in the park, and on impulse, he'd asked Marshall to call him at the hotel. He'd waited for his call, but it never came. He was actually disappointed as he made his way back to LA. He wasn't sure why. Their love was in shambles. Marshall had destroyed his trust. Yet, there was still something alive deep inside his heart, something that made him long to see Marshall, talk

to him. That's why he'd run after him. And now, three years later, that's why his stomach was in a mess. Tomorrow, they'd meet again.

Angelo got out of bed and stood in front the mirror. He took off his shirt in anticipation of taking a shower. He knew he hadn't changed much. He wore a bit of a shadow on his jaw and his hair was shorter. But he'd kept his body in good shape, using the gym at the university. He had a few fine lines he hadn't seen before, but nothing too pronounced. Young men still gave him a second look in the bars.

He threw his shirt aside and reached for his zipper on his pants. But in spite of all that, he was alone. His words to Natalie eight years ago rang true now. He'd told her that he saw himself being alone for the rest of his life, and here he was.

In the shower, he thought of the men who'd tried to love him. There was Antonio, his best friend who still lived in Rome, and Seth, another professor at the university. Then there was Ian, the guy who ran the coffee shop near the university. Those three had managed to hang on for the longest. Then there'd been the string of one-night stands, too many faces, too many bodies in which he'd derived fleeting moments of happiness.

His most constant friend had been the bottle, who he'd had an on-off love affair with through the years, finally exchanging it for countless AA meetings.

He'd been sober for over a year now, and hopefully wouldn't be tempted to visit his old lover. Now this, coming here to where Marshall was...this was tough for him. He found himself staring longingly at the mini bar when he emerged from the shower. One little shot before bed, jerk off and then sleep. A pattern he knew quite well.

He decided to pass. He turned off the light, crawled into bed and tried to doze off. He saw Marshall in front of his eyes. That first time he came to the house at the plantation in Colombia, wearing those tight shorts that fuelled his imagination. The first time he held him in his bedroom, the cries of passion he coaxed out of Marshall's soul. The happiness. The two of them together in Rome, making love. In Rio, making love. The pain. Yes. Always at the end, there was pain—the pain of knowing Marshall had betrayed him, had slowly been feeding him arsenic, the physical pain of being that close to death. But it was over, done with. He needed to forget. However, there was always a reason why he couldn't, a young man with the same curly dark hair, a whiff of coffee, an intimate touch in the night, a man's deep moan of satisfaction after fucking. He licked his lips, tossed in bed. "Marshall," he whispered as he took his own cock in hand, "oh God, I still want you."

When Roger rose on Saturday morning, Marshall was sitting up in a chair by the kitchen window. He hadn't slept all night. He was trying to find a way to rationalise throwing away a perfectly good relationship for a brief meeting with Angelo. Two years in exchange for what...a few hours?

"Morning," Roger said, ruffling his hair. "What 'cha doing here?"

"I woke up early."

Roger poured himself some coffee. "Let's go to that new art exhibition today and then maybe we can eat at--"

"Roger," Marshall turned and looked at him.

"What?"

"I need to do this."

"Damn it, Marshall. I thought we'd decided."

"You decided. Please, don't leave me. I need your support."

"You need to see him."

"At least give me the benefit of the doubt."

"Not where he's concerned." He left the kitchen.

"Damn," Marshall sighed and closed his eyes.

* * * *

Angelo checked the street signs, looking for Natalie's address. He called her this morning and she'd invited him to have lunch. Neither one of them

mentioned Marshall. When he spotted the right number, he pulled up into the driveway. A very pregnant Natalie stood in the doorway.

He smiled and got out, unbuttoning his hip length black leather jacket. It had started out to be a nippy fall day, but the sun had come out now, warming it up some. He ran his fingers through his hair as the wind blew it around his head and heard leaves crunch under his boots.

He stood in front of her for a moment as she looked at him, her eyes filled with tears. "Hey, you, you haven't changed at all."

"You have." He smiled. "Bonjour, ma Belle."

She slowly lifted her arms and put them around his neck. "Don't try and hug me too much, your arms won't fit around."

He laughed and then kissed her on both cheeks.

"Nice car," she said, eyeing the Italian sports car.

"Thanks."

"Come in," she said and opened the door wider.

He followed her into the entrance leading into a nice big living room with a kitchen behind, and a hallway leading off to the left where he assumed the bedrooms and bathroom were. He was relieved to see that Marshall hadn't arrived yet. "So how are you feeling?"

"Pregnant," she replied with a moan.

He smiled again. "You look beautiful."

"You are such a liar, but keep saying it. Come,

sit. Lunch is almost ready.”

“I hope you didn’t go to too much trouble.”

“Are you kidding? It’s frozen.”

He laughed.

“You look fantastic. Are you happy?”

He looked around. “I’m doing okay.”

“That’s not the right answer.”

He shrugged.

She took a breath. “Marshall’s not coming.”

“Oh.” He wasn’t sure what he felt about that, a combination of relief and disappointment. “So I’m on my own?”

“He’s writing something. We can read it in front of the board. It’s not him, it’s Roger.”

“Roger?”

“Oh, yeah, his boyfriend.”

“What does this Roger have to do with it?”

“They live together. They’re partners...two years now. Marshall made the mistake of telling him everything a while back. Roger doesn’t want him to see you.”

“Why not?” He blinked.

Natalie looked at him. “Angelo. Why do you think?”

“That was a long time ago.”

“Not for Marshall. He still loves you.”

Angelo stood suddenly. He walked over to the window.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that like that, but

there's no point in trying to deny it. He's tried. And I'm proud of him. But he's not over you. I doubt he could ever be over you, Angelo."

Angelo fell silent. He watched the leaves twirl and dance in the street. Somewhere, a dog barked. Marshall was living with a man. He didn't want to know about that. Now, he just wanted to get this over with and go home.

Natalie called him to the table. They ate frozen lasagne and garlic bread. Natalie offered him wine. He was sorely tempted. "No thanks."

"Come on, you love wine," she urged.

"Natalie, I'm an alcoholic," he declared as she went to pour the wine.

She stopped in midair. "Oh my God. I'm sorry. I didn't know."

He smiled and covered her hand. "You couldn't have known."

"And now, it's okay?"

He nodded. "Yeah. It's been a year, but it's a struggle."

"Is there someone?"

"Not anymore. They come and go."

"Sweetie--"

"No, don't pity me." He met her gaze.

"You have so much. You're so gorgeous and intelligent and--"

"You're trying to swell my ego?" He lifted his eyebrow, laughed at her.

"I say the truth."

"And Marshall, he's okay?"

"Yeah. He owns his own store now, and he's still painting. He's had a few art shows. His boyfriend is a--" she stopped. "He's good, except that, damn it, Angelo, the two of you belong together."

"We never belonged together, Nat."

"Your hearts are--"

"Both broken. Let's leave it at that. Tell me about you? You're with Jason. You are having a baby, and your job?"

"It's great. I can't wait to get back full time."

"Are you hoping for a girl or a boy?"

"I don't care as long as it's healthy. Oh, I have dessert," she added.

"So where is that man of yours?"

"Oh, he's playing softball today. He's a firefighter. They have a team," she said from the kitchen. "You want coffee?"

"I'll come and help you."

They were sitting, drinking coffee and eating cake when the doorbell rang.

Natalie put down her fork. "I'm not expecting anyone," she made a face. "Excuse me."

* * * *

Marshall stood nervously at the door. He had parked out front. In Natalie's driveway was a red

Mustang Giugiaro, an Italian designed sports car. It could only be Angelo's car. His father had been an American race car driver and Angelo knew cars.

Natalie opened the door. She just stared at him, then reached out and touched his cheek with her hand. "Baby. You came."

He glanced at the car again.

"Angelo is here. Come on."

Marshall hesitated, then took a deep breath. He walked in behind Natalie and closed the door.

Angelo sat at the kitchen table.

He looked much the same as Marshall remembered him. Marshall started to shake all over. He reached out blindly and Natalie took his arm, propelled him forward.

Angelo stood there in a pair of jeans and a burgundy shirt. He actually smiled at him. "Hello, Marshall."

Marshall mouthed something, tears rolling silently down his cheeks.

Angelo took a few steps toward him.

Natalie said something about dishes, and ran off to leave them alone together.

Angelo stood right in front of him.

Marshall found it hard to breath.

"It's all right," Angelo told him, his voice soft.

His throat ached from holding back the tears. It wasn't what he'd planned. He'd practised it all. He was going to be strong and tough, and speak to him

like anyone else he hadn't seen in awhile. But damn it, if he'd had any doubt before about what he felt, it was gone. The passion, the desire, the love was still as intense as it had been years ago, perhaps even stronger. Nothing had changed. He reached out and almost touched him.

Angelo moved closer. He put his arms around him for a brief moment, hugged him. Then he released him. "How are you?"

"Not so good right now," he sniffed. "You look beautiful."

He laughed faintly. "Natalie told me you weren't coming."

"I wasn't going to." He took a breath. He walked over and sat down on the sofa. Angelo was standing too close. It was overwhelming.

"What changed your mind?" Angelo took the chair opposite him.

You. You. It's always been you. Oh, baby, do you think I could have stayed away?

"Marshall?"

"Ah...I didn't answer?"

"No."

He cleared his throat. "I think it's important to do what we have to in order to..." He couldn't speak anymore. He folded his hands together, dying to ask him if there was someone else, someone who was lucky enough to hold him in their arms every night, kiss those lips, feel his cock inside them, but he

didn't. He couldn't have stood the pain from the answer. And it wouldn't have made any difference anyway.

"...to keep Hal behind bars," Angelo finished his thought for him.

"Yes." Why did I come? I'm suffocating here. Oh Angelo, Angel, I want you. I want to touch you. I want your cock, your hands, your lips. I love you.

Angelo stood up as Natalie came into the room. "Oh sit down, you," she grinned. "You're so sweet. Anyway, I guess we should get started. Let's go to the table and we can begin to plan what we want to say."

Marshall stood, too, grateful for the diversion.

"What happened with Roger?" Natalie asked. "Is he all right with this, Marshall, or..."

Marshall shook his head. "It's okay. Let's do this."
"

* * * *

Angelo sat on the right of Natalie and Marshall on the left. Angelo really couldn't see him from where he sat, and that was a relief. He'd almost broken down himself when Marshall started to cry, and that same protectiveness he'd always felt toward him kicked in right away. He wanted to hold him, rock him in his arms, kiss him, and tell him not to cry, but that wasn't his role anymore.

Marshall had changed physically. He was no longer that scared kid he'd remembered who had just barely attained manhood. He was all grown up, mature, but in his eyes, it was still the Marshall Angelo remembered, the Marshall he'd loved. No other man had ever made him feel this way. No other ever would. And now, as they worked together on these letters, Angelo wanted nothing better than to leave here and be alone in his hotel room. Marshall was still the man who'd slowly fed him poison, and held him in his arms at the same time, whispering words of love. And when Marshall was this close, it was easy to forget that.

When the doorbell rang again around four o'clock, all three of them looked up from their work.

Natalie excused herself and Marshall gave her a hand up.

Angelo looked at Marshall. "This is tough for you, isn't it?"

"Isn't it tough for you?"

"Not this part," Angelo said.

Marshall met his gaze. "Can we talk later, just the two of us?"

Angelo hesitated. "We'll see."

"Marshall!"

Angelo found himself staring at a man around forty years old, dark-haired, slim, handsome and furious.

“Roger, what are you doing here?” Marshall got to his feet.

“I wanted to see the man that you dream about every night, in the flesh.” Roger walked over to the table and glared at Angelo.

“Have you been drinking?” Natalie demanded angrily. “Mon Dieu. Quel est le problème avec vous?”

“Stay out of this, Nat.” Roger pointed at her. “This is all your fault. You set this all up.”

Angelo stood. “I don’t much care for the way you’re talking to Natalie in her own house.”

Roger gave Angelo the once over. “So this is him?” Roger scoffed. “You gave up on us for this?”

Angelo narrowed his eyes, muttering something under his breath.

* * * *

“Roger!” Marshall came around the table. “Let’s talk about this outside.”

Roger grabbed his arm.

Angelo reached over and took a hold of Roger. “Take your hands off him.”

Marshall looked at Angelo in surprise. “If you have a problem, it’s with me, not him. If you want to discuss this, we’ll do that outside.”

Roger took a swing at Angelo. Angelo ducked and Natalie stumbled back.

Marshall raced over and caught Natalie just before she hit the wall. "Nat, are you all right?"

"I'm fine. Roger, get out!" she yelled.

"Now, I'm pissed," Angelo growled. "You have no manners." Angelo took Roger by the neck and hauled him across the living room. They hit the door together as Roger began to struggle and the door flew open. They both went through it.

Marshall closed his eyes. "Oh my God! I have to stop this! What if Roger hurts him?"

"Isn't it Roger you should be worried about?" Natalie looked at him.

"Of course," Marshall muttered as he ran to the door. When he got outside, Roger was in his car.

Angelo stood there on the curb and watched as he drove off.

"Are you all right?" Marshall turned Angelo around to look at him.

"I'm fine." He pushed his hands away. "Let's call it a day." Angelo walked back into the house. "Are you all right, Natalie?" he demanded.

She was sitting down, her face in her hands. "Fine, thanks." She looked up. "You?"

He nodded. "I think we're done. I'm going back to the hotel. I'll call you tomorrow. You can let me know as soon as we have a date."

"It will be this week." She stood and wrapped her arms around him.

Marshall watched as he kissed her goodbye.

“Angelo.” He followed him to the door. “Can we talk?”

Angelo turned and looked at him. “It’s Roger you really need to talk to, not me. He’s hurting.”

“So am I.”

“Yeah, well, welcome to the club,” he told him as he yanked open the door.

Marshall stood there in silence as it shut in his face.

“He’s right,” Natalie said. “You need to talk to Roger.”

“I have to tell him it’s over.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh God, Nat, of course I’m sure. Just looking at Angelo makes me sure. There might still be a chance for us.”

“I don’t know about that. Think about what you’re doing.”

“It’s not fair to Roger, or any other man. It’s either Angelo, or I stay alone for the rest of my life. Oh, Nat, when I saw him again, I...it’s still there, as strong as ever, maybe even stronger. It’s my punishment maybe. All I know is there will never be another man for me.”

Natalie motioned to him.

He leaned in for a hug.

“Do the honourable thing, honey. Tell Roger the truth. Don’t hurt him anymore than you have already.”

The honourable thing was not always the easiest thing. Marshall cried downstairs in the living room as Roger packed his bags upstairs. He had loved him in his own way, and now there was probably only loneliness to look forward to. Believing that Angelo would open his heart to him again was a long shot, but he couldn't keep using other men as a substitute. It wasn't fair to anyone.

Roger walked into the living room before he left. He looked miserable. He put his suitcase down. "What do we do about the house?"

"Sell it, I guess. Oh, Roger, I'm so sorry."

"He's not going to take you back. Would you?"

Marshall shook his head.

"I hope you're happy, Marshall."

Marshall didn't reply.

"You sure you don't want to keep the house? You could buy me out."

"I..." Marshall shook his head. "I can't think right now."

Roger picked up his suitcase. "My lawyer will call you," he said before he left.

Marshall sat there for a long time, not moving or speaking. Finally, he called Natalie. "Hi Nat," he said. "What hotel is Angelo at?"

"Marshall. Are you sure about this? Where's Roger?"

"Gone. He went to stay with his sister."

"I'm sorry."

"It had to be done."

"Marshall, you can't just march over to the hotel and--"

"I have to do something. He's here in the city. And I know I'm asking a lot, but I felt...I don't know. I'm prepared to make a fool of myself if I have to."

"He's at The Arms on Sherbrooke, room twenty-one, but I don't think you should go. I don't want to see you hurt."

"It has gone way past hurting now," Marshall told her and hung up.

* * * *

Angelo held the tiny bottle of liquor in his hand and stared at it. In fact, he'd been staring at it for at least twenty minutes. He knew what unscrewing that cap would mean.

His sponsor had called him a functional drunk, one who could still go through the motions of life, still hold a job, one who drank when they were alone, to combat pain, loneliness, to help them sleep. Alcohol had done all of those things. And sometimes, it felt like it was his only friend, getting him through these past years. But he knew that it was as deceptive a friend as Marshall had been a lover. It pretended to bring comfort, but secretly, it was killing him.

And right now, he needed his old friend. The day had been more stressful than he'd imagined, and it

wasn't only seeing Marshall again, being in the same room, watching him break down and cry in front of him. It was Roger, and how he'd reacted to Roger. The minute Angelo saw Roger, he resented him. And when he'd taken him outside, there was a moment when he'd wanted to beat the shit out of him. But he didn't. He should have felt sorry for the bastard, but instead, he envied him. He wanted to be him. He still wanted Marshall. In spite of everything, he wasn't over him. That's what was killing him right now. His heart and his head were in mortal combat, and only his old friend could force them to call a truce.

Angelo felt the bottle again in his hand. If it had been glass instead of plastic, he would have broken it. He stood, looked in the mirror, lifted the bottle and stared at it. "Give me strength," he whispered and then threw it across the room.

It was okay this time. He'd fought it off. But he knew there would be a next time. He glanced at the phone, thought about calling his sponsor in the US, but decided against it. The sponsor would only tell him to avoid stressful situations. But how in the hell could he do that with the threat of Hal being released from prison?

At the end, he pulled on a pair of nylon shorts and a sleeveless t-shirt, and went to the exercise room. Maybe that would help relieve some of the tension and let him sleep.

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Three

Marshall stood across the street outside the hotel. The downtown streets were quiet tonight. It was a crisp autumn night and Marshall could smell the snow in the air.

He looked both ways for traffic and then crossed the street. He had thought about what he would say on the way over in the car, but now, none of it came easily to his mind. He walked through the lobby with its white leather sofas and low-hanging light fixtures. The desk clerk nodded at him, assuming he was a guest.

He waited for the elevator. He thought about calling, but Angelo would probably talk him out of coming up. No, it was better this way.

The elevator doors opened. Marshall stepped in, pressed two and closed his eyes as the doors closed. Angelo. My angel. I love you. I still love you. God, don't turn me away.

His stomach ached as he stepped off the elevator and walked silently down the carpeted hallway. There were gold-toned mirrors on the wall, and the man who looked back at him as he glanced at one, looked ashen.

He lifted his hand in front of room twenty-one and knocked. When no one answered, he turned and

raced back down the hallway, convinced that this had been a mistake. He pressed the elevator, waited. It was coming down. Angelo had gone out maybe, or he was busy. He might have had a man in his room. Maybe he didn't even come alone.

The elevator dinged and the doors opened. Suddenly, he found himself staring into Angelo's eyes. He wasn't sure who was more surprised, him or Angelo.

For a moment, they said nothing, just stared at one another.

Angelo stepped out of the elevator. He lifted his sweat soaked t-shirt and wiped his face on it. His dark hair was tied back and wet as well. He looked unbelievable in a pair of short nylon shorts, and that tank top. Marshall wanted nothing more than to rip it off him and lick the sweat from his chest. His mouth watered looking at him.

"What are you doing here?" Angelo asked him, jarring him out of his trance.

"I want to talk to you."

"Go downstairs. I'll shower and change, and meet you in the bar." He was about to walk past him.

Marshall reached out and grabbed his forearm. "I don't want to meet in the bar." He met his gaze.

Angelo pulled his arm away, looking irritated. "What is it you do want?"

Marshall clutched the front of his top. Without realising his own strength, he suddenly shoved

Angelo back against the wall. He held him there, his material- clenched fist pressing against his chest. They were close together now, their chests both heaving, even though neither one had exerted much effort.

Marshall was lost in Angelo's dark eyes. They looked at him with an expression he couldn't read.

Angelo didn't fight him. He just stood there, his back against the wall, hands at his side. Marshall pressed his forehead against his own fist, moving closer still, inhaling the masculine sweat, which was nothing but precious to him suddenly. "Baby," he whispered.

"Marshall, let me go," he said, almost pleading, but made no move, didn't struggle.

Marshall found his free hand wandering down Angelo's flank to his thigh. "I have no right," he looked up at him now, "but I need you. I want you so much that I..."

A hand gripped his, squeezed, then shifted it between their two bodies and placed Marshall's hand on his cock.

It was hard. Marshall curled his fingers over it, feeling it through the flimsy material. Tears lit his eyes. He released his shirt, slipped his hand up underneath it, explored the waves of muscles, which flowed over his stomach, moved up to his chest letting his fingers dally with Angelo's right nipple.

Angelo took a deep breath as Marshall released

his cock and slipped his hand up inside his shorts through the leg. His fingers encountered Angelo's naked cock, come already coating the head. He groaned, lifted his shirt and pressed his lips to his chest.

The elevator was moving, coming up or down, Marshall couldn't tell. Angelo pushed him back and walked down the hallway toward his room.

Marshall hesitated. Did he want him to follow?

At the door, Angelo turned and looked at him. He didn't say anything. He unlocked the door and left it ajar.

Marshall moved like a zombie toward that open door. If he was dreaming, he didn't want to wake up.

* * * *

Angelo walked into the bathroom and turned on the shower. He knew he was tempting fate. He knew exactly what was going to happen. He was stripping off the tank top and kicking off his trainers when he heard the hotel room door close. His heart hammered in his chest. He licked his lips, took down his shorts and looked at his cock, hard, ready and needy. Why should he deprive himself? If Marshall wanted him, well, he could have him.

"You're beautiful," Marshall said, his voice sounding muffled, barely in control.

Angelo glanced at him, finding it hard to breath.

He stepped under the spray of water, every second excruciating.

Marshall was undressing. Within seconds, he'd step in behind him and touch him. Angelo licked his lips again, his cock starting to get painful now, throbbing. He tried to slow his breathing down, but by the time Marshall slid in behind him, he was practically panting.

Marshall's hands slid up his flanks, reached around to brush his nipples with his fingertips and then moved his arms up over his head. He pressed him forward and forced Angelo to place his palms above him on the tile.

Soft lips trailed across his back as Marshall's own erection pressed against his ass. Fingers worked his nipples, then a hand slid down his belly, brushed his cock.

Angelo let his head go forward. His body trembled. Marshall's arms came around his torso and hugged him so tight against his body, he could scarcely breathe. He kissed across his back again, gently nibbled at his shoulder, then moved back his wet hair and pressed his lips against his neck.

"I'm so afraid to let go," he whispered against his ear, grazing it with his teeth. "God, Angel, I love you."

Angelo's forehead pressed against the tile. "Don't," he whispered. "Don't say you love me. Fuck me, make love to me, but don't say you love me, Marshall."

Marshall released him. He took a few steps back and Angelo turned off the shower. He rested one hand on the tile for a minute as if he needed the support. The emotion was too great. Marshall wanted to fall at his knees, beg his forgiveness. It was killing him and it had been all these years. "I sent Roger away."

Angelo glanced at him over his shoulder now, eyebrow raised. When he didn't say anything, Marshall stepped out of the shower. He stood there, dripping wet, just looking at him. Every inch of his golden skin seemed familiar. He'd touched him everywhere, kissed him everywhere. His body was the only peace he'd ever known.

Angelo turned around now and leaned against the tile. His cock was still hard and Marshall could literally taste it in his mouth, feel it inside of him. "Aren't you going to speak?"

"To say what?"

"To ask me why I sent Roger away?"

"I know why." He reached for a towel on the rack beside the shower and wiped his face. "You sent him away because you saw me, and you thought that suddenly I was going to forget what you did to me." His voice ended on a bitter note. He wrapped the towel around his waist and got out.

Marshall nodded, his throat constricted. Tears lit his eyes.

Angelo walked out of the bathroom. He went to the mini bar and took out a small bottle. He twisted off the cap without a word and tossed the contents to the back of his throat. "There. At least it's over."

"At least what's over?" He was still standing there naked, wet. He was hardly conscious of dripping all over the carpet.

"My sobriety."

Marshall blinked. "I don't understand."

"It's not important," he said. "What is it you want, Marshall? Do you want to fuck? We can do that. Right now, I want to fuck you badly, as you can see." His mouth twisted and he glanced down at the tent in the towel. "My body has a mind of its own, and it's not the rationale side. It's not..." Marshall moved so quickly, Angelo didn't even realise how close he was until the towel he wore lay at his feet.

Marshall was on his knees, his hungry mouth swallowing his aching cock, as one hand wrapped around the base, and the other hand kneaded his ass.

Angelo's knees went weak. If the bed hadn't been directly behind him, he would have landed on the floor. As he lowered himself to the bed, Marshall stayed with him, grunting his pleasure moving his lips down his shaft, as the head of Angelo's cock hit the back of his throat.

Marshall knelt on his knees on the bed between Angelo's open thighs, one hand now on his own cock, stroking it slowly, moaning as he did, his eyes closed.

Angelo's head arched back, his face contorting. He was going to come, whether his head thought he should be coming or not. His cock pulsed, pumping out its release as Marshall came off his cock, jerking out his own relief at the same time.

* * * *

The expression on Angelo's face was beyond glimpsing heaven. It was heaven. His eyes closed, his muscles tensed in his cheeks, his forehead. He let out a deep groan, then a sudden gasp of air, and finally licked his lips a few times as if he'd just finished an especially satisfying meal.

Marshall's orgasm vibrated throughout his body from his head to his toes, and it was simply a result of tasting Angelo's cock, watching him come. If Angelo had touched him, he would have gone off even faster.

He sat back. Finally, he could experience the pleasure of just looking at him, muscular, hard and so male. He couldn't help remembering what it felt like to be fucked by that beautiful cock of his. And Angelo seemed even more beautiful to him than in his dreams.

Marshall placed a hand on Angelo's thighs, but Angelo pushed him aside and got off the bed. For a terrible second, Marshall thought he was going to ask him to leave. Instead, he went back to the bar, opened the door, took out another small bottle and unscrewed the cap.

Marshall watched him curiously as he drank it down. "Do you want me to..." He could hardly say the word.

Angelo set down the empty bottle on the bureau. "Leave? Oh no," he said, shaking his head. "You're not going anywhere, Marshall. You came here to get fucked. I'm about to oblige."

The tone in his voice was lewd, the look in his eyes almost savage. It was a side of Angelo he'd never seen. There was nothing tender, or loving about it. It was turning him on.

"Turn over," he told him, taking some lube and condoms out of the bureau drawer.

Marshall watched him over his shoulder as he turned onto his stomach. He'd brought that stuff with him. He wondered if it was because he'd intended to go out and bring some man back to the hotel. Somehow, that fuelled a wave of jealousy inside of him.

Angelo knelt on the bed, throwing the stuff onto the bed beside him. He seized hold of Marshall's hips and pulled him to his knees. He didn't say anything, and suddenly Marshall wasn't sure if he

wanted him like this, but then Angelo touched him. He smoothed a hand over his hair and then around to his chest. He lowered his lips to his shoulder and pulled him closer. "God, God, God, God," Angelo breathed against his neck, his hard cock jamming against Marshall's ass. It was then he knew he'd take it anyway Angelo chose to give it to him. Now trapped in his strong arms, his head flopped back against Angelo's hard chest as those hands brought him to life. He wanted to kiss him. He wanted to look at his face when he came inside of him. But Angelo had other plans.

A lubricated finger slipped inside his ass, the other fondled his cock, his balls.

Marshall wanted to scream. He had all he could do not to cry out his name repeatedly. He bit down on his lip, his chest heaving, a soft whimper coming from deep within him. "I love you so much, Angelo."

"No," he growled, withdrawing his finger, pushing him down to his knees. "This isn't love. It's fucking. Just shut up," he demanded.

Marshall felt Angelo's cock invading him. He closed his eyes. How long he'd waited for this. He heard Angelo groan, push deeper into him. For a minute, he rested there, his breathing coming fast and hard. "I can't," he lowered his head on Marshall's back.

"Angelo?" Marshall tried to look back at him, his mind a maze of hurt, and desire and confusion. This

had been a mistake, maybe for both of them.

Angelo's arms tightened around him and then he began to move again, slow, steady, his thick length wringing sensations out of his body he'd almost forgotten. Marshall cried out his name, the sweat now pouring into his eyes. "Yes, yes, yes," he groaned.

Angelo squeezed his cock, said his name and then cried out something that sounded like a prayer when he came inside of him.

Marshall pumped his orgasm into the mattress, his body curling into a ball, groaning from deep in his chest. "Yes, oh God yes," he cried, sobbing now. All these years without him, without his touch, he wasn't sure how he'd survived it.

He lifted his head, wiped his eyes. Angelo wasn't beside him. He was sitting on the small sofa nearby, another one of those tiny bottles in his hand. Marshall rolled over, watched him as his lips caressed the top, then tipped it back. He had no words, no idea what to say. Angelo didn't want to hear that he loved him, yet Marshall longed to say it, make him believe it.

* * * *

Angelo knew Marshall's gaze was on him. He raised his legs, rested his feet on the coffee table in front of him and let the liquor burn all the way down.

Right now, he hated himself for a variety of reasons. He had no strength anymore. He couldn't fight. He'd given into the liquor and given into Marshall. He wasn't sure which was worse, or which was going to kill him faster. Right now, he didn't care.

Fucking him had started out in the right place. Marshall was a good-looking guy wanting to be fucked. He obliged, completely unprepared for what being inside of him was going to feel like again. It brought him heaven. It was love, as much as he wanted to pretend otherwise. He just had to make sure that Marshall didn't realise that. If he did, he was done for. He was right back where he'd been in the beginning—vulnerable. He'd never allow that again. That's why none of his relationships had worked. He couldn't allow himself to love another man the way he'd loved Marshall, the way he still loved Marshall. "You shouldn't have sent Roger away."

"Why not?" Marshall asked, bringing up his knees and wrapping his arms around them. "I didn't love him."

"Love isn't everything. Sometimes it's better if you don't."

"What was that just now?"

"Two men fucking."

"No. It was more than that."

"Think what you want, Marshall," he scoffed. "You came here, got what you wanted. Now get out."

Marshall was standing in front of him suddenly. "You need to forgive me, not just for me, but for you." He went down on his knees beside him. "It's tearing you apart. What can I do to--"

"Nothing." He looked at him. "There's nothing to be done."

The tears streamed down Marshall's face. "I love you. I made a mistake. I'm not the same man."

"I'm not either."

"Take me back. I can't live without you." He lowered his head to his thigh.

Angelo almost stroked his hair, then changed his mind.

"If it's punishment, then I've paid. How much punishment do you want me to--"

"It's not punishment. Is that what you think?"

Marshall raised his head, met his gaze. "Yes. That's what I think."

"How can I trust you again?" he demanded. "You said you loved me. You held me in your arms. I was inside of you, and you said you loved me." His voice broke. "Marshall, you tried to kill me. You fed me poison until I almost died. At anytime, you could have told me. You chose not to. That's not love."

"I was naïve, scared. I believed Hal when he said it wouldn't kill you. Angelo, I never gave you what he told me to."

"Which means you knew what you were doing." He looked away. "Stop torturing me, Marshall. I love

you. Don't ever believe that I don't. I just can't be with you."

Marshall touched his shoulder. "Look at me. We're both miserable. We love each other. I promise you I'll spend the rest of my life making this up to you, but I can't live without you, Angelo. I can't. If you don't take me back, I'll have to live alone."

Angelo looked at him. "Well then we'll both live alone."

Marshall let out a cry of frustration. He stood, paced the carpet. "Why are you being so stubborn about this? This is the past, leave it there. Do you really think I'd try to kill you again?"

"No," he said, lowering his feet. "But I can't forget that betrayal, Marshall. I wish I could. I can't get past it. There is no us. There will never be an us. So please, I'm begging you. If you love me as you say, leave now. Go home, call Roger."

* * * *

Marshall put on his clothes. He hadn't felt this unhappy since he'd thought that Angelo was dead. He left quietly as Angelo stood at the window. He didn't even turn around.

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Four

Natalie stopped by the store the next day to let Marshall know that he and Angelo were expected to give their statements next week, Thursday, at ten in the morning. When she arrived, Marshall's employee, Christine, told her he had called in sick. That wasn't like Marshall at all. She had called the hotel to speak to Angelo this morning, but he wasn't in his room. He had turned off his cell phone as well.

Natalie said goodbye to Christine and drove to Marshall's house. He didn't open the door for ten minutes, and when he did, he looked like shit. "What's wrong with you, leaving me out here on the doorstep to freeze to death?"

"Sorry," he said. "Come in."

She looked at him. "You went to the hotel, didn't you?"

He didn't reply, but simply asked, "You want coffee?"

"No. I want to know what happened. Angelo isn't answering his cell."

"He probably doesn't want to answer it because he thinks it's me."

"What happened?"

"I don't want to talk about it, okay?"

"Fine, be like that. Your appointment is Thursday

at ten."

"At the prison?"

"Um," she nodded, sitting down.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired."

"You don't need this crap now."

"Why did you call in sick?"

"I am sick."

"Sick with what?"

"Just sick."

"If you want to talk, I--"

"I'd rather be alone if you don't mind."

"Okay," she got up, kissed his cheek. "If you even need me, you know I..."

Marshall squeezed her arm. "I know."

* * * *

Marshall walked over to the window and watched her drive away. He couldn't go to work today. He couldn't concentrate. He couldn't think of anything but Angelo. He had to hold himself back from returning to the hotel. It didn't matter how Angelo fucked him, angry, or not, love or no love, he wanted him. He didn't care what he had to do, how much humiliation Angelo doled out. He had to have him.

He'd tried to call him three times already without any answer. "Damn you, Angelo! I love you," he told

him on his answering machine. "I want you. I want your body, your cock, your kisses. I can't go on without you." He hung up, waited for the phone to ring. Nothing. Angelo probably hadn't even bothered to listen to it.

Marshall picked up his car keys and left the house.

* * * *

The half-drunk bottle of whiskey sat on the bureau. Angelo lay on the bed, his head to the side, just staring at it. He'd been drunk since Marshall left him. He was afraid of being sober. Steady swallows, spaced appropriately, kept the pain away. He closed his eyes. He prayed for sleep.

When someone knocked at his door, he rolled over and put the pillow over his head. Then he heard Marshall calling his name.

He sat up, crawled off the bed and went slowly to the door, prepared to tell him to go away. But when he opened it, he didn't say anything. He just pulled Marshall inside and into his arms. He kissed him deeply, passionately and tore at his clothes.

Marshall helped him, undoing the robe Angelo wore. He ran a hand over his jaw. "You haven't shaved. You taste like whiskey."

Angelo drew him back into his arms. They were both naked, and he closed his eyes from the

sensation of Marshall's skin on his. "Do you care?" he demanded gruffly.

There was no answer except for what was coming from Marshall's lips and his hands.

Suddenly, Angelo slammed Marshall hard into the wall. Marshall grunted as Angelo spread his legs, massaged his cock and inserted his fingers up inside of him. "Rough trade," he hissed, "isn't that what you were used to, with all those men you played?"

"Angelo, please," he pleaded, not sure if he was pleading for him to stop saying those things, or to fuck him.

"Please what, baby, fuck me, use my ass? What? What do you want?" Angelo dug his fingers deeper up inside of him.

"Fuck me, yeah, oh yeah," he breathed. "I'm so empty without you."

Angelo dragged his waist forward, took him down on the floor and started fucking him hard and deep, pumping his ass over and over until Marshall cried out in surrender and Angelo came inside of him.

* * * *

Marshall slammed his fist into the floor, his orgasm rocking him to the core. He turned around and pressed Angelo down on his back. He wasn't

getting away this time. He crawled on top of him, kissed his chest, his throat, mingled his tongue with his, then kissed his way down his body, sighing with contentment. When he got to his cock, he pushed his thighs apart, licked his shaft, suckled his balls and teased his anus with his tongue and his fingers until Angelo's chest heaved and he began to moan.

"I want to fuck you," Marshall groaned, licking the head of Angelo's cock. "I want to fuck that beautiful ass of yours and look at your face when I drive you crazy." Marshall ran his hands over Angelo's thighs. He pulled up on his legs and drilled into his ass with his cock. He didn't ask permission and Angelo didn't deny him. He lifted his hips up as Marshall pumped his passion into him, and they both came seconds later, shouting and moaning, their bodies moving together in satiated bliss.

Angelo was too beautiful when he was orgasmic. Something about the way he moved, the way his chest heaved and his face contorted. Fucking him had been overwhelming and when Marshall came, he had to move away from him, bring himself down again. At one point, he thought his heart would explode.

He felt almost suicidal, like he was going closer and closer to the edge. Each time he touched him, it made his heart ache more because he knew Angelo wouldn't let him stay. When he was calm and Angelo lay still on the floor, he asked him what he wanted to

ask him the other night. "Why are you drinking?"

"Because I'm a drunk."

Marshall met his gaze from across the room.

"What?"

"I'm a drunk." He sat up. He said it casually as if he were telling him he liked the taste of sushi.

"Some call it functional alcoholism."

Marshall felt the pain of those words, deep inside of him. It was his fault. He knew that sincerely.

"Since when?"

"It doesn't matter since when."

"Have you been in treatment?"

"Yep. And as you can see, it's working well." He got to his feet and uttered a bitter laugh.

"Has it ever worked?"

"For about a year."

Marshall closed his eyes. "When did you start drinking again?" It was a redundant question. He knew the answer already.

Angelo didn't reply.

"Oh, Angelo." Marshall sighed. "This is my fault."

"No, it's not your fault. Don't give yourself so much credit. No one is responsible for my drinking but me. That's something they teach you at the drunk meetings. Sorry, I'm afraid you're off the hook for this one."

"But seeing me again--"

"Like I said," he replied sharply, "you give yourself too much credit."

Marshall stood. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know what you're going to do, but I'm going to have a drink."

"Let me help you."

"Get a glass?"

"That's not what I meant."

"I know what you meant. Why don't you go now?"

He picked up his robe and shrugged into it.

"I can't leave you like this."

"Why not?"

"Because I love you."

"Stop it, Marshall. I just want to give my testimony and get to hell out of here."

Marshall looked down at his hands. "It's Thursday at ten. Nat told me."

"Okay."

"Come and stay with me."

"No."

"Then I'll stay here with you."

Angelo looked at him. "I don't want you here."

"I don't care. If you plan to kill yourself, I'll join you. I don't want to live without you."

"But you've been living without me for some time now."

"If you call what I've been doing living. And I don't think you've been living either. No matter what happened in the past, Angel, we love each other. That never changed. Why can't we start from there again?"

Angelo looked at him. "You're delusional. And don't call me Angel. I'm far from that."

Marshall came over and took the glass out of his hand. "Maybe so but I want to start over. I beg you. Let's do it, or let's end it. We'll go together, side by side. I don't care anymore."

"No," he said softly. He reached out and touched his hair. "No, Marshall. I couldn't bear it if..."

Marshall pulled him close. "Then please, hold me. Hold me tonight, baby, and let me heal you. Let me help you. I'm yours. I've always been yours. Together, we can do anything. I believe that. We can bury the past. Oh God, Angel, let's try."

Angelo lowered his head onto Marshall's shoulder. For a few minutes, he didn't say anything, then mutely, he nodded.

* * * *

Natalie was worried about Marshall. When Jason came home, she told him about what had happened while he was at the firehouse, leaving out the part where she'd almost been tossed on her ass.

He sat down beside her, took her hand. "You have to let Marshall handle his own shit, Nat. He's a grown man. You coddle him too much."

Nat snatched her hand away. "That's not true. I'm concerned, that's all. I'd like nothing better than to

see him and Angelo together. Marshall never stopped loving him. I've never seen anything like that before. And I believe that somewhere deep down inside, Angelo still cares for him. But I don't see a lot of hope. Can Angelo forgive the past? Jason, if it was me, if I was Marshall, with all I'd done to you, could you forgive me?"

"Nat," he sucked in some breath, "that's a big question. I don't know."

"I've been asking myself that about you. And I think with time, if I saw that you'd really changed, I think I'd give you another chance. It wouldn't be the same situation. Everything has changed in Marshall's life. An unscrupulous bastard manipulated him, and he couldn't even recognize love until he thought he was going to lose it. You know what I mean?"

Jason sighed. "Some people can't forgive, and maybe you are overestimating Angelo's feelings for Marshall."

"I don't think so." She sat back.

"You look tired," Jason said, lifting her feet onto his lap. "How about a foot rub?"

She smiled at him and closed her eyes.

* * * *

Hal gave his lawyer an exaggerated smile when he walked into the room. He hated that slimy

bastard, but the prick was devious enough, maybe, to get his ass out of here. "So what's the news? Did the fuck-head go for it? I gave them what they wanted. That Ellie-fuck is going to have ten more years tacked onto his sentence."

"Hal," Fred Dawson said as he set his briefcase on the table, "the prosecutor has agreed to give you an early bail hearing as you requested. However, that doesn't mean they'll release you. In fact, it's highly unlikely given, ah...recent events."

"What recent events?"

"Victim impact statements."

"Huh? What fucking victims?"

"Marshall Calletti and Angelo Farelli."

"What?" Hal roared. "You got to be kidding me. Those two are conspiring against me, together? Well, I'll be God damned."

"There's nothing I can do. The prosecutor offered you some time off your sentence and perhaps better conditions if the information you gave led to prosecution. So far, it hasn't. They think your cellmate was putting you on. He never killed that girl in Toronto."

"Fucking shit!" Hal slammed his fist on the table, causing the prison guard to poke his head in the door. Hal calmed himself and leaned across the table. "There has to be some way for you to get me out of here."

Dawson stood, shook his head. "Sorry, Mr.

Makin. I didn't really see much hope that the parole board was actually going to take your plea for release very seriously before, but now with those two coming to--"

"You're worthless," Hal grunted.

Dawson sighed. "I'll see you, Mr. Makin. Take care."

The guard came into the room and motioned with his hand.

Hal stood, glared at him. Stupid cocksucker. As he walked down the hallway back toward his cell, he thought of Marshall. In fact, he'd never stopped thinking about Marshall. So you're back with your lover-boy now. How nice for you to spend your nights sucking on that big beautiful cock of his. The last time I set eyes on Angelo Farelli, he'd been a beautiful hunk of man, nothing like that in this place. Soon, Marshall, we'll meet, because one way or another, I'm getting out of this place and then you'll pay for double crossing me, for putting me here. You'll pay, you little whore. I promise.

* * * *

The lovemaking was tender and almost bittersweet. Angelo kissed him the way he'd remembered his kisses, tender, yet passionate, and they sent a thrill throughout his body. Just his kisses caused Marshall to arch his body and whimper his

name. When he looked into his eyes and gently caressed his lips with his, Marshall groaned and pulled him closer. Oh God, he couldn't believe that finally, Angelo was back in his arms and that somehow, Angelo had enough mercy inside his heart to really try and make this work. To forgive him with his entire heart, as Angelo seemed prepared now to do, was nothing less than a miracle.

Angelo's cock sunk slowly into his ass as he pulled Marshall's feet to his shoulders and bore down into his body. He linked his fingers with Marshall's, plunged deeper and then slowly began to fuck him in a rhythmic dance that was almost hypnotic.

"Baby," Marshall whispered, reaching out to touch his hair, caress his cheek. Angelo brushed his lips across his hand.

"Mi amor," Angelo replied in Spanish.

My love. He called me his love.

The rhythm grew more erratic, the music moving from Bach to something raunchier, raw. The need in Angelo's face intensified and as he fucked him harder. Marshall went with him, his back arching again, head hitting the headboard. His cock shot out its release, his chest heaving as Angelo released his own efforts into his ass, lowering his body to his, stroking his hair. "I love you." He kissed his cheek, his ear. "Marshall, I love you so much."

Marshall's tears rained down his face as he held

onto Angelo. "Oh God, God," he moaned, caressing Angelo's cheek, only to find that it was also wet with tears.

They held each other tight the rest of the night. Marshall fought sleep. He was too afraid that Angelo would leave him in the night, or he'd wake up only to find that it was all a dream and he was alone. Eventually, however, he did succumb, and when he opened his eyes again, Angelo was no longer in his arms. He got out of bed and walked to the bathroom. Angelo stood at the bathroom sink, pouring out all the little bottles of booze.

Marshall came over and slipped his arms around Angelo from behind. He kissed his shoulder, then laid his cheek there on his back. "You'll have to pay for those you know."

"It's my punishment, for being such a damn fool."

Marshall released him. "If you have a problem, Angelo, I'll help you. We'll do it together, fight all your demons."

Angelo turned around. He gave him a tender smile. "I won't need this anymore. I have you."

Marshall smiled and reached up to kiss his mouth. He ran a hand down over his chest. "Yes, you have me and I'm never going to let you go. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"Come back to bed," Marshall pleaded. "Please.

Angelo laughed. "You're insatiable."

"Where you're concerned, I am." He wandered out of the bathroom and over to the bed. He jumped on it. "Hurry up." He patted the mattress. "I'm cold."

"Cold, eh?" Angelo cocked an eyebrow.

Marshall laughed as Angelo crawled into bed beside him and pulled him on top. It was probably a crime to feel this happy. In fact, it had been a long time since he'd felt this kind of euphoria, not since Angelo had held him back in Colombia.

* * * *

Marshall was kissing him and Angelo was lost to him, just like he'd always been. It both exhilarated and frightened the hell out of him, but he pushed the fear away and closed his eyes, concentrating on the sensation of pleasure shooting through his body, filling his cock.

He put his hand in Marshall's hair as he felt his mouth capture the head of his cock. He sighed, moaned, lifted his hips and fed him his cock. All the years seemed to melt away. He loved Marshall. He'd never stopped, and it was time to give him a second chance, to give them both a second chance. "Ahhhh...ahhhh...yes," he heard his voice call out. "Yes!"

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Five

When Monday morning came, Marshall didn't want to go into the store. He couldn't stand the thought of leaving Angelo, and he knew he'd have to find some way to separate himself from the only man he'd ever love. He stood beside the bed, watching him sleep for a moment, and he moaned inwardly, longing to crawl back in beside him, just lay there, holding him, touching him.

They'd made love several times yesterday and two times during the night. Neither one of them had gotten much sleep. Marshall smiled. He'd leave him a note, letting his baby sleep. He wanted to kiss him, but he really didn't want to wake him.

"God, you look like an angel when you sleep," he said softly, tempted to run his finger over that dark shadow on his jaw. "God, help me," Marshall whispered, "I'd do anything for you."

"Is that so?" Angelo mumbled, opening one eye.

Marshall started to laugh. He crawled on top of him and began to tickle him. "You ass. You weren't sleeping."

"I was." He chuckled. "Until you started talking to yourself."

"I was not talking to myself," Marshall protested, struggling to get away as Angelo held him fast. "I

was just, ah...thinking aloud." He finally gave in and settled down into his arms. It was where he really wanted to be anyway.

"Same thing, isn't it?" Angelo kissed his forehead.

"Technically, no."

"Where you going anyway?"

"To work. Some of us still have to work for a living, you know."

"Hey, hey," he muttered.

Marshall laughed and stared into his eyes. "I don't want to leave you."

Angelo traced the curve of his lower lip with his finger. "I'm not going anywhere."

"But you will. You'll leave me and go back to Vermont."

He pursed his lips. "But it will only be temporary, until the end of the term."

"Then what? Angelo," he said anxiously. "We have to be together. I'll sell the store and—"

"No, you won't. I'll come here to Montreal. I love this city."

"But you're not a Canadian."

He shrugged. "I'll apply for citizenship. And then, you could always marry me." He met his eyes. "It is legal here. It would be only to get me into the country and then..."

Marshall was agast. His mouth fell open.

"Close your mouth, sweetie, or I'll fill it with

something. You'll never get to work." He grinned at him.

"You...did you just ask me to...yes, yes, yes," Marshall yelped, covering his face with kisses.

"Whoa, whoa," Angelo said as he fended him off, trying to keep a straight face. "Calm down, boy. I told you, it will be just for immigration and--"

"I'm going to kick your gorgeous butt," Marshall threatened teasingly. "When? When do we do this? Let's do it now, today."

"Marshall." He laughed, trying to sit up. "Can I pee first?"

"Go pee. Shit, what will I wear?"

Angelo grinned at him over his shoulder. "Nothing would suit me. You'll be naked soon enough after we cut the cake," he called from the bathroom.

Marshall sat cross-legged on the bed. "I never thought I'd ever get married."

"Christ, me neither," he called out. "It was just a thought."

Marshall jumped off the bed and threw himself into Angelo's arms as soon as he came out of the bathroom. "I love your thoughts, oh and God damn." he ran his hands over his naked chest, "I love your body."

"I know, I know." He smiled, pushing him away. "Go to work, will you?"

"But you meant it, didn't you?"

Angelo turned and looked at him. "When did I ever say anything I didn't mean? I love you. You love me. If you marry me, I'll have less problems getting citizenship. If we're going to do this, we're going to go all the way."

"You won't mind coming here to live? Really? What about your job?"

He shrugged. "I'll find another. Plus, I have my writing. Now, go to work."

Marshall nodded with a smile, picking up his car keys. "Kiss me goodbye?"

"Then you'll leave?" He gave him a wary look.

"You just want to go back to sleep!" Marshall accused.

"Damn right," he replied. "You've worn me out."

Marshall laughed. Angelo gave him a quick kiss. Marshall licked his lips. "Don't bother getting dressed. I'll be right back after work." He winked at him.

Angelo shook his head. "I shouldn't have bothered bringing my suitcase."

"Well, you could have packed lighter."

"A G-string and a condom."

"Not even," Marshall shook his head, walking to the door. "You don't need the G-string." He blew him a kiss and left.

* * * *

Natalie called him at the store. Marshall wanted to tell her the news, but not over the phone.

"You sound weird," Natalie said.

"Thanks."

She laughed. "No, like different. What happened?"

"I told you, Curious Caroline, not on the phone."

"Curious Caroline? Can we have lunch?"

"I'm kind of busy. I think I might just grab a sandwich across the road today."

"You're killing me."

"Okay. Meet me at the sandwich place then."

"Noon?"

"That will do. If you're there before, save me a place."

* * * *

The shank Hal had been sharpening was ready, and today he was on laundry, which meant he was responsible for putting the dirty clothes into the laundry bins, which were taken outside the prison for cleaning. Big Bill was the guard responsible for checking each bin before it was loaded onto the truck. Hal didn't expect that he'd be doing his inspection today.

Everything was timing. He had to wait for the next-to-last bin to hit the truck, take out Bill on his way in and then jump into the last one, cover himself

up with some stinky clothes and he'd be on his way.

He already told his new boy where to meet him, the sweet thing. He, unlike Marshall knew how to take his orders, and he gave him his ass on demand as well. He'd been so lucky with cellmates. Soon, Marshall, baby. Soon.

* * * *

"Okay, spill it," Natalie said as soon as Marshall walked into the sandwich place. "Why in the hell do you look like its Christmas and New Years all wrapped into one?"

Marshall sat down beside her. "He wants me back. We spent all weekend together. Nat," he took her hand, "he's moving here. He wants to marry me."

Natalie started to cry. "Damn you, Marshall, look what you've done. This pregnancy thing makes me a basket case." She took some tissues out of her purse. "I'm so happy for you. He's really moving here?"

Marshall nodded. "I would have gone to Vermont, but he said no. He doesn't want me to sell the store."
"

"He's so sweet."

"Yes, he is," Marshall licked his lips.

Natalie hit him and laughed. "Don't gloat, you. I want to be in the wedding."

"You will be. Who do you think will stand beside

me when I say those words? Oh God, Nat, I love him so much it's almost frightening. What if something happens?"

"Nothing is going to happen. This business with Hal will be all over soon, all behind you, and it will be just the two of you." She hugged him. "He is your love. He's always been. Now, he's been able to forgive the past. He really does love you, Marshall. Only love has that great a power."

Marshall wiped his eyes. "I know. Let's have dinner together, after all this mess at the parole board is over."

"Why not tonight?"

"Well," he hesitated, "I don't feel like I want to share him just yet."

She smiled. "Okay. After the bail hearing."

"Are you sure he won't get out?"

"No, sweetie. The prosecutor never promised he'd get out, just some time off his sentence, and it's not sure that the info he gave them will even help get a conviction. If it doesn't, he gets nothing."

"I know if Hal was ever to get out, he'd come after me. He hates me."

"Never mind that. You're safe. Now, what shall we eat?"

Angelo lit the candles just as Marshall knocked on the door of his hotel room. He opened it and Marshall ran into his arms, hugging him tightly,

slamming the door closed with his foot. When they broke apart, Marshall glanced at the table, which had been prepared with candles and wine. Two plates covered with metal domes sat across from one another.

"I hope you like filet mignon."

"Um, and I'm starved. You did all this?"

"The hotel did all this. I just paid." He laughed.

Marshall noticed there was no wine in Angelo's glass. He pulled him close again. "I love you."

"Good. Let's eat," he said.

Marshall couldn't help but look into his eyes as they ate. Angelo looked so beautiful sitting there, the ends of his hair still damp from his shower, his sliver shirt left open at the throat.

"This is delicious," Angelo said. "I was starving."

"Didn't you eat anything after I left?"

"I slept until three," he replied with a laugh.

Marshall laughed with him, lifting his wine glass. "I guess I'm too much for you, eh, handsome?"

"We'll see about that," he growled, lifting another dome cover, "after dessert."

"Um, cheesecake. I love it." Marshall pushed back his plate. He stood up, dipped his finger in the cake and walked over to Angelo's chair. He pushed it back with one hand and sat on his knee, lifting his finger to Angelo's mouth.

Angelo grinned, and opened his mouth to receive Marshall's cake-covered finger. As he licked it, he noticed that Marshall dug his fingers into it again. He spread the cheesecake on Angelo's lips and then opened his shirt and spread it across his chest.

Angelo laughed as they kissed, each of them getting a taste of the cheesecake and of each other. Then Marshall licked off his chest, lapping his cheese-covered nipple, then opening the rest of his shirt. "If you put cheesecake on my cock," he threatened, "I'll swear vengeance."

Marshall laughed. "Promise?"

"Oh yeah," Angelo told him. "I promise."

Marshall went down on the floor between his legs and undid the zipper on his pants. "Lift that gorgeous ass."

Angelo laughed and lifted up.

Marshall tore down his pants and underwear and pulled them off, along with his shoes. "Spread your legs," Marshall groaned, the look in his eyes lusty.

Angelo squirmed a little. It was turning him on big time. He widened his legs as Marshall dipped his entire hand in the cake and coated his cock and his balls with it.

"Oh my God," Angelo laughed, letting out a yelp. "You're in big trouble now."

Marshall started eating the cake off his cock.

“Um, yeah...um...what...what cha’ going to do, baby?”

Angelo sucked in some air. His head fell back as Marshall feasted on him, licking his shaft, his balls. “Um, baby, yeah, yeah. Sweet.” He let it go on for as long as he could stand it, then grabbed Marshall’s face between his hands and leaned down to kiss him. “Okay.” He grinned devilishly. “Now baby, you pay.”

Marshall was laughing as Angelo stood and pulled him up into his arms.

“I’m so scared,” Marshall said while giggling.

Angelo made a face at him. “You should be,” he growled and pulled him over to the bed while Marshall pretended to fight him off.

“You don’t protest too much,” Angelo nuzzled his neck, taking him down on the bed with him.

“Have you looked in a mirror lately?” Marshall groaned while laying quiet as Angelo began to undo his shirt.

Angelo grinned. “I can go look now if you like.”

“Never mind, stud. Put your money where your mouth is and pay me back, oh baby, please, pay me back.” Marshall reached up for a kiss.

Angelo waved his hand away. “Ah, ah, ah, patience.”

* * * *

"You stupid idiot," Hal barked. "You were supposed to pick me up down there, behind the warehouse. What in hell is wrong with you, you worthless piece of shit? Someone could have seen us."

"I'm...I'm, ah, sorry, Hal. I didn't mean it. I wasn't thinking," Duncan said. He gave him a quick hug. "I'm real glad you made it, got out of there. Things will be good, Hal, real good now. You'll see."

"Get in the fucking car," Hal muttered. "Let's get out of here."

"Where we going, Hal? We heading south? We could go to Ontario, Niagara Falls. I like the idea of seeing that. I have never seen it."

Hal buckled his seatbelt. "You just go where I tell you. We're staying right here in the city for a while. I got some things to take care of here before we go anywhere. You got money?"

"Yeah, some," Duncan said, starting the 1995 Ford he'd picked up.

"What do you mean some? You been selling that ass of yours, or not? I told you when I got out, you better have some dough socked away. I'm not living in no dump."

"I got some, Hal, honest."

"Slow down. The last thing we want is to get stopped by the cops. Tonight," he pointed to him, "you're out on the streets, selling that ass of yours. And make the John use a condom, cause I don't

want no crabs. And tonight, I'm in need, you got me, boy?"

"I got you, Hal."

"Good. Then I'll think of some way we can make some real money."

"But why we staying in the city, Hal?" Duncan asked hesitantly. "You...well, you could get...could get caught. Won't the cops be looking for you?"

"What, you got a stuttering problem now? You just let me worry about that, Moron."

* * * *

Angelo was inside of him. If this were his revenge, he'd have to think up ways to earn his vengeance more often. Marshall wrapped his legs around his waist as Angelo had gotten up on his knees and pulled Marshall up onto his lap. With his cock buried deep inside of Marshall's ass, Marshall was able to look into his eyes, run his hands over his shoulders and chest. This was heaven. He wanted to fuck in this position always.

Angelo was moving up inside of him, slowly, sensuously, his cock making contact with every sensitive spot inside him. He let his head go back. Angelo leaned forward and kissed his throat. They rocked together, their breathing more laboured. Marshall groaned deeply, frantically moving his hips to keep pace with Angelo. "Baby, baby," he called

out as Angelo's hand milked his cock. They both came with a shout, Angelo still bucking his hips, coming up into Marshall's ass. Marshall saw Angelo lick his lips as he withdrew his body from his. He took his face in his hands, kissed his mouth tenderly and grinned. "You look like a cat that's just finished a particularly satisfying bowl of milk."

"Is that so?" Angelo laughed softly as he leaned toward him and rubbed his nose with his. His hair was wet with perspiration, as was his chest.

Marshall had never seen a man look more beautiful than he did now. "It is so," Marshall cooed, kissing his lips softly, pressing his forehead against his. "I'm so happy."

Angelo stroked his hair. "Me, too."

Marshall swallowed as he took his head in his hands and looked into his eyes. "You are so bad."

"Me?"

"Yes. But your vengeance is not so bad."

Angelo laughed as Marshall released him. He went back on his elbows. Marshall sat on his thighs.

"Big, bad Angelo," Marshall mocked.

"I am big," he looked down at his faded erection, "bad...well...I don't know about that one."

Marshall laughed, hankering down beside him on the floor. "I want to go back to Rio. Can we?"

"Sure."

"I want to dance with you on those white sands, and make love in a hotel room overlooking the

water. I still remember those coconut shrimp."

"Seems like so long ago."

"It was." Marshall looked at him. "Everything was different then except for how I felt about you. Do you know it was there I realised that I was in love with you. A guy told me that on the dance floor."

"Huh?"

"A man told me I was in love with you when we were in that bar."

"He told you that you were in love with me? I don't get it."

Marshall laughed. "I was dancing with you, and he said something about how it must be nice to be that in love. He saw it on my face, in my eyes. I was so upset. I hardly slept all night. I couldn't believe it because until you, I didn't even know that kind of love existed."

"Come here, baby," he said, putting his arm around him and pulling him closer. He kissed the top of his head. "We'll go back to Rio, I promise. Okay?"

"Okay."

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Six

Hal was not exactly thrilled with the dump that Duncan had set them up in, but it looked like the little worm hadn't been working it too hard. So here he was, stuck in one bloody room with a torn blind and no cable. The little bastard better come back with some real money tonight, he thought, as he flipped open the phone directory. "Marshall Calletti. Um. Let's see. There you are," he said with a smile. "Oh, and what's this...Calletti Art Supply. Um. Little fucker has done well for himself," He laughed, ripping out the page. "He has his own business now. Wow, they do say that shit rises." He couldn't help but wonder what sugar daddy set him up? Maybe Farelli gave him the cash, for a taste of that sweet ass of his.

Hal lay back on the bed with a self-satisfied smile on his face. He didn't intend on going about this too quickly. He'd check out the situation, see what was going on with his old friend. He wanted to see the little fucker sweat before he put out his lights for good.

When the door opened a few hours later, Hal opened his eyes and sat up in the bed. He narrowed his eyes and looked at Duncan. "Okay," he said, "where's the cash?"

Marshall heard the ringing far away in his brain. Gradually, he was coming out of a deep sleep. When he did, the ringing had stopped. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. The sun was rising in the morning sky. He glanced at Angelo who was peacefully asleep and smiled. Everything he wanted, everything he ever needed was just a touch away. He snuggled down beside him. It was too early to get up and go to work. He hugged him close and kissed his shoulder, letting his hand move down over his flank, then gently fondled his sleeping cock. He was tempted to move under the blankets just to taste him again, but knew that would wake him. He held back. There was plenty of time for that. His own cock was hard just thinking about it. "Damn it, baby," he whispered, "it's a crime what you do to me." He closed his eyes and lulled back into a half-sleep. When the ringing played in his mind again, he was dosing. He sat up and stared at the phone in disbelief. "Shit." The clock said seven fifteen.

Beside him, Angelo groaned and threw the pillow over his head.

Suddenly it occurred to Marshall that Natalie might be in labour. He dashed out of bed and grabbed the phone. "Hello."

"Oh thank God." It was Nat.

"Is it time? Are you all right? Is Jason with you?"

"Marshall. I'm not in labour. Is Angelo there?"

"Of course."

"Honey, are you sitting down?"

"Nat, will you spit it out?"

"It's Hal. He's escaped."

"Escaped?" Marshall actually laughed. "What do you mean escaped?"

"They think he went out on the laundry truck. He killed a prison guard and the driver. They think he has an accomplice, some guy who was his cell mate for a while inside."

Marshall couldn't speak. He sunk down in the chair.

"Marshall?"

"This can't be happening. This is a nightmare. This is a fucking nightmare."

"They'll catch him. They'll find him."

"He'll kill me." Suddenly he felt a hand cover his.

Angelo took the phone out of his hand. "Natalie?"
"

Marshall walked into the bathroom and shut the door. Two minutes later, he was vomiting in the toilet.

* * * *

As Hal fucked Duncan up against the wall, he thought about how much pleasure he'd feel when he

finally saw the light go out in Marshall's eyes. Maybe he'd slowly strangle him while he was fucking that sweet ass of his. Or better, he'd make him watch while he fucked Angelo Farelli and then kill him.

He was coming now inside of Duncan, that image in his head as he grunted and rammed the last of his come up inside of him. He pulled away and wiped the sweat off his brow. "That was hot, wasn't it, Duncan?"

Duncan stayed silent, his face on his arm. He nodded. "Yeah, hot," he muttered.

"You didn't do too badly tonight." Hal smirked, counting the bills as he sat down on the edge of the bed. "Tomorrow night, work a little harder. We'll get you a job in one of those gay bars downtown. I know one where you can dance for perverts and then they pay to have a show in the back room. A nice gang bang."

"I don't like that," Duncan whined. "I don't think I want--"

"Don't be such a wimp. Your ass was made for multiple cocks. You're a whore, Duncan, nothing but a fifthly slut. I'm the only one who gives a damn for you. I'll take care of you, baby," Hal extended his hand. "Come to daddy. I'll make you a rich boy. You just have to listen to me. You got no common sense, sweetie. I've got a few jobs for you to do and then we'll be out of here."

"What kind of jobs?"

"You'll see. Let's just say that maybe, if you're a good boy, I might let you play with the most gorgeous of specimens soon—a real gentleman. He used to be a coffee baron."

"A what?"

"Coffee baron," Hal snapped, rolling his eyes. "Never mind. You think coffee is magic don't you, sweetheart, falls from the sky?"

"No, Hal, I know it doesn't fall from the sky."

Hal smirked. "You'll enjoy him, our coffee baron, and this beauty is going to bring us Marshall. Maybe, but before I get rid of him, I'll have Marshall give you some pointers on how to make some real money, since you're such a moron,"

"I thought it was going to be just you and me?"

"That's right, baby," he pulled him close and kissed him hard, "just you and me, forever."

"Why don't we go and see this Marshall right away? Why do we need the coffee guy?"

"Because." He smiled. "I really need to see Marshall suffer."

"Why? Who is he? Who's Marshall?"

"Marshall was you, sweet thing, and he stuck a knife in my back. You'd never do that, would you, Duncan?"

"No!"

Hal grabbed his arm and squeezed hard.

Duncan winced.

"Are you sure?"

“Yeah, yeah, Hal,” he tried to shrink away. “I promise.”

“Good, now go to the drugstore and get me all the things I’ve written down on this list.”

Duncan took the paper from Hal’s hand and read the words. “Black hair dye?”

“Yeah, hair dye, that permanent shit. And sunglasses.”

“And all this other stuff, too?”

“Right. Now get going. And we’ll have pizza when you come back, okay?”

“Okay Hal.”

“We’ll eat and then you can get between my legs and suck my cock, you dirty slut. Now, get out. Hurry up.”

* * * *

Angelo opened the bathroom door. He stood there and watched Marshall as he splashed his face with cold water. He wanted to speak, to reassure him, but wasn’t quite sure what to say. Hal was loose. Hal was a maniac, and he had already killed two men. “I won’t let Hal hurt you, Marshall.”

Marshall looked at him. “If Hal wants to kill me, he’ll find a way to get to me.”

“Natalie suggested police protection.”

“No,” he shook his head. “That won’t do any good. I know Hal, I know him better than the police.

And I don't care what happens to me, but I swear to God, I'll never let him near you."

"Marshall," Angelo said softly. He walked over and placed his hands on his shoulders.

"He'll use you to get to me. If he hurts you, if he even tries, I swear, I'll kill him, Angelo—I'll fucking kill him."

Angelo had never seen Marshall like this. There was no way to console him. He'd gone from terrified to enraged. He brushed past him like a house on fire and started to get dressed.

"He won't touch you. I won't let him touch you," he muttered.

"Marshall! Calm down. No one is going to hurt me."

"You don't know him like I do." There were tears in his eyes along with the look of terror.

"I know he's a sociopath, but I can take care of myself."

"No! You're going home."

"What? Home? I'm not leaving you here alone with that maniac out of jail."

"You're going back to Vermont. I'll join you as soon as I can."

"Hal is probably far away from here by now."

"No, he's here in the city. I feel him. He won't leave until he gets what he wants. Please, please, baby, go," he pleaded, clutching Angelo to him. "I can't lose you now." He let him go abruptly and went

over to the closet. He took out Angelo's suitcase.

"Hey, hey, Marshall, stop it. Come on. I..."

Marshall threw his suitcase onto the bed and started to throw Angelo's clothes in to it.

"Marshall, God damn it!" Angelo grabbed him. "I'm not leaving you."

"Yes, you are," he jerked away from him. "If you love me, you'll go."

"You'll come with me, where I can protect you."

"You won't be able to protect me. He'll hurt you to hurt me. He'll strike where it will hurt the most. He knows how much I love you. Please. I'll get on my knees if you want me to, please, baby, if what we've had these last few nights means anything to you, you'll go."

"That's not fair."

"None of this is fair."

Angelo took him into his arms and held him tight. He knew full well that there was no way in hell he was going to leave Marshall alone with Hal on the loose, no matter what Marshall said. Together they could fight Hal Makin, and he had to make Marshall believe that.

* * * *

Natalie knocked on the door to Angelo's hotel room, feeling ill at ease as she heard the loud voices coming from inside. Angelo and Marshall

were having a wicked argument. She knocked louder, wincing as she heard Angelo swear.

The door opened and Marshall stood there, his face tear-stained.

"I guess this is a bad time," she said hesitantly.

"No, it's the ideal time," Angelo interjected, motioning for her to come in. "Maybe you can talk some sense into his head. I fucking give up." He threw up his hands and brushed past her, leaving the room.

"Angelo, don't," Marshall called after him, but he'd taken the stairs now, not even waiting for the elevator.

Natalie gave Marshall a compassionate look. "He'll be fine."

"Natalie. Hal is out there. You know him. He'll use Angelo to get to me. He'll hurt him and I'll kill him. I'll kill him if he hurts my baby again."

Natalie's eyes filled with tears. "Sweetheart," she whispered. "I know how scared you are."

"No, you don't. No one can know this terror. Natalie, Angelo has forgiven me. He's taken me back, into his arms, into his heart. If anything happened to him, I'd just die. I'd just curl up and die. He doesn't know...he can't understand how much I love him. I can't be responsible for what I'd do to Hal if he so much as looks at Angelo." He was pacing back and forth.

Natalie felt his tension, his pain. She didn't know

what to say. There was no guarantee that Hal wouldn't come after Marshall. He blamed him for all of it, for his going to jail. And he'd strike out at anything, anyone Marshall loved, even her, if he thought it would hurt him. She didn't even dare put that thought into Marshall's head. He was so in love with Angelo, he couldn't think beyond that, and she understood why. "What are you planning to do?"

"I want Angelo to leave, to go back to Vermont. He'll be safer there."

"And why don't you go with him?"

"Don't you think I want to? I can't bare the thought of sleeping without him, even one night. Pathetic eh?"

She smiled at him. "It's love, that's all. Nothing pathetic about that. But I don't understand why you don't go with him, honey. The police will pick Hal up soon and you'd be out of the way. Or go somewhere else."

"Rio," he whispered. "God, I want to go back to Rio with him. I want to hold him while we dance on the sand and..." He choked. "I can't—I can't think of anything until Hal is back in jail where he belongs, or dead. He'd only follow us anyway."

"They seem to know who helped him with his escape. A young guy about nineteen, named Duncan Delmont. He had much the same upbringing as you, one foster home, group home, after another. He was in jail for fraud and prostitution

when he ended up sharing a cell with Hal.”

“Why in the hell would they put this kid in with a murderer?”

“They say he tried to kill one of the Johns, apparently a man who was once his foster parent.”

“Isn’t that sweet,” Marshall muttered.

“There are people in the human race who are garbage. You know that.”

“Um, Hal would qualify. What happened? This kid didn’t kill him?”

“No, but he tried—cut him up pretty bad. The john made it.”

“And Duncan went to jail, and how lucky can you get, bunking with a sociopath. Just the kind Hal could manipulate.”

“Exactly.”

“Natalie. I have to stay here, draw Hal out.”

“Act as bait?” She made a face as she lowered herself to the bed. Her legs were aching. “Not without police involvement.”

Marshall walked to the window. “I have to do this alone, Nat. If Hal even smells a cop, he’ll run.”

“And then when you come face to face with him, what?” she demanded.

Marshall turned and looked at her. “I kill him.”

A chill ran down Natalie’s spine. “No, Marshall,” she whispered. “No.”

He stood looking out at the street. It had started to rain. “Where is he? Where is Angelo?”

"I'm here," a deep voice said suddenly.

Marshall turned from the window, swallowed hard. "Baby, you all right?"

"I only walked outside the hotel for a few minutes. Angelo looked at Natalie. "Please, I hope you've made him see that we should be together in this."

"Take him away," she said.

"No! I can't be looking over my shoulder all the time. I have to bait him, draw him out."

"Do you hear this nonsense he's saying?" Angelo shook his head.

"Baby, I can't rest until I'm sure he can't hurt you."

"I can take care of myself," he said between clenched teeth.

"He'll strike when you least expect it. He'll be armed. He's devious, Angelo. He's--"

"If you're staying, I'm staying. Let's rent a place somewhere and we'll take turns standing guard. I'm sure the police—"

"No police! I want to bait him, bring him out. Then I'm going to..."

"What? Kill him? You'll go to jail, leave me again?"

"No, no," Marshall said. "It will be self-defence."

"Marshall, no." Angelo met his gaze. "We'll wait it out here together if that's what you want, but the police will handle this."

Natalie made a sound, which startled the two men, forcing them to look in her direction.

“Guys,” she said, “I think I’m...oh...I think I’m in labour.”

Both Angelo and Marshall were at her side. A few minutes later, Angelo sat in the backseat with Natalie, as Marshall sped to the hospital, all talk of Hal temporarily silenced.

* * * *

“So what do you think?” Hal asked, twirling around in front of the faded mirror. “I’m pretty hot with black hair, eh?”

“Delicious, Hal.” Duncan chuckled. “I really like the new beard. How about me? You like me with black hair, too?”

“It will do.” He studied his reflection, rubbed his jaw. “It’s not much of a beard yet, but it will be. We need to take a little trip.”

“I love travelling, Halley. Where we going?”

“Don’t call me Halley,” he snapped. “We need to pick up something I put away for safe keeping—some cash. Did you get rid of the car like I told you?”

“Yeah. It was a shame, dumping it in that scrap place. It was running good. And I had to walk ten blocks.”

“It was running well, not good, and we’ll get a new one later today.”

“How we going to travel to that place today if we

don't have a car?"

"Bus. We take a bus. Come on, get your clothes on," Hal barked. "I want out of this sleaze pit."

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Seven

Natalie spent almost twenty-four hours in labour. When the baby came, she was exhausted. Jason sobbed like a baby himself when he held the new life in his arms. They named the baby Jason Marshall, and Marshall was as proud as the new father was.

Natalie's parents had arrived from Quebec City, and Marshall and Angelo decided to take their leave. They were both exhausted and wanted to give some time to Natalie's family, who were extremely proud grandparents.

When Marshall went in the room to kiss Natalie goodbye, she held onto his hand tightly and whispered in French for him to be careful. "Soyez prudent."

"Je promets," he reassured her.

Outside, the sun was beginning to set. Angelo took his hand in his as they walked out of the hospital. "Tired?"

Marshall nodded. "He's a beautiful baby."

"Um, yes he is. Jason and Natalie are blessed."

"I'm blessed," Marshall said, pulling Angelo close as they got to the car. He kissed him softly on the mouth. "I'm so blessed to be loved by you. I'm going

to tell you that everyday the rest of your life.”

“Okay.” He smiled. “You want me to drive?”

Marshall nodded, handing him the keys. He suddenly felt exhausted and the reprieve they’d had from the worry over Hal was over.

As he sat with his head back against the headrest in the passenger’s seat, he closed his eyes. The car rolled out of the hospital parking lot and an image of Hal danced in his head. “Natalie,” he said aloud, his eyes flying open. He reached over and gripped Angelo’s forearm.

“What is it?” Angelo asked as he came to a stop at a red light.

“What if he goes after Nat? What if he hurts the baby? She was my defence lawyer and--”

“I don’t think even Hal would hurt a baby.”

“Yes, he would. He doesn’t care.”

“Jason is with her. I’m sure she’s aware of the danger.”

Marshall sighed. “I never thought about her at all. All I could think about was you and--”

“Nat would understand that. Now, relax. You’re tired and hungry. Let’s go back to the hotel. I’m still booked until tomorrow. Do you want to order in?”

Marshall nodded and smiled. “I want to eat and make love, not necessarily in that order.”

“Are you sure you have the energy for that?”

“Um,” he nodded. “Let’s get in the bathtub together. I want to kiss you all over.”

Angelo grinned. "Okay. I better drive faster."

* * * *

Hal moved the telescope in front of the window and positioned it so that he could look directly into the window of Angelo Farelli's room. It looked like his pigeons had taken a little trip, but they'd be back. The hotel clerk had been very informative when he'd called to leave an urgent message for Angelo Farelli. It seemed that the bitch lawyer, who'd made it look so bad for him at the trial, was in labour. Like good little Samaritans, Marshall and his hunky coffee baron had sped her off to the hospital where the cow gave birth. And Mr. Farelli was still booked at the hotel until tomorrow. They had to come back tonight.

He'd had Duncan go to the florist down the street and order a little gift to be sent to the hotel and delivered to Mr. Farelli's hotel room. He was quite certain that Marshall and Angelo would appreciate the gesture. Even now, through the telescope, he could see it sitting in the middle of the table by the door, a beautiful centerpiece with red roses and baby breath. The message read simply, With fond memories of arsenic and Rio. I can't wait to see you again.

He was laughing as Duncan padded across the room in his bare feet. "Hal," he muttered, still in

tears. He was a basket case. Why in the hell was he always burdened with these emotional cripples? "Why'd we have to kill her?"

Hal turned and glared at him. "For Christ's sakes, Duncan, do you think she was just going to invite us to stay here in her luxury condo as her fucking guests? We needed this place. It's perfectly located."

"We could have just tied her up and--"

"Don't be such a wimp. Old bag probably didn't have anything to live for anyway."

"But there's blood all over my shoes."

"We'll buy you new shoes. Now shut up and find us something to eat, will you," he ordered. "I'm starving."

* * * *

"I have a craving for you to be inside me," Marshall announced as soon as they got into the elevator.

Angelo laughed as Marshall pushed him back against the wall of the lift and began to undo his shirt. "Marshall," Angelo managed as Marshall began to smother him with kisses, "what if someone gets on."

"Well, they'll have to get right off," he chuckled, undoing the zipper on Angelo's jeans, "I'm not sharing."

Angelo tried to push his hands away from his pants, struggling, and laughing. Marshall was being Marshall, and Angelo was relieved. At least they weren't arguing and they weren't talking about Hal. That baby had provided a much-needed break from their heated discussion, but somehow he knew the topic would come up again. Once they'd eaten and showered and Marshall had satisfied his itch, the topic was bound to come up again.

By the time the elevator opened on their floor, Marshall was stroking his cock, his shirt was half-open, and both of them were hard as hell. They were both breathing hard as they staggered down the hall, giggling like two schoolboys, and Angelo's hand shook as he tried to insert the electronic card key in the slot. "Will you stop," he chastised Marshall playfully as he struggled to open the door, "I can't get it open."

Marshall took the card key and threw it into the hallway. "To hell with it, I'm going to have you right here in the hall."

"You're a nut," Angelo accused, laughingly trying to pick up the card key from the floor while Marshall wrestled with him, attempting to hold him back.

Finally, Angelo won the battle and they burst into the room, Angelo shutting the door with his foot as they both tore at the others clothes.

Angelo broke away and ran to the bathroom, leaving his shirt and pants behind. He ran some

warm water in the tub as Marshall moved in behind him and pulled down his black briefs, kissing his back and moving down to nibble at one of his ass cheeks.

"You have the greatest ass. And your cock is ...um..." Marshall reached around and took his cock in his hand.

Angelo's knees weakened as he tried to place his hand under the water to check the temperature.

"Get in the bathtub," Marshall murmured, still stroking his cock.

Angelo licked his lips as he lifted a foot over the tub, then another.

The tub was round with a flat seat at the end where one could sit before getting down in the water. "Sit there," Marshall told him, pressing him down on the seat as he got in after him. "Yeah, oh yeah, spread your legs."

Angelo turned off the water. He leaned back against the tub, sitting on the seat, warm water now caressing his calves. Marshall stepped in and went to his knees in front of him. He moved wet hands up his thighs. His hard naked body filled him with such need. He wanted him right now, but wanted to make it good for him.

"God, you are a beautiful man, Angelo Farelli. And you're mine. Say it," he moved his fingers over the underside of his hard shaft, then bent his head to press his lips against the tip of his cock.

Angelo uttered a pleasurable sound, a sound that had always driven him crazy. "I'm yours."

"I love to please you. I can't wait for you to fuck me, but I will. I'll be patient. I want to make sure you're ready to fuck me, long and hard."

Angelo smiled at him, blew him a kiss.

Marshall laughed. "Lift your legs onto the sides of the tub. I want to suck your cock and fuck you with my finger at the same time. Would you like that?"

Angelo's chest heaved as he lifted his legs. "Do what you want," he said softly. "What gives you pleasure, gives me pleasure."

"God, you say the sexiest things," Marshall pressed his lips to his inner thigh. "Is there a sexier man anywhere than you?"

Angelo let his head go back as Marshall's finger moved up into his ass hole. At the same time, Marshall ran his tongue around the tip of his cock then licked his balls, suckling them while his finger moved deeper inside of him.

Angelo moaned, lifted his hips in invitation as Marshall's finger moved inside of him. He took Angelo's cock deep into his throat as one hand moved up over his chest. His lips and tongue worked up and down his shaft repeatedly, spurred on by the sounds coming from his lover. He tasted the pre-come and backed off just as Angelo was on the brink. "God, don't stop," Angelo gasped.

"I got something better, baby," Marshall leaned over him and kissed his mouth hungrily. He pinched his nipples a few times before straddling his lap with his knees resting on the seat. He gripped Angelo's shoulder with one hand and guided his cock up inside of him with the other. Angelo reached out to steady him, shouting out something incoherent as Marshall bore down, taking more of his shaft up inside of him.

Marshall looked down into his face. It was the face of need and desire. It was the face of love. Angelo grabbed Marshall's hips now, and lifted him up and down on his shaft, taking control, and together they fucked furiously. Marshall's body went back as Angelo supported his back.

"Ride me, ride me, baby," Angelo grunted, both of them panting and grunting as the fucking intensified.

As Marshall began to come, Angelo pulled him closer, his lips at his throat, rising up until Marshall was pressed against the tiles and Angelo had pulled them even closer together, his passion spending inside of him.

They stood there the longest time against the tile, Angelo's face buried in Marshall's hair, just holding each other. Marshall was utterly and completely satisfied. He didn't want to let him go,

didn't want to get out of the tub.

Eventually Angelo turned on the shower. Marshall soaped Angelo's body, washed his hair and they were both hard again as they towelled off.

"Fuck me in bed," Marshall whispered against his mouth.

Angelo yanked him closer. He ravished his mouth and then reached behind to squeeze his ass cheeks. "How do you want it?"

"On my knees," Marshall groaned. "I just want your cock so badly."

"Damn it, Marshall," Angelo moaned. He pulled him out of the bathroom to the bed. They fell together, the towels tossed aside and Angelo rolled Marshall onto his stomach.

"Fuck me," Marshall bit his bottom lip, scrambling to his knees as Angelo grabbed his waist and slammed into his ass. Angelo's hard body moulded into his as his cock filled him completely and his hands moved over his chest and his balls.

When Angelo's pace slowed to an easy, slow and oh so sexy beat, Marshall moaned out his pleasure and Angelo pulled him up against his chest. Marshall moved his head around so that he could kiss Angelo's hot mouth and the pleasure went on.

While wrapped in his arms, his cock spent, his heartbeat returning to normal, he fell asleep almost instantly, the sound of Angelo's deep, steady

breathing a lullaby. No one could touch them here, surrounded by love. No one.

* * * *

Hal glanced over at Duncan as he slept on the luxurious king-sized bed. They couldn't stay here long. That corpse would start to stink and he wasn't even sure if the bitch had lived alone.

Marshall and his coffee baron hadn't seen the flowers yet, but that was okay. They'd given him quite a show. Farelli had held up well over the years. He was in great shape, with a body to die for, muscular, sleek, bronze, with a good-sized cock designed for pleasure, and from the way Marshall was squirming and fawning all over the place, his ass was happy as hell. What a show. He wanted to applaud.

There was no sense in waiting too much longer. "Okay Marshall, next move is yours, and then..." He smiled. "Check mate."

* * * *

Marshall rolled over in bed and looked at the alarm clock that was ticking away the seconds on the nightstand. It was after seven. He had phoned Christine from the hospital and asked her to run the store yesterday, but he had to go in today to check

on things.

He turned around in bed and watched Angelo sleeping. He smiled, reached over and traced the line of his square jaw with his finger. God, he was so beautiful, inside and out. And it was nothing short of a miracle, them being here together like this. He'd be grateful every day of his life. He'd never take it for granted.

Reluctantly, he got out of bed. Angelo was checking out of here today, and Marshall's pleas for him to go home to Vermont for a while had fallen on deaf ears. Tonight, Angelo would come and stay with him. His teaching assistant was handling his courses at the University for now, and would continue to do so for as long as it took.

The arrival of little Jason Marshall had distracted them all from the threat of Hal. It had been good timing really, allowing him to calm down some, but as he headed for the shower, the panic started to creep back up his spine again.

He showered quickly and told himself to be rational. It would be all right. Angelo was by his side, and Hal would soon be in custody again. It was going to be fine, just fine. They'd get through this.

As he dressed quietly beside the bed, he couldn't resist glancing over at Angelo from time to time. The blankets had fallen away. He was lying on his back, an arm tucked under his head. His thighs lay open slightly and his cock was hard.

Marshall felt his own cock respond. He ran a tongue over his lips. He wanted to kiss his mouth, rub his cheek over his rough jaw, and hold his beautiful sex in his hand. But if he did that, he'd never get to the store today. Still, in spite of his own warning, his hand strayed over to one of Angelo's well-muscled thighs. When his fingers touched the top of his shaft, he was lost. He crawled over to him on the bed and lowered his mouth to his cock. He closed his eyes, breathing in the scent of him. "I love you," he murmured against his skin. "God, baby, I love you so much." His voice faltered and his eyes stung with unshed tears. His emotions were so close to breaking again. Christ. He reared back, told himself to get a grip.

He got off the bed and hunted for his keys. When he approached the table in the hallway, sure that he'd dropped his keys there, the first thing he noticed were the roses. He didn't remember seeing them before. They were beautiful.

He went over to smell them, then went back to looking for his keys. He was still scanning for his keys when he felt two strong arms fold around him. Soft lips touched his hair and his neck.

Marshall relaxed back into Angelo's arms, his eyes closing. "Good morning, baby," he said and reached back to place his hand on one of Angelo's cheeks, feeling his rough jaw.

Angelo kissed his palm. "Morning. Where you

going?”

“Work, unfortunately. I need to go to the store.”

“You kiss my cock, then leave me,” Angelo moaned, his face in Marshall’s hair.

Marshall laughed. “It wasn’t easy to do that, believe me.”

Angelo released him.

“I didn’t realise that the hotel provided fresh flowers in the rooms. That’s a nice touch,” Marshall said as he leaned forward again to smell the roses.

Angelo narrowed his eyes and moved up beside him. “They weren’t here when we left with Natalie.”

Marshall glanced at him.

Angelo reached out and picked up a small envelop which sat beside the flowers.

Marshall hadn’t noticed it before. “What’s that?” Marshall narrowed his eyes.

“I don’t know,” Angelo replied as he pulled out the note. He read it silently.

Marshall noticed the way his face changed. His mouth hardened and then he said something in Spanish under his breath. “What? What is it? Let me see.” He reached out for it.

Angelo crumbled it up in his hand. “It’s nothing.”

“Angelo! Let me see.” He held out his hand.

Angelo put the crumbled paper into it. “I don’t want you to get excited. We’ll call the police, that’s all.”

Angelo picked up the phone while Marshall was

reading the words on the card. With fond memories of arsenic and Rio. I can't wait to see you again. He dropped the paper on the floor, shaking all over. He could hear Angelo's voice in the background, speaking on the phone in French to someone at the front desk. His voice was tense as he interrogated the person on the phone about the flowers left in his room. The call ended with him slamming down the phone. "God damn it. We're going to the police."

"What did they say?" Marshall looked at him.

"The florist delivered it. They have no idea who the sender was. Where is that note? You go to the store, do what you have to do, and I'm going to have a little talk with the police."

"Angelo," Marshall clutched his arm. "It was Hal. He's knows where we are. He's just bidding his time. I'm not leaving you alone."

"Go to the store. I'll check out of here and go to the police station. I'll meet you at the store at lunch time."

"We need to call Natalie. I'm scared that he'll--"

"She's not his priority right now." Angelo put his hands on his shoulders. "I'll walk you to your car. You'll be safe at the store. He wouldn't dare come there."

"But, Angelo," Marshall began, "I don't--"

"I'll meet you at lunch time. Come on, you're going to be late. He's just mind gaming you right now. Don't let him do this to you."

Marshall nodded miserably.

Angelo took his arm and led him to the elevator. They were silent on the way down to the parking garage. The elevator door slid open and a car alarm went off. Marshall jumped.

Angelo squeezed his hand. "It's okay. Are you all right to drive? I can drive you to the store, if you like and then take a cab back to the hotel?"

Marshall shook his head. "No, just check out of here right away. Drive directly to the police. You promise me?"

Angelo nodded and gave him a quick kiss goodbye.

"I'll see you at lunch time. Find some place nice for us to go, okay?" Marshall unlocked his car door. "I should go to the police with you. To hell with the store."

"Go to work. If they want to talk to you, they'll contact you."

Marshall nodded hesitantly. "Okay." He kissed Angelo again, got into his car and started the engine. He opened his window and glanced up at him, his heart aching. "I love you, baby."

"Me, too," he said with a smile.

"Be careful."

"I will. Now go."

"I'm going to call Natalie from the store."

"Good idea. Just try not to scare her too much."

"I won't. Bye, beautiful," he rolled the car forward,

and left Angelo standing there in the parking lot. When Marshall turned out into the street, he cast one more look at him in his rearview mirror. He was heading toward the elevator. Marshall almost turned the car around and went back, then someone honked from behind and he pulled out onto the street.

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Eight

An hour later, Angelo packed up his belongs, and was ready to leave. He wouldn't bother with breakfast. His appetite was nil. He was worried about Marshall. He couldn't believe that bastard Hal had the balls to stick around here after having escaped from prison. The florist who had sent the flowers must have some recollection of who had paid for them. He'd talk to the police about that.

At the desk, he paid his bill, picked up his suitcase and took the elevator to the parking garage. He was feeling uneasy about all of this. He should have insisted that Marshall leave with him this morning. They should have just gotten into the car and driven to Vermont. Hal would have had more trouble crossing the border, especially with a warrant for his arrest.

When Angelo pulled out his automatic starter and pointed it toward his car, he heard someone cursing softly nearby. He turned to see a young man huddled over his steering wheel, struggling with something in a small Honda. "Having some trouble?"

The young man turned to look at him. "Yeah. My key is locked in the ignition. Happens all the time with this car."

Angelo put down his suitcase near his own car and walked over. "That make is known for that. There is a little hole with a cap on the steering column. If you take that off and then stick a small screwdriver up there, it will depress the lock and you can get your key out."

The young man got out of the vehicle. "You know a lot about cars."

"Some. I grew up around race cars."

"I have screwdrivers in the trunk, but I'm not sure what cap you're talking about. Can you take a look, show me?"

Angelo hesitated. He really didn't want to hang around here in the parking lot, but the guy was in trouble. "Sure," he shrugged. "It will only take a second. You should take care always to lubricate your ignition. It helps."

"I'll remember that," he said, and went around to the trunk.

* * * *

Marshall checked the time. It was past ten. It was time to call Natalie. He'd rehearsed in his mind what he would say. This was a happy time for her and Jason, and he knew she was tired, too. He didn't want to alarm her or bring her down, but he really thought he should warn her that Hal was still here somewhere in the city. As it turned out, he got the

answering machine. He told her to call him. You didn't announce something like that on a machine.

His employee, Christine seemed to sense his mood. She didn't talk to him too much, just went about her work. Barney was working in the back, unpacking some new stock, and there had only been the few odd customers this morning. He was tempted to call Angelo's cell phone, but he was probably at the police station already and he would have turned it off.

One of his regular's came in around eleven thirty and he followed her around, collecting the items she wanted. She was a prominent painter in the area and spent a lot of money in his store. He always went out of his way to give her personalized service.

It was after twelve by the time he rang up her purchases and said goodbye. Barney walked her to her car with her items, which included several new easels and two huge bags of supplies, then went to lunch.

Marshall walked to the window and looked out several times, certain that he'd see Angelo's car pull up out front any moment. When it past twelve thirty, he figured that he'd been held up at the police station.

Then the phone rang.

Marshall raced to the phone. "Angelo?" he said, without thinking. This was his business phone. It was Natalie. "Hey," he said, "sorry. I'm just waiting for

Angelo to show up for lunch. How are you? How is the baby?" He cast another glance toward the window. Where in fuck is he?

"I'm fine and so is the baby. How are you?"

"Nat," Marshall clutched the phone, "Hal is in the city. I don't want you to worry but—"

"How do you know?"

"He had some flowers delivered to the hotel."

"Oh no."

"Just be careful, that's all."

"Where is Angelo?"

"He went to the police this morning. He was supposed to meet me for lunch. He won't go back to Vermont so he's moving in with me."

"There was no way he was going to leave you, honey. Marshall, the police are searching for Hal. They'll find him. You should just close the store and go to Vermont with Angelo, like he wanted."

Marshall sighed. "You know, maybe you're right. I promise I'll think about it. I'll talk about it with Angelo over lunch. It might be the best solution."

They spoke for a few more minutes, then rang off. Marshall looked anxiously at the clock. It was ten to one.

* * * *

"Do you want me to drive?" Hal snapped.

Duncan shook his head. "I'm just not used to

driving a car like this, that's all. Do you think he's dead?"

"No, he's not dead, stupid. What good would he be to me dead? We can get rid of him later, but he might be kind of fun to have around for awhile, don't you think?"

"He's very handsome, Latin. I like the Latin types. He's smart, too, knew about cars and such."

"Yeah, yeah. Okay, head to Verdun, auto route 15 to the Clement Bridge."

"Why we going to Île des Sœurs?"

"Because," he responded, "that's where I want to go. We're going to find us a nice, soundproof condo among the rich. I'm not living in some flea bag hotel."

"I'm not killing anyone else, Hal. That woman died and I still got blood on my shoes."

"Slow down, will ya? We don't need to get arrested with him in the trunk. I knew I should have driven. And I fucking told you to get rid of those shoes."

"I don't have another pair."

Hal rolled his eyes.

"We could find an empty one, someone on vacation maybe?"

"And how we supposed to know who's on vacation, or not, genius?"

"I don't know, but--"

"Drive, leave the thinking to me. I'll find us what

we need.”

“Okay, Hal. Fine.”

Damn right, it was fine. This slut needed a beating. He was too much of a nervous Nellie, although he did have a sweet ass. Hal rubbed his jaw. The beard was coming nicely. He glanced at Duncan with disdain. Yeah, that beating was coming soon. Thanks to that chicken shit, Farelli had cut him a good one right in the jaw before he'd yanked the chloroform-soaked hanky out of Duncan's hand, pressed him back on the car with the gun and shoved the hanky over his face. If he hadn't had the gun, Farelli might have gotten away. If he had escaped, Hal would have killed the little bastard.

The island where they headed for was perfect. It was just a few miles from downtown Montreal, but it was very secluded from the city and free of the heavy traffic and noise. The island was primarily composed of residential apartments, condos and flats, with few very large businesses. He'd pick a condo, and they'd carry on there, undisturbed until Marshall came to him.

It was two in the afternoon now, too light to do anything, and if he was right, Farelli would be coming to by the time the sun went down. He'd still be groggy and would probably have a splitting headache, but he was one strong dude and he didn't relish wrestling with him. No, they had to find a place, tie him up so he wouldn't cause them any

torment, then sit back and enjoy the show.

He kept his eyes peeled now as Duncan drove past the condos and apartment buildings. These people had the bucks, and one day he'd live among them, live the good life. "Duncan, pull into that underground parking lot there. I want to take a nap and then I have to meet with someone who is going to pay me some good money for this little baby." He patted the dash.

"You're selling the car? It's a great car, Hal."

"Yeah, it's a great car which is registered to Angelo Farelli, you idiot. We need to lose it. We don't need a car. And we can use the cash."

"But you just picked up a lot of money."

"Shut up, jerk."

"But, Hal, how are we going to get, you-know-who to the condo without a car?"

"I have that covered. The buyer is bringing us another vehicle, and from what he said on the phone, he may even be able to help us with our condo situation."

"We won't have to kill anyone?"

"Maybe not."

"You're smart, Hal." Duncan laughed. "I feel safe with you."

"Don't forget it. Turn here, there's the parking lot."
"

The traffic was horrible and it took Marshall over an hour to get back to the hotel. When he finally roared into the underground parking lot, almost having a head on collision with an SUV, he noticed right away that the place where Angelo parked his car was empty. He was gone, but gone where? He'd tried his cell phone at least ten times. He kept getting the answering machine.

Marshall slammed his fist down on the steering wheel repeatedly, ignoring the vehicle behind him who was honking his horn for him to get out of the way. "Angelo! Where are you?"

His cell phone rang. Marshall scrambled to pick it up off the seat. He flipped it open as the driver of the vehicle behind him slowly drove around him, swearing at him. Marshall ignored him. "Angelo?"

Angelo?"

"No, it's Natalie. He's not with you?"

"No! Fuck, fuck, fuck," Marshall ran his hand through his hair. "Why didn't he listen to me?"

"You have to go to the police, report this. Wait! Maybe he could he still be with the police."

"No. He would have called me. Oh, God, Nat. Hal has him."

"You can't be sure."

"I am sure. I should have never left him. I should have done what he suggested, left here with him, headed to Vermont."

“Call the police, Marshall! Now!”

“No. Hal will contact me. I know him. He’ll kill Angelo if I go to the police. He wants me. He can have me, as long as he doesn’t hurt Angelo. If he so much as touches him, I swear, Nat, I swear, I’ll kill him. I’ll kill him so slowly and--”

“Marshall, calm down. Maybe we’re overreacting. Maybe Angelo is still with the police or—”

“No.” Tears rolled down his cheeks. “I told you, he would have called me by now. Hal has him, Nat. I just got to wait for him to tell me where.” He hung up. He let out a scream of torment, banged his fist against the wheel again. The tears dried on his face as he did a three-sixty in the parking lot and roared back out into the streets.

* * * *

Angelo tried to move his stiff limbs in the back of the trunk, but couldn’t. His wrists and ankles were tied and he was bent double, his knees touching his chest. It was suffocatingly hot in there, and he felt like he wanted to throw up, his head a fog of pain. He kept losing consciousness, fighting it as much as he could, then blackness, until again there were sounds of voices and traffic around him.

The car had stopped moving. In fact, there was no noise until he thought it sounded like someone

was snoring.

They had shoved something into his mouth and he couldn't call out. He tried to raise his body up some to hit the roof of the trunk, but there wasn't enough space to make much of an impact. He had the sinking feeling that they locked him in the trunk of his own car.

He could have kicked himself for playing right into Hal's hands, but he wasn't expecting Hal to act so soon, and he had no idea what his accomplice looked like. Marshall would be frantic, he knew. He wished he could tell him not to worry, but he couldn't. He saw Marshall's face. His mind drifted again and then he was out.

* * * *

Duncan held his breath as he attempted to lift the body out of the truck. Hal had exchanged this ratty old Ford for this guy's Mustang Giugiaro. He didn't see why they couldn't have just switched the license plate or something. Now, they had this old heap of junk, and Hal even wanted him to go and dump this one.

"Will you fucking help me?" Hal barked at him. "What are you just standing there for?"

Duncan grabbed the man's feet.

"Put him down—his feet down, stupid, on the ground. Now untie his ankles. I'll get his wrists."

“Why we untying him?”

“Because, doorknob, we need to get him to the condo. If someone sees us, we’ll say he’s drunk, okay? It would look a bit suspicious with him being tied up, don’t you think?”

“What if he comes to?”

“He’s too groggy to do anything, but if you keep standing there, asking stupid fucking questions, he might. Hurry up! Now place his arm around your shoulder like you’re helping him.”

“He’s dead weight.”

“Drag him then. Shit.”

They moved forward. “Is that it?” Duncan looked up. He’d dreamed of living in a place like this, overlooking the water.

“The one on top.”

“Are the people on vacation?” Duncan asked between grunts, as they got to the door. Hal used the key the man had given him.

Hal struggled with the key and then flung the door open. “Come on, we’ll take the stairs, less likely to encounter anyone. As soon as we secure him, you go down and get rid of that car.”

“How many flights are there?” Duncan heaved.

“Four. Suck it up, you wimpy assed slut. Hurry up.”

Duncan strained to get the man to the first landing. He wasn’t even sure why they had this guy or what Hal planned to do with him. All he knew was

that the guy was handsome, really good looking, and tall, and he'd had a sexy voice. He only saw men like that in the movies. "What are you planning on doing with him?" Duncan asked as they got to the second landing and took a break for a second, both breathing hard.

The man made some incoherent sounds.

"None of your business! You just do what I say. And I got a job for you. You start tonight. My contact put in a good word. You can get rid of the car on the way."

"Oh, Hal, not tonight," he whined.

Hal glared at him. "You want me to toss you out the fucking window, you no good whore? You'll wiggle your ass and do as you're told, and get it plugged by horny perverts. You're going to pull your weight around here, make some money. Now hurry up and let's get him to the top. Use some muscle, you fuck. Come on!"

* * * *

Marshall paced the floor, his head racing. He was thinking back to all the things he and Hal did in this city, all the places they went, the unsavoury characters Hal used to associate with. He couldn't sit here and do nothing. He grabbed his keys and headed back out the door.

In the car, he took the pistol out of his pocket and

made sure it was loaded. He'd bought this gun on the black market right after he got out of prison. He had never felt safe, even with Hal in the joint. Now he had a reason to use it. It didn't matter what happened to him, the first thing he planned on doing upon meeting Hal, was putting a bullet right through his head and then, if Angelo...no, he couldn't think of that, but he knew if the worse happened, there'd be one bullet left in that gun for himself. I won't live without you, honey, not now that I know what we can have. I couldn't bare it.

He drove without seeing. He drove with only the thought of murder in his mind. His stomach ached and his mind swam. Rio. He saw Rio, the warm sands, and his baby's face. That calmed him, but the fear was too much, the emotions too high. He drove to a part of Montreal he hadn't visited in years, a place where young men sold their souls and gave their bodies to dirty old men and prayed that drugs would alleviate their pain.

* * * *

Natalie sat in the downtown police station. Jason was beside her, the baby sleeping in his arms. Jean-Guy Desjardin had been on the phone for the last few minutes with the police in Vermont. When he hung up, he said, "They'll go by his house, Natalie, see if he's there."

Jean-Guy had been the detective on the case when the police arrested Marshall and Hal in Columbia. He was well familiar with the profile, but right now, he was trying her patience. "I told you, Jean-Guy, Angelo Farelli didn't go home. He wouldn't have gone without Marshall."

"So now all is forgiven. Christ, Marshall did try to poison the guy. What's wrong with his head?"

"They love each other," Natalie said stiffly. "Haven't you even heard of forgiveness?"

Jean-Guy sighed. "Yeah, well..." he rolled that around in this mouth. "We can't do anything right now anyway. Farelli hasn't been missing twenty-four hours and—"

"Come on," she leaned forward, "Makin is on the loose. This is not a normal situation."

"I can't do anything until tomorrow."

"Any progress on finding Makin?"

"Not so far."

"He's still in the city and none of us are safe until he's found. Marshall is a sitting duck. And Angelo, poor Angelo, he could be..." she paused, swallowing. "He could be dead already."

"I'll put the word out to look for Marshall if you think he might be a danger to himself. We'll put him under police protection."

Natalie stood up. "No, don't do that. I'll try and find Marshall myself first."

"I'm sorry, Natalie," he said. "We're doing all we

can. The minute we have him, I'll call you. In the meantime, I'll make sure a squad car patrols your area."

Natalie turned to Jason. "Let's go."

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Nine

The condo was perfect, three bedrooms, a well-stocked kitchen, huge flat screen television and soundproof. Terry had told him that a New York mobster used this place for his out-of-town business, and that he wasn't going to be back for awhile, something about him ending up at the bottom of the Hudson.

Duncan helped him secure their hostage to the bed. When they bound his hands and feet, Hal took the rag out of his mouth and stood back to admire his handy work. "You can yell all you want now, pretty baby, no one can hear you."

The place was completely soundproof.

It took him at least a half hour to convince Duncan to leave. He was really resisting the idea of working for a living. Hal finally gave him a good punch in the mouth, careful not to split his lip, although it would be puffy for a few days. "The old perverts will love your swollen lip. They'll think you have enormous experience sucking cock." The joke was brilliant, although the humour seemed lost on Duncan.

He left then, with complete instructions on how to dump the car, finally giving Hal some peace. Hal stripped off his clothes and got into the hot tub with

a bottle of champagne he'd found behind the bar. This was living. He closed his eyes and swallowed some of the liquid. He was thinking about the half-conscious man he had tied up in the next room, thinking about what a gorgeous body he had. Um. A man, a real man for a change, instead of these limp-dicked kids he usually picked up. His hand went to his cock. A little date rape drug and Mr. Farelli would be really cooperative. He laughed. Poor Marshall. Poor, poor Marshall.

* * * *

The headache was unbearable, but at least he could breathe. He blinked open his eyes and looked around in the semi-lit room. He pulled at the constraints, wondering where in the hell he was. He didn't have any doubt who had brought him here though. Marshall. Where was Marshall? He hoped to hell he was safe, and that he wouldn't fall for any ploy Hal might have conjured up in his sick little head to entice him here.

When the door opened, the light flooded in. It blinded him for a minute. Hal Makin stood there, in an oversized red, silk robe, the same skinny, homely man he always was, only older. He flicked on the overhead light. "Well hello there, Angelo." He grinned. "Long time, no see."

"Not long enough for me." He was surprised that

he could actually form words, but speaking only made the pain in his head worse.

"That's not very nice."

"Where's Marshall?"

He laughed. "Always the hero. You're the one who is all tied up and vulnerable, baby, not Marshall. And yet your only concern is for him." He walked over to the bed. "What a man," he mocked.

"You can kill me if you want, but leave Marshall alone."

"Um," he said, lifting Angelo's chin in his fingers.

Angelo tried to struggle away. It didn't help his head any.

Hal held onto his chin tighter, yanking his head back. "Damn, you're a handsome fellow, Angelo. Nice face, beautiful eyes, full, luscious lips. And I haven't even gotten to the rest of you yet."

"Fuck you."

He lifted an eyebrow. "Don't give me any ideas, stud." He let his chin go.

A chill ran down Angelo's spine. He couldn't bare the thought of that bastard's hands on him, but he could take anything Hal could dish out. "You'll have to kill me if you plan on doing that. I'd rather be dead than have your slimy hands on me."

"Tough words," Hal's mouth hardened. "But it doesn't need to come to that. A little date rape drug and you'd be all over me."

"It would take more than that."

“Tough bugger, aren’t you?” He perched on the edge of the bed and placed a hand on Angelo’s thigh. “You really don’t need all these clothes. It’s warm in here. I’d really like to have something ah ...stimulating to look at. So how big is your cock?”

“Fuck off, Makin,” Angelo warned, his chest heaving in anger.

Makin’s finger moved over the zipper on his jeans. He smiled at him. “Not hard. Too bad. No fun. Make it hard for me, Angel. Isn’t that what Marshall calls you—his angel?”

Angelo bucked his hips, trying to push Hal’s hand away. Hal ground his knuckles into his cock and pressed hard. Angelo winced. God that hurt.

“Stop fighting me,” Hal hissed. He moved his hand away.

Angelo bit his bottom lip to quell the pain in his groin.

“Tell me something, handsome. Why would a stud, a hunk like you, go back to the bed of a guy who tried to poison you? Are you stupid? I know you’re not desperate because you turn the heads of the multitudes, baby. You must have guys on their knees begging for your cock. So why? Satisfy Hal’s curiosity.”

Angelo winced as the pain shot through his head again. “I have nothing to say to you,” he grunted.

Hal shrugged. He reached into the pocket of his robe and brought out some little white pills. He

showed them to Angelo. "Rohypnol," he said with a grin. "Or date rape drugs as most people call them. They make it hard to resist."

"Very handy for you," Angelo muttered. "Considering that with those, at least you'd have a shot at getting laid."

"Nasty, nasty," Hal said, crunching up the pills and tossing them onto the bureau. "Sticks and stones. Not all of us can look like you, Farelli. And just for that, I'm going to find me a big kitchen knife. And those jeans and that shirt, they're coming off." He stood up and smiled. "I'm bored, honey, and you're just too much of a temptation. Besides, I'm dying to give Marshall the details of how I violated you. And I do intend to violate you," he announced and gave him another smile, only more wicked. Hal left the room.

Angelo realised suddenly, that he'd been holding his breath, finally letting it out. Christ. .

* * * *

The place had changed—the owner, the name, yet, the exact same hole it had been when he used to come in here with Hal. He'd suggested a few times that Marshall try his hand at dancing, but Marshall had balked, often getting a good beating as a reward for his defiance. If he hadn't been so good at lining up the men for blackmail, he was sure

Hal would have had him up there on that stage.

For a minute, he didn't know what he was doing here. A young, half-naked dancer approached him, trying to show him to a table. He smiled seductively, leaned close to his ear. God, the tables had turned. He was no longer the hunter. He was now the prey.

He reached out and touched the young man's cheek. It was almost like touching himself back in time, compassion, pity, desperation— all these feelings welled up inside of him. Where is my Angelo?

“What can I get you, sweetie?”

Up on the stage, a short, muscular guy moved his hips back and forth, bucking against a pole. The old men around the stage shouted obscenities at him and poked money into his G-string, trying to cop a feel. “I’m looking for someone,” he replied.

“Well, maybe you’ve found him,” he cooed. “I get off at two.”

“No.” Marshall shook his head. “A man in his forties, stringy blond hair, skinny, ugly. Did he come in here, with a…” he looked around, “a young guy?”

“Ah, I don’t know. What did the young guy look like?”

“I don’t know, like you, like him.” He pointed to the dancer on the stage. He knew he wasn’t making any sense. “I’m sorry.” He was on the verge of breaking down again. Hal. How could you take my Angelo? Please don’t hurt him. He is everything to

me. I'll kill you if you hurt him...

"You'd better sit down," the young man was saying. "You don't look so good."

Marshall clutched his arm. "No, I've got to go. I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He broke away and ran outside into the night air. "Hal," he cried out to no one in the street. "Come and get me. Come on. I don't want to live without him. Kill me, God damn it, kill me." He fell to his knees in front of the club. He didn't realise that a police car had pulled up beside him until two officers dragged him to his feet.

"Come on, Mr. Calletti," one officer said in a gentle voice. "It's time to go now."

* * * *

Angelo heard screaming. Hal was yelling at someone and the voice that responded, sounded terrified.

"Please, Hal, don't hit me anymore okay? It was slow. It was all I could make. I didn't get to the back room."

Angelo blinked open his eyes. The light was still on in the room and it was bright, stinging. His headache had subsided some, but he still felt sick to his stomach, his vision blurred. He swallowed the bile in his throat.

"...you worthless piece of shit..."

Angelo swallowed. His mouth was dry. He tried

the ropes, pulling against them, but he'd been tied tightly and the ropes were cutting into his circulation. He could see streaks of dried blood on his arm. He tried to relax. His stomach felt queasy. He looked around the room. It was rather bland, the curtains and matching bedspread, a dull shade of lavender, and the walls a faded plum. The bureau was expensive wood, along with the matching nightstands, the furniture covered with a thin layer of dust. Who ever this place belonged to, it didn't look like this room had been used much.

The door opened slowly and a head peeked in. The face was that of a young man, barely out of his teens. He looked shy, embarrassed even. "Don't listen to that," he whispered. "Haley isn't really mad at me."

Angelo lifted an eyebrow. This was bizarre. The guy didn't seem to understand what in hell was happening here. Maybe that was a good thing. "I'm sure he'll, ah...get over it," Angelo managed.

The door widened. The young man walked right over to the bed, his hand outstretched. "I'm Duncan. Oh," he said, "sorry, you can't, can you?"

"No," Angelo's mouth twisted, "not really."

"Sorry about earlier, you know." He lowered his voice. "I had no choice."

"One always has a choice."

That was the wrong answer. The guy's face crumbled. "I said I was sorry, okay?" He looked like

he was going to cry.

"Sure, sure, no problem." There was no point in getting on his bad side.

"Don't worry," Duncan said and reached out and touched Angelo's hair.

Angelo found this quite bizarre.

"Hal's bark is worse than his bite. He doesn't want to hurt you. He only wants the other one."

Angelo sucked in some breath. "Marshall."

"Yeah, that's him. You know him, right?"

"Yeah."

"He double crossed him or something. Hal doesn't like that. They'll talk it out and it will be all right. We'll all be friends."

"You think?"

Duncan studied him. "Sure. Hal says Marshall can teach me the ropes."

"Marshall isn't going to teach you anything."

"He will." He smiled, stroking his hair again. "You know, you're beautiful. You're just about the most beautiful man I've ever seen—like a movie star."

Angelo just stared at him. There was something amiss with this guy. He was almost child-like.

"I've dreamed of men who look like you. I dreamed once that a man like you fell in love with me. He was oh so nice and gentle. He took me away from everything, all the pain and shit in life."

"He might be out there."

"I doubt that. Men like you don't want guys like

me.”

Don't be surprised, Angelo thought. “Why would you say that?”

“Because it's true. I'm no good, come from nothing, going no where.”

“Maybe if you could get away from bad people, you'd--”

He leaned down, whispering, “And would you take me away, baby?”

For a moment, Angelo thought he was going to kiss him. “Would you go with me?”

He blushed and straightened up. “Yeah, maybe.” He smiled.

“Then help me get out of here and—”

“What in hell are you doing in here, you slut?” Hal marched into the room. He was holding a belt in his hand and the expression on his face looked lethal. He swung it and caught Duncan across the back. Duncan yelped and jumped out of reach.

“Hal, don't,” Angelo called out. “Leave him alone.”

Hal stared at Angelo and then he started to laugh. “Still playing hero, Farelli?”

Duncan looked at Angelo, too, his eyes wide.

“Get out of this room,” Hal told Duncan, threatening him with the belt again.

Duncan jumped and raced to the door. He paused a moment and looked back at the bed. “You are an angel, aren't you?” he murmured and

disappeared.

Hal walked closer to the bed. "An angel? Oh, I doubt that. Men who look like you are rarely angels, especially the way I've seen you punish Marshall's sweet little ass. You know, men like you can drive a grown man out of his mind and cause little boys to defy their masters and betray their friends."

Angelo met his gaze unflinchingly. "You were never Marshall's friend."

"What would you know about Marshall and me? I can tell you that he loved my cock, did you know that?"

"You're a liar."

"You just don't want to believe that." He smiled at him. "He was the best cock sucker in the business. He brought men to their knees. And if I recall correctly, Mr. Coffee Baron, he brought you to your knees as well. And even after he almost killed you, you've taken him back. I guess you're like your father, Angelo. You like to live dangerously. He did it on the racetrack and you do it in bed. Is it genetic?"

"You know nothing about my father. And say what you want. You can't manipulate me, not like you're doing to Duncan."

"You're a fool to forgive Marshall. No man in his right mind would do such a thing. You must really love his ass."

"It's because I know how to love, Hal. Something you'll never understand. You can't love, and no one

will ever love you. It makes me almost feel sorry for you."

Hal moved closer, his face a mask of hate. "I'm going to torture you, fuck you and then kill you. And I'm going to let Marshall watch. What do you think about that?"

Angelo raised his chin, looked him in the eye. "Go ahead. I'm not afraid of cowards."

Hal raised his hand in midair, then lowered it. "Fuck you, Farelli," he muttered, then got up and stalked out of the room.

* * * *

"You had me arrested?"

Natalie leaned into the bars. She pressed her forehead against the metal. "I didn't have you arrested. I told them not to do this. I just called in a favour, asked them to watch out for you. As soon as you calm down, you can go, Marshall. You're not in your right mind. I didn't want you to get hurt out there."
"

Marshall glared at her. "I spent enough time behind bars, Nat. How could you do this to me?"

"To protect you. Baby, you're not thinking straight."

"I need to find Angelo. That's all that matters. Please, Natalie, I beg you. Get me out of here so that--"

"Let me help you. Please."

"He could be hurt. Hal will hurt him. Natalie. Please. I beg you."

"Marshall. Listen to me. I know how much you love Angelo, and I—"

"You don't know how much I love him. You can't know." He shook his head. "I can find Hal. I can find some clue to—"

"Then let me help you, please."

"You've just had a baby, Nat. You—"

"Let me help you," she insisted. She reached through the bars and grabbed his hand. "I...I love him, too. I love you both. I have friends on the force. Together—"

"No police."

"Just us then. Jason and I. I can't let you go out there alone."

"If I tell you where I am at all times?" He clutched the bars.

"And you'll let us help you?"

He nodded.

She backed away from the cell. "We need a plan. You'll come back with us tonight. Sleep. We'll talk about it in the morning? You have to sleep, Marshall."

"I can't sleep, but I'll come back with you. Now, please Nat, get me out of here. I can't stand it."

She called for a guard.

The baby finally settled down around three in the morning, and when the house was completely quiet, Marshall left by the back door, carefully locking it behind him. If Hal had a duplicate of his past self with him, he was working him somehow. He had only to put the word out, let Hal find him. Why in the hell hadn't Hal contacted him? He wanted to make him suffer, that's why, and he knew that the waiting was killing him.

Marshall sat in an all-night coffee shop in the gay village. He studied the dancers as they came in after the bars closed, some with Johns, many alone. He spoke to each one of them, telling him he was looking for Hal Makin. No one knew him, or at least no one admitted knowing him.

When the sun rose in the sky, Marshall wrapped his coat around him and shivered in the early morning cold. There was frost on the grass. Winter would be here soon. He took out his cell phone and stared at it. "Ring."

He stopped by the store, made sure everything was all right, then drove around, combing the streets, not sure what he was looking for, what he would find. Natalie had left several desperate messages on his phone. He ignored them. He went home and tried to sleep for a few hours. He laid there, staring at the ceiling, then got back up, showered, changed his clothes and headed back out to the clubs.

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Ten

Angelo had lain there for the past three nights, listening to Duncan howl in pain as Hal abused him in every possible way. Duncan would come in around four in the morning, give Hal the money he'd earned doing God knows what, and take a beating because Hal didn't think it was enough. Then Hal would rape him repeatedly and make Duncan apologise.

"You made me do that!"

It was tough listening to that. It was like hearing a man brutalise a defenceless kitten. Angelo figured that maybe he was going to die here in this fucking bedroom, soaked in his own urine. He hadn't had anything to drink since he'd arrived and that was going on three days. He had tried to break the ropes several times, but they were too thick. He only ended up deepening the cuts that were already on his wrists and around his ankles. If he could have gotten loose, he would have beaten the living shit out of Hal. He wouldn't treat a dog the way Hal treated Duncan, but there was nothing he could do about Duncan or himself right now, and it was that feeling of helplessness that was killing him.

The abuse Hal gave Duncan was torture to listen to and he prayed for silence. All Angelo could think

of was how it must have been for Marshall. How he hated Hal. And Hal was making sure he heard everything. He even left the door open to the room, which lay right across the hall, ensuring that he didn't miss a thing. At one point, he almost wished that Hal would come into the room and start torturing him instead, just to give Duncan a break from his cruelty.

He was in desperate need of water now, and he knew that he was dehydrated. Lying in his own urine wasn't pleasant either. He wondered if Hal was just going to let him die this way. He knew one thing—he wouldn't see the week out without water.

The sun was setting through the window. Day three was officially over. At least Marshall wasn't here. At least Marshall was safe. Stay away, Marshall, stay away.

Hal and Duncan had been sleeping all day. He could hear Hal's obnoxious snoring from across the hall.

Angelo eventually faded in and out of sleep himself, his eyes opening when he suddenly felt a presence near by. It was Duncan. He was standing over him. His eye was black and blue, his mouth puffy. He looked a mess.

"Mi Dios," Angelo muttered in horror.

"I'm okay, honey," he said softly, stroking Angelo's hair again. "He doesn't mean it. I piss him off."

"This isn't your fault," Angelo told him. "You

should get away from him.”

“Forget it. Anyway, I’m not supposed to be in here with you so don’t talk too loud, okay, sweetie?”

“Duncan,” Angelo swallowed, “can you get me some water?”

“Sure, baby, sure,” he said. He walked across the floor and turned the light on in the adjoining bathroom. “It isn’t too cold, came out of the bathroom sink,” he said as he came back with the glass.

“It’s okay. I haven’t had any water since I got here.”

“Is that bad?”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “It’s bad. Lift my head a little.”

Duncan lifted his head and put the glass to his lips.

Angelo choked, but swallowed it down, his throat hurting.

“More?” Duncan asked.

“Please.”

Duncan came back with another glass. Angelo drank half of it. “That’s enough. Look, I need some help. I could use the toilet and--”

“I can’t,” he shook his head and took a step back. “Hal would kill me. I can’t untie you.”

“Please.”

“I’ll tell you what, I’ll clean you up a bit and bring a can or something so you can...I’ll be respectful, I promise.”

It was humiliating, but he didn't have much of a choice. "Okay."

"I can get you some sweat pants...oh but, there's no way to put them on you. Maybe if I just..."

"Just get the can," Angelo urged, "and a wet cloth, a towel."

He nodded. "I'll be right back."

A few minutes later, Duncan came back with a plastic container. "I'll have to open your pants, hold it. I'm sorry, but--"

"Go ahead, just do it," Angelo said. He closed his eyes as Duncan fumbled with his zip. He felt his hand slip around his cock and pull it out.

"Go," he said.

He'd been trying to hold it for hours, not wanting to wet himself again. He let out a little sound of pleasure as he relieved himself.

Duncan was very discrete. He cleaned him up quickly and then respectfully tucked him in and zipped his pants. "Better?"

"Thank you."

"You're bleeding," he gasped, looking at Angelo's wrist. "Does it hurt?"

"It burns."

"Maybe I could loosen the ropes a little, just a little."

Angelo met his eyes. "Please?"

"Are you hungry?" he asked, fiddling with the rope.

Angelo felt it fall away a little from his flesh. "Ah, damn," he muttered.

"I'll get the other one. I think there's leftover pizza in the fridge," he said, working the other rope.

"I don't think I could hold it down. It's all right, more water now, maybe."

Duncan loosened the ropes on both ankles. "There, don't tell Hal, okay? Let me get rid of all this and I'll come back with more water. We can talk for a bit. I don't have to go to work until nine."

"Where are you working?"

"This place called the Glory Hole. Neat name, eh?"

Angelo didn't comment on that one.

"I'll be back," he put a finger to his lips and snuck out the door.

A few minutes later, Duncan was back with more water and this time it is was cold. He tore off a few pieces of pizza and fed it to him, but it didn't set well on his stomach, and Angelo didn't take more than a few bites.

Duncan perched on the edge of the bed. "Don't worry, Angelo," he said, "Marshall will be here soon and everything will be okay."

Angelo felt the panic rise in him. "Did Hal...eh ...say that?"

"Hal is going to call Marshall when he wakes up. He wants to play a bit, but eventually he'll tell him where to come, and well, he'll let you go then."

"Duncan, Hal isn't going to let me go. He intends to kill me and Marshall."

"No," he shook his head. "That's not true."

"He's already killed people. You know that. He killed the prison guard and the driver of that truck."

Duncan sighed. "And others, too."

"You see. You got to get away from him."

"I can't! I need Hal. Now shut up about that, okay?" He rubbed his hands together.

Angelo sighed. He decided to change the subject. Duncan was the only hope he had right now of surviving this. He couldn't risk scaring him off. "You're probably right."

"I know it."

"Tell me about you, Duncan."

"Nothing to tell. I'm no good."

"Why do you say things like that?"

"I been in trouble a lot, that's all. My father was a lifer. My mother liked the bottle. I was in a shitload of foster homes. My foster dad, the last one, he liked me a little, too much, you dig?"

"I dig."

"I cut him up some at the end and landed myself in the joint. I met Hal there. He saved my life."

"Hal saved your life? How so?"

"He protected me. The first night, he said, hey kid, you either going to be gang raped by a lot of men, or fucked every night by me. He wouldn't let anyone touch me."

"I bet," Angelo sneered. "Duncan, he didn't do it just to be nice. He--"

"I know, but no one does anything for nothing. I owe him."

"So you helped him escape."

"Well, he did that himself. I just met him and provided the last part of the getaway. Just like Bonnie and Clyde, or Bobbie and Clyde." He laughed.

Angelo smiled faintly.

"It's Hal and me forever."

"I see. Forever is a long time, Duncan, to put up with that kind of abuse. You deserve better."

He didn't comment but just touched his hair again and then ran his finger over his jaw. "You need a shave."

"No doubt."

"You're not like most men I've known. You're, ah ...cultured, you know, fancy."

He raised an eyebrow. "Fancy?"

"It's the way you talk, and when I saw you, all well groomed, and stuff. You had a nice aftershave on when we met in the parking lot. What was it?"

"Joop."

"Very nice. You ever notice that aftershave smells different on different men."

"It reacts with the chemicals in the skin."

"So your cologne would smell differently on me?"

"Yeah."

"Angelo?"

"Yeah?"

"Did you really make coffee?"

"I grew coffee beans."

"Did you like that?"

"Not really. It was a family business on my mother's side."

"You don't talk like a Columbian."

"I'm not a Columbian. I'm an American. My mother was South American."

"Oh. Was your mother beautiful?"

"Yes."

"And your father, he was very handsome, I bet."

"I thought so."

"Who did you love best?"

"I grew up with my father. My mother's family didn't approve of her relationship with my father."

"Did they love each other?"

"I think they did."

"And you love Marshall?"

He hesitated. He wasn't sure if he should tell Duncan that. On instinct, he said, "No."

"Oh. I thought you two were a pair, that Marshall would come here because you're the love of his life or something, that's what Hal said."

"Marshall doesn't care about what happens to me, we're not together. You can tell Hal that."

That seemed to please him. "I won't let anything bad happen to you, Angelo."

He smiled at him. "Thank you. Maybe we could leave here together?"

Duncan's eyes widened. "You mean, without Hal?"

"If you wanted to. I mean, if you could untie me when Hal was sleeping..."

Duncan stood up. "You're trying to trick me."

He'd gone too far maybe. "I was just talking, Duncan. No worries."

"I got to get ready for work." He was nervous again.

"You'll come back and we'll talk again, right?"

He nodded. "I'll try. Got to go. Got to really try to make some money tonight so Hal will be happy with me, you know?"

"Yeah," he said, "but, Duncan, why do you need to make Hal happy? What about you? Are you happy?"

"But he saved me," he shook his head. "I told you."

Angelo nodded. "Thanks for your help, okay?"

Duncan smiled. "Sure. I should have asked for a kiss in return."

Angelo didn't say anything to that and Duncan left the room.

* * * *

Hal lit a cigarette and picked up the mobile that

was sitting on the nightstand beside the bed. It was nine thirty. Duncan had left for work a little while ago. It was time to speak to his long lost friend.

Marshall listed his cell phone number in his ad in the Yellow Pages. There was the number for the store, and right beside it, was the other. He knew he'd be waiting for his call. It rang only twice before Marshall picked up.

"Where is he, Hal?"

"What, no hello, how are you?" There was loud music playing in the background.

"If you've hurt one hair on his head, I swear--"

"You swear what?" He laughed. "I haven't touched him, but I'm going to. And just in case you're having this traced, fuck you." He hung up. "The best calls were short and sweet," he said, drawing on his cigarette and throwing the mobile onto the bed.

He walked into the other room, whistling. "Well, well, sweetheart, how are you? You certainly look a little...worse for wear. I'm going to give you some water because I don't want to kill you right away." He walked into the bedroom. "You must be due." He came back out and walked over to the bed. "Open your mouth, darling," he howled with laughter, then poured the water all over Angelo's face.

Angelo sputtered a little, licking some of the water from his lips.

"You're all wet," Hal said. "Poor baby." He left the

room and went in search of a knife. He found a big, long sharp mother in the kitchen. He walked back in, holding the knife in the air. "Here we go."

Angelo met his gaze defiantly.

Hal had to hand it to him. If things were in reverse, he would have been shitting his pants. "You should be scared," he said softly, grabbing his pant leg and edging the knife to the material. "I just talked to your lover." He looked up at him, the jeans now torn to the thigh. His jaw tightened. "Ah, that got a reaction."

The knife brushed over his groin and cut through the material clear to the other side and then down. Angelo's entire body stiffened. "It will be good to get these off. You reek."

"I wouldn't reek if you let me use the bathroom."

"Sorry. I'd have to untie you and I'm not going to do that."

"Scared?"

Hal laughed. "Of you—no."

"Well then if you're not scared, undo the ropes. Face me like a man."

"Why should I?" He sunk the knife under his belt and cut it in two. "There. Now. Should we do the underwear or the shirt?" He looked at him. "You're not so pretty anymore, Angelo. That shadow has turned into a rather unsightly beard. Should we shave you?"

"Don't bother."

"I might cut your throat."

Angelo tugged on the ropes.

"Keep doing that, naked, it will be a turn-on. Marshall told me not to touch you. He's one greedy little boy, isn't he? Wants you all to himself." Hal flicked the knife over the seam in his underwear. "I think we'll do the shirt, leave the underwear on. I'm getting hot flashes." He waved his hand in front of his face and laughed again.

He saw Angelo swallow as he moved the knife down his chest, picking off one button after another. With the tip of the knife, he laid it open, moving it lightly over his chest, around each nipple, down to his navel. "You're hot," he told him, moving his tongue over his lips.

Angelo lifted his head and spit at him. It landed right in his face.

Hal wiped his hand across his mouth, then crawled onto the bed. He levied the knife at Angelo's throat. "Do that again, Farelli, and you're a dead man." He reached between his legs and gripped his balls hard. "Do you understand me?"

Angelo gritted his teeth. "No entiendo," he said.

* * * *

Marshall just about fell through Natalie's front door. Jason picked him up and helped him to the sofa.

“What in hell? Where have you been?” he demanded. “Natalie has been frantic.”

“Is that Marshall?” Natalie called out, running down the steps. “Marshall, thank God.” She huddled beside him on the sofa. “Where have you been? I’ve been calling and calling. My God, you look horrible.”

“I haven’t eaten, I haven’t slept. Nat,” he looked up at her, “Hal called me. He contacted me. He has Angelo. He says he’s going to...”

Natalie drew him into her arms, trying to calm him down.

Marshall drew back, dried his tears. He stood, paced the floor. “Ring,” he said to his phone. “Why isn’t he calling me back?”

“Marshall, we have to tell the police. They could trace the call.”

“He wouldn’t stay on long enough. He’s trying to torment me, to make me suffer. He said he’s going to...Natalie, I can’t stand it. I can’t. I...”

Natalie got up and grabbed him to her again. “We need to work with the police now, Marshall. Please.”

He nodded. “Okay, but I need to go out there alone. They have to let me. I know that guy Hal is with is out there. If I could get to him, I could find Angelo.”

“They know Duncan Delmont was the one who went to the florist,” Natalie said, “and the hotel. They’re looking for him, too.”

“Hal will have made him change his appearance. He won’t be using that name either. And I’m sure the place he’s working won’t have bothered making him fill out an employment application. He’s either working the streets or the clubs. You need to get me a description of him, Natalie.”

“I’ll get my coat. We’ll go and see Jean-Guy.”

* * * *

Hal had slugged him a couple of time in the mouth. Angelo tasted his own blood as Hal went into a fit and ripped Angelo’s shirt to pieces in front of him. “Don’t fuck with me, Farelli!”

“I have no intention of fucking with you. You’d have to kill me first,” he muttered.

“I’ll fuck you so hard, you’ll bleed,” he growled.

“You have to untie my ankles for that, Makin, unless you have an extension for that scrawny cock of yours.”

“Prick. You’re a conceited, arrogant, son of a bitch.”

“It’s better than being a pathetic loser! Come on, baby, if you think you’re man enough, undo my legs and take me for a ride, you fucking ugly son of bitch.”

“Shut your mouth or I’ll tie your ankles to your arms and leave you like that. I’ll fuck that tight ass of yours anytime I please.”

“Go ahead, you poor excuse for a man. And when I’m free, I’ll shove my fist down your throat, Hal, and watch while you choke to death. So bring it on. Come on!” he cried out.

Hal actually fell silent for a second, but then he started to laugh. “Pretty tough for someone who has pissed all over himself.”

“Well I’d rather piss all over myself than be you any day. And like I said, untie me, give it a try, you fucking coward. It might be worth it to you, Hal, I’m a great lay,” he sneered. “Come on, Hal. Come on. Let’s go. Action— action not words.”

“Fuck you,” he said and threw what was left of Angelo’s shirt on the floor. He walked out and slammed the door behind him.

Angelo swallowed, his entire body shaking, in part with fear, the other part rage. Hal was a bully and all bullies were cowards. And the abuse they’d heaped on others was done because they felt worthless themselves. They had to grind others into the ground in order to justify their own existence. With Hal, you could never show fear. He’d eat you alive. Angelo managed to smile a little. He’d done it. He’d made Hal just a little bit afraid of him, and if he were to get out of this alive, he’d have to keep right on doing it.

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Eleven

They'd spent almost the entire night in the police station, but finally by morning, the police seemed willing to go along with Marshall's plan. They would use him as the bait and make sure to stay out of sight until Marshall could lead them to Hal.

Marshall now had the photograph of Duncan, and he felt sure that he'd seen him at one of those clubs, but he couldn't remember which one it was.

"Why don't we just pick him up?" Jean-Guy slugged down some cold coffee.

"No. Hal will know. It could prompt him to move, or to kill Angelo. I need to pump him for information, get him to talk."

"We've put a trace on your phone," one of the other detectives on the case told him. "We can identify where he is almost immediately now, but if he's using a cell, we might not be able to trace him at all."

Marshall sighed.

"He's only called once?" Jean-guy asked him again.

"Yes."

"Okay, comb those clubs. If you find Delmont, we'll give you one chance to get some info and then we move in and arrest his ass," Jean-guy said. "He'll

sell out Makin for a deal.”

“No, he won’t.” Marshall shook his head. “Delmont will be too scared and if he doesn’t show up on time, Hal will know the police caught him. He’ll panic. He could kill Angelo. The only reason Angelo is still alive is that he thinks it will bring me to him. Please, give me more time, a few nights to take this Duncan Delmont into my confidence, make him trust me. Please.”

“Okay, we’ll play it by ear,” Jean-Guy said, pointing at him. “But you keep us in the loop.”

“I will. Thanks,” Marshall said. “I owe you.”

“Be careful. And you’re wearing that wire, Caletti.”

“Okay, I’ll wear it. Put it on me. I promise that I won’t take it off.”

Natalie convinced Marshall to come back with her. He was exhausted and needed to sleep. At around ten o’clock, Marshall went up into Natalie’s spare bedroom and crawled onto the bed. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d slept. He curled into a ball and dragged a blanket over his shoulder, burying his head in the pillow. Tears flooded to his eyes. He closed his eyes tightly together and the tears flowed down his face. He was alone. Angelo wasn’t beside him. Angelo was with Hal. God knows what Hal had done to him. How could he sleep? How could he sleep knowing that

his baby, the love of his life, was in danger?

But he had to. He had to sleep if he was going to continue to function, was going to find Angelo. He told himself to relax, his mind raced, images, Angelo's face, his hard, smooth, naked torso, his cock, his smile. It's all right, Marshall. I love you.

Smooth white sand flowed through his fingers. I can't lose you again. There he was, walking toward him, smiling. The hotel stood in the background. There was moonlight shining down on him, music somewhere far away. Dance with me. He held out his hand. Marshall took it, gasping as Angelo pulled him close, into his arms. I would die here in your arms. And it would be all right, Angelo. Oh, Angelo, make love to me. I miss you so much. I ache at the thought of you.

They rolled in the sand. Angelo looked down at him, smiled. "Do you love me, Marshall?"

"Yes."

"Then believe. Believe in me."

"I do," Marshall croaked, trying to touch his face, but he couldn't. He couldn't feel his cheek. "You're not here."

"No, but I'm close."

Marshall sat up in bed, his eyes snapping open. The room was dark. The alarm on the nightstand said six thirty-five. He'd slept all that time. I'm close.

"It was him. It was so real," Marshall said to

Natalie a half hour later as she poured him a cup of coffee and tried to get him to eat something.

The baby lay in the bassinette on the sofa nearby, sleeping. He looked so peaceful.

"It was just a vivid dream," Natalie sat down beside him.

"He said that he was close. And I believe that. But where? Natalie, do you believe in telepathy?"

"I don't know."

"I really think I heard his voice."

"Oh, baby," she touched his hand. "Here, eat the sandwich, okay? If you're going to find Angelo, you have to keep up your strength."

"I know I saw that Delmont guy somewhere dancing, I just can't remember where. I've got to go to all of those places again."

"And if you see him? Honey, the cops haven't even found him."

"They didn't know where to look, that's all. I'm going to find him."

"You have to be careful, you could scare him off. What if he knows who you are?"

"He won't. Hal was never the sentimental type. It's not like he keeps pictures of me, and I've changed since then."

She smiled and touched his cheek. "In many ways."

"He told me he was all right. He told me to trust him."

“Who?”

“Angelo, Natalie.”

“Honey, it was a dream.”

He took one bite out of the sandwich and then stood. “I’m going home to shower and change and then heading to the clubs.”

“Do you want me to go with you? I can get a babysitter.”

“No. Too dangerous. And be careful. Keep your doors locked.” He stooped to kiss her head. “I’ll call you.”

“Make sure you wear that wire,” she said, walking him to the door.

He nodded, kissed her and walked out.

* * * *

“Marshall?” Angelo said, opening his eyes. He looked around the room. It was the same. He was still tied to the bed. He could have sworn that Marshall was there with him in the room. They were in Rio, rolling on the sand and then Marshall was saying something to him. He couldn’t remember what it was.

Then Duncan walked in. He seemed relaxed for a change. “Hey, Angelo,” he said, coming over to the bed. “Are you hungry? Thirsty?”

“Water would be nice,” he told him.

“I’ll get that right away. You know,” he reached

down and brushed back some of his hair, “you need a shower.”

“Yeah.” That was certainly an understatement. It had been almost five days now. “I doubt Hal is going to let me take one.”

“Maybe,” he glanced at the bathroom, “if you hurry. I mean, Hal’s is out for a bit.”

Angelo tried not to overreact. “You’d have to untie me, and...”

“Um, but it wouldn’t be free.” He smiled at him.

“What?”

“I want to watch. Can I watch?”

“Watch me take a shower?” He narrowed his eyes.

“Yeah. And don’t think I’m a pervert or something.” He laughed. “I just think you’re hot, that’s all.”

“Ah thanks, Duncan. And sure, you can watch—no problem.” This felt weird. “Just untie me and--”

“You can’t tell Hal.”

“I won’t.” He shook his head. What he intended to do was get to fuck out of there at the earliest opportunity.

“You’d have to be fast. I’d lock the door and ...well, I’d have to shoot you if you tried to escape.”

“Shoot me?” Angelo looked for a gun. “Are you sure Hal is gone?”

“Yeah.”

Suddenly, he didn’t believe him. This was a set

up, one of Hal's practical jokes.

"And there might be a few other things you'd have to do for me in the shower."

"Like what?"

"Let me suck your cock, fuck me, that kind of thing." He reached for the rope around Angelo's wrist.

"Forget it, I've changed my mind," Angelo said.

"Oh, don't fight it," Hal said suddenly, walking in, a twelve gauge shot gun in his hand. "Duncan is just being friendly."

Duncan had untied both his wrists. Angelo rubbed them, wincing, examining the big welts.

"You stink," Hal said with a smirk. "Time to wash, and time for a little fun in the shower."

Duncan was undoing the ropes around his ankles now.

"Be careful when you stand up," Duncan said. "I'll help you. You'll probably need to get your sea legs."

"Get him up," Hal barked. He lifted his other hand to show Angelo the movie camera. "We're going to make a movie and then we're going to send it to Marshall. You're going to be a star."

"I'm not making any movie," Angelo told him.

Hal came over to the bed and yanked Angelo to his feet. He stumbled a little, almost fell.

Hal pressed the shotgun to his chest. "You are not in control here. I am. And don't you ever challenge me again, or you'll lose. Duncan, take off

your clothes and then strip off the rest of his. Get him in the bathroom and start the shower. We're going to make a film that Marshall won't soon forget."

* * * *

Marshall had gone in and out of at least three male strip joints before midnight. He hadn't seen that dancer yet, but the night was still young. When his cell phone rang around twelve thirty, he was just about to go into another. The one was a real dive called the Glory Hole, and from the looks of the guys coming out of it, it wasn't what one would call an upscale place. Marshall snatched his cell phone out of his pocket and flipped it open, praying it was Hal. "Hello. Hal?"

"Check your mailbox," the voice said then the phone went dead.

"Fuck!" Marshall growled. He looked at the club again. The stress had reached an all time high. What in hell was in his mailbox, a piece of Angelo? That was his greatest fear. He pushed it away. He was going to go into this place first then he'd go home and check his mailbox, debating if he should call Jean-guy or not.

He walked into the club, remembering that he had come in here before. And when he saw the stage, he knew it was the right place. His stomach was in knots. He took a seat next to the stage and

ordered a beer.

The young guy dancing had beautiful ebony skin. He sauntered over and presented his ass to him. Marshall dug into his pocket for a five and put it in his G-string. He had to look like this was what he was here for. He looked around, trying to see if he could see Duncan Delmont.

The dance ended and the dancer left the stage.

Around him were a gang of lonely men, most of them past their prime. And there were a few of them going in and out of the back room.

Marshall stood up and walked across the room. A bouncer stopped him before he could pull back the curtain. "It's a private party. A hundred dollars entrance fee."

"That's steep. What goes on in there?"

"What ever you want," he answered, "and it's a no holds-barred room. One hot dancer doing whatever you want, however you want it."

"How do I know I'll like him?"

"You take your chances."

He nodded, took out two fifties and handed them to the guy. "I'm in."

"Condoms are appreciated, but not mandatory. Anything goes except that you can't get violent."

"I hear you," he said and moved back the curtain.

* * * *

"I didn't film your face. You think he'll recognise your cock?"

"Fuck you, Hal," Angelo glared at him.

Hal laughed. He sat in the chair in the corner, shotgun still on his lap.

Angelo was back on the bed, wrists and ankles tied, but Duncan hadn't tied him as tightly as Hal had, and he'd been working the ropes for awhile.

"You're clean now, Farelli, but you still stink. Your kind always do—good looking, rich, intellectual. It's not a surprise that Marshall would be attracted to a man like you. I despise men like you."

"What do you want me to say, Hal?" He sighed.

"Just that Duncan is also enamoured with you. Couldn't you feel it while he was sucking your cock in the shower?"

"I didn't feel anything. And I don't feel anything for Duncan except pity. He's pathetic for allowing you to manipulate him. And you're an evil fuck. What do you think sending Marshall a tape of Duncan sucking my cock in a shower is going to do? Do you think he's not smart enough to know I was coerced? I wasn't even hard for Christ's sakes." He'd done nothing more than press his cock against Duncan's buttocks. There had been no penetration.

He laughed. "Doesn't much matter that you weren't being co-operative. It looked really good on film, realistic. Anyway, you should be grateful."

"Grateful?" Angelo's eyes widened. "And why's

that?"

"I gave you the opportunity to have some hot sex before you die."

Angelo shook his head. "Give me a break."

He stood, came over to the bed.

Angelo cringed as Hal reached out and touched his chest. "You are a beautiful man. Too bad you're going to come to such a tragic end." He raked his gaze over him. "I'd really like to taste you before you die."

"Don't touch me. Get your filthy hands off of me." Angelo met his gaze.

Hal laughed, picked up the blanket at the end of the bed and tossed it over him. "Sleep tight, Marshall's Angel. It won't be long now until I bring Marshall to me, and you can watch him die. Or maybe, he can watch you. Which do you think would create the greatest impact?"

"Watching you die would suit me just fine."

"That's not going to happen."

"Don't be so sure."

"Fuck you," he said, and left the room.

* * * *

Three men hovered around a table in the back. It looked like an old pool table. One man was on top of the other, viciously fucking the guy underneath him, his hand yanking on his hair. Another man

stood at the end of the table, getting his cock sucked by the same guy, who was moaning in obvious pain.

The third watched, stroking his cock and shouting, "Fuck that ass, fuck that ass."

It wasn't easy to watch. Marshall could see the pain on the young guy's face. He wasn't enjoying himself.

Marshall came closer. No one paid any attention to him, which was good because he was trying to get a look at the face of the guy on the table. The hair was different, but it was definitely Duncan Delmont.

Marshall faded into the corner and when the three men were done with him, they just did up their paints and left him there on the table.

Duncan Delmont sat up with a groan. The bouncer came in and threw a hundred dollar bill at him. "Here's your cut."

Delmont picked the money off the table, then he noticed Marshall. "We're closed," he grunted.

"It's okay. I don't want that."

"They all want that."

"What's your name?"

"Donald," he said.

Liar. "Donald," Marshall came closer, "you want to make some real money?"

"Sure. How much we talking? And, ah...not tonight, okay?"

"It has to be tonight. Let's go to my house."

"I've got to dance."

"Play sick. I'll give you one thousand dollars if you come with me."

"To do what?"

"Just to talk."

"Talk?" Duncan slid off the table and picked up his robe. "You're bullshitting me. No one pays that kind of dough for talking."

"One hour and you'll be home at your usual time if you got a boyfriend waiting."

"No boyfriend, well, not really." He smiled. "Although there's this guy I really like. No chance for us though."

"Oh yeah?" Marshall clenched his hands at his side. I have to go slowly. Patience. I can't blow this. "Why is that?"

"Beautiful, dark-haired, his skin like honey. He's a good man, too. I know that. But he's way out of my league."

"Does he like you?"

"I doubt that."

"So why don't you tell your manager, we'll get out of here. And then we can talk some more about this guy."

"I need to see the money up front and I don't do funny stuff."

"No funny stuff, just talk as I told you." Marshall opened his wallet, showed him some bills.

Duncan checked the clock. "Okay," he nodded.

"What's your name?" Duncan asked as he slipped into the front seat of Marshall's car. "You never did say."

"Toby," he lied.

"What do you do, Toby?"

"I'm an artist."

"Oh."

"Let's stop here at this hotel, okay?"

Duncan shrugged.

"I can drive you back after."

"No," he muttered. "I have to go by myself."

Marshall got out of the car. He went to the office and rented a cabin, then steadily walked down to the right one and opened the door.

Duncan walked in after him and Marshall shut the door.

"Sit down there on the bed," Marshall said.

Duncan perched on the bed.

When Marshall turned around, he had the pistol in his hand.

"Fuck!" Duncan scrambled back on the bed. "I knew this was bogus. What 'cha got that for? I'll do what you want. Don't kill me."

"Now, listen carefully. I'm going to ask you some questions and you're going to tell me all the right answers, or I'm going to kill you."

After Arsenic and Rio

Chapter Twelve

Marshall must have turned off his cell phone because Natalie couldn't get any answer. She had tried him at around eleven thirty to see if Marshall had had any luck. Eventually, she'd given up. At one in the morning, Jean-guy called her and told her that Marshall had taken off his wire.

"What's he up to?" Jean-Guy bellowed in the receiver. "I knew we shouldn't have trusted him. He could get himself and Farelli killed. The agreement is off. I'm putting an APB on the whole damn bunch of them." He hung up.

Jason came over to Natalie, the baby in his arms. "Who was that?"

Natalie was worried. "That was Desjardin," she told her husband. "Marshall is AWOL."

* * * *

Marshall grabbed Duncan by the shirt collar and dragged him to the edge of the bed. He held the pistol to his temple. "Now, where is Angelo? I know that you know where he is because he's the one you were talking about—honey skin and dark hair. And I don't care what you fucking feel about him, he's mine. You can't have him. So you might as well tell

me where he is. Now!"

"I don't know," Duncan yelled, close to hysterics. "Please, don't shoot."

"Listen to me, you fucking little prick, I love Angelo. I will kill for him without a thought, so don't push me. Where in fuck is he?"

"Hal...Hal has him, but he'll kill me if--"

"I'll kill you now so make your choice. First, you're going to tell me what Hal sent me in the mail. And then, you're going to take me to Angelo."

"He'll kill me. Please don't."

"I'm going to call the police and have them pick you up. Hal won't get to you."

"I don't want to go to prison," he sobbed.

"Well, you're going to go to prison. Tell me! Is he okay? Is Angelo all right?"

"Yes," he nodded. "He's fine. Hal won't hurt him, and I wouldn't let him even if he tried."

"If Hal wanted Angelo dead, he'd be dead. There would be nothing you could do about it."

"No, I would never let him kill Angelo. I love him."

"Love him?" Marshall pulled him to his feet. "Kid, you don't know what love is. If you loved him, you'd have gotten him out of there already."

"No, 'cause then I'd lose him. He'd never want me."

Marshall dragged him to the door. "You got that right. Now, tell me what Hal sent me in the mail."

"A tape...a film."

"Of what?"

"Me and Angelo in the shower."

"You and Angelo in the...that bastard! Doing what?" He shook him.

"I sucked him off, but...he never got hard. Hal kept pushing him, but Angelo fought him off. He refused to get a hard-on...so he had to fake the fucking part."

"Fucking?"

"He didn't, okay? Happy? I would have loved it, but...he didn't have a hard-on."

"You miserable little bastard," he pushed him through the door. "Let's go. Take me there now! Take me to Angelo."

* * * *

Angelo had worked his hand through one of the ropes and was carefully untying the other. Hal had been watching television in the living room and thankfully hadn't come in to harass him.

Quickly he reached down and began to undo the ropes around his ankles. He was wobbly when he stepped out onto the floor, but after a few seconds, he felt quite steady. He reached over and picked up what was left of his pants and pulled them on. The television was on full blast, which was a good thing. Hal would never hear him sneak up on him. Now where in the hell had Hal put that shotgun?

* * * *

"I want to go now," Duncan whimpered as Marshall got out of the car and pulled Duncan with him. "You're going up there and you're going to act like nothing is wrong, you got me? Give him this money. It will distract him."

"I want the police," he sobbed.

Marshall whacked him hard against the face. "Do you really care about Angelo? Do you really love him as you said?"

He nodded.

"Then help me, God damn it. Pull yourself together and get me in there so that we can save him. The courts will go easier on you if you help me, Duncan. Hal is evil. He hurts you, doesn't he?"

Duncan nodded. "Sometimes."

"Love shouldn't hurt. One day maybe you'll meet a good man like Angelo, but you got to help me put Hal down for good."

Duncan swallowed. He nodded. "Okay."

* * * *

Angelo looked slowly around the corner. He could see Hal sitting on the sofa. The shotgun was propped up against the coffee table. He could do this. He could jump him before Hal could get to the

gun. He took a deep breath, about to move when he heard someone knocking at the front door. Shit. He moved back into the shadows against the wall, breathing hard, waiting.

"Hal, it's me. Duncan."

Angelo looked around the corner. Hal stood, shotgun in his hand. He walked to the door, opened it. And then Angelo heard Marshall.

"Hello, Hal. Nice to see you again."

Angelo closed his eyes. No. This was exactly what Hal wanted. He'd kill Marshall.

"He made me, Hal," Duncan cried out. "I didn't have a choice," Duncan blathered.

Marshall had a gun pointed at Hal, but Hal had his shotgun aimed directly at Marshall's head.

Angelo saw Hal cock the gun, "No," he yelled and came running out of the room.

Hal moved the shotgun in Angelo's direction and Duncan shouted out something and jumped in the way. He went down with a bullet to the head.

Angelo stood there, stunned, looking down at a very dead Duncan, his eyes still open. Almost simultaneously, Marshall fired at Hal and hit him in the chest.

Hal attempted to fire back, but Angelo lunged for him and knocked the shotgun out of his hand.

Hal didn't struggle. He was already dead. Angelo got on top of Hal and began to hit him with his fists. He hit him in the face until his knuckles

were bloody, not even hearing Marshall shouting at him to stop.

Finally, Marshall succeeded in pulling Angelo off him and on his knees. Marshall pulled him into his arms and held him, rocking him, sobbing with relief. "He's dead, baby. It's all right. He's dead." He stroked Angelo's hair. There were no words, only tears of gratitude that Angelo was alive.

When the door burst open and the police rushed in, it was already all over.

The police checked the two bodies and Jean-Guy Desjardin shook his head. "You're in a heap of trouble, Caletti," he pointed at him. "You could have gotten yourself killed."

"I don't care." He sighed, hugging Angelo tighter. "I really don't care."

* * * *

Angelo didn't want to go to the hospital, but he gave in after Marshall insisted on it. He was suffering from dehydration and the doctor wanted to keep him for a few days.

The police were all over the place, asking questions of course, and Natalie arrived at the hospital about a half hour after Angelo and Marshall did.

"Are you hurt?" she asked Marshall.

"No, thanks to Angelo. He saved my life."

"And it looks as if you saved his."

"We're even," he said and then smiled.

"You took a big risk." She hugged him.

"He's worth it," Marshall told her.

She nodded. "Is he all right?"

"Grumpy. He doesn't like hospitals."

"Um, I can understand that."

"It's over, Nat. Hal is dead."

"Jean-Guy told me. I'm glad. They'll be some questions and such, but it will all work out."

"I know."

"I'll be with you through it all."

"Aren't you always?"

"And you and Angelo?"

"I'm not letting him out of my sight."

She laughed. "That should thrill him. Can we see him?"

"Yeah. Come on."

* * * *

Angelo smiled when he saw Natalie. "Hey."

She kissed his cheek.

"Don't you ever sleep? It's four in the morning."

"Not lately I don't. How are you?"

"I've been better, but I'm okay." He smiled at Marshall and reached out for his hand. He squeezed it in his. "I'm okay now." He met his gaze. "You came to save me," he said softly.

"Of course I did. I'd go to the ends of the earth for you."

Angelo swallowed. "I believe you."

"Ahem, guys," Natalie said, "get a room."

Angelo and Marshall laughed.

"So you're moving here to Montreal?" she asked Angelo.

"If Marshall will have me."

"I don't think that will be a problem," she laughed, as Marshall leaned over and kissed him several times on the lips.

"Am I planning a wedding?"

"Wedding?" Marshall and Angelo both said at the same time.

"Yeah, wedding," she laughed.

"You don't want to marry me, do you, Marshall?" Angelo teased.

Marshall shook his head and met his gaze. "No way." They kept looking at each other.

Angelo grinned.

"Boys?" Natalie laughed. "I'm here."

"We know that," Marshall said, looking at her. "And we're happy about that."

Angelo nodded. "We love you, Natalie. Will you stand up with us?"

Tears came to her eyes. "Of course I will."

The nurse came in. "Mr. Farelli needs some rest now."

Marshall kissed Angelo goodbye. Natalie did

likewise, and the two of them walked out together.

The sun was coming up. "So we go to breakfast?" Natalie asked.

"Yeah," Marshall linked his arm in hers. "You buying?"

"Sure."

"You're on. Nat, Hal sent me a film. It's in my mailbox at home."

"A film of what?"

"Hal made Duncan do some things and--"

"Give it to the police. It's evidence. Marshall, don't look at it. You know it's not real. It has nothing to do with you and Angelo. After breakfast, we'll stop by the house and you give it to me. I'll take it to the police."

Marshall nodded. "Okay." And that's exactly what he did.

* * * *

"Rio?" Natalie gasped. "You're not getting married in Rio. I don't even know if it's legal to get married in Rio."

Angelo laughed, holding the baby on his lap. "Relax, Nat. We're going to do the ceremony thing here. We're going to Rio on our honeymoon."

"Oh, whew," she said and sat down again. "Don't give me a heart attack. Where is Marshall by the way?"

"At the store," Angelo replied, cooing at the baby.

"Don't forget your suit fittings tomorrow. And also the cake has to be--"

"Nat," Angelo said, "you'd think it was you and Jason getting married. Hey, why don't you guys come to Rio with us?"

"On your honeymoon?"

"Well, we don't have to share a room."

Natalie picked up a cushion and threw it at him.

"Hey, watch your son."

She laughed. "He's giggling. He loves you. Too bad you couldn't have one."

"We could adopt."

"Are you going to?"

"Maybe. We've talked about it."

"There is the surrogate thing. I could help you with that, handle all the legalities. Marshall would love to have a baby that looks like you."

"Marshall can't have babies, Nat." He grinned.

"Funny!"

"How's immigration coming?"

"Um, coming. They're slow. Don't worry."

"I saw an opening at Concordia U next year in your area."

"I don't want to teach right now. I want to write."

"Oh, okay. Are you going to stay in the house?"

"Marshall paid off the ex, but I'd like to choose one of our own. Marshall is dragging his heels."

She laughed. "He likes the location."

"Um, I know."

A car drove up outside.

Natalie stood. "There's your beloved now."

"Probably wants to know what we're having for dinner."

"You've been spoiling him with your cooking."

"I know."

"Hey," Marshall said, walking in. "Where's my baby?" he held out his arms.

"Here," Angelo said.

"Not you," he muttered, "the little guy. Ah, you're my baby, too," he said, leaning down and kissing Angelo on the lips.

Angelo handed him the baby. "I better be."

Marshall leaned over to kiss Natalie, as he held the baby in his arms. "You and Jason want to join us for supper?"

"Yeah," she said, looking at Angelo, "if he's cooking."

Angelo stood. "I better get home." He grinned. "Pick up some wine," he told Marshall.

"I'd rather pick you up. And, ah...no wine."

"Come on, Marshall," he muttered. "It's only for you guys. I'll drink water, okay?"

Marshall went over and kissed him lightly on the mouth. "Okay."

"Don't worry. You're the only stimulus I need."

Marshall laughed.

“Later,” he winked, lifting a hand. He grabbed his coat and left.

* * * *

Natalie was looking at Marshall. “What?” Marshall smiled at her.

“You’re so happy. I’ve never seen you like this before. I could cry.”

“Save it for the wedding, lady.”

“Angelo invited me and Jason to go to Rio with you.”

“Hey, that’s a good idea.”

“Really? You think so?”

“Sure. Leave the little guy with Jason’s mom and come with us. It will be a blast.”

“But don’t you want to be alone with Angelo?”

“In our bed, yeah, but I’ll try to keep from sexually molesting him in public. It’s not easy, believe me.”

Natalie laughed.

A week later, on a Saturday afternoon in front of a judge, Angelo and Marshall said their vows. Marshall would have never believed that one day he’d be standing here, holding Angelo’s hand in his, and they’d be committing their lives together. It was a dream come true. When the judge asked him for his vows, he looked at Angelo and said simply, “I love you with my entire heart, my body, my life, and I

will love you forever, even in death.”

Angelo smiled at him. And very softly, he said, “You are my life, my breath, you’re every dream I’ve ever had, and I have loved you in all the good times and the bad times, and I will go on loving you until the end of my life.”

Tears ran down Marshall’s face, and when the judge told them to kiss, Marshall was trembling so badly, he could barely complete the kiss.

Angelo laughed softly, hugging him tightly. “It’s all right, baby,” he whispered in his ear. “Everything is all right now.”

Epilogue

Natalie and Jason were having a great time, frolicking in the sand. It had been a long day under the hot sun and Angelo looked delicious in a pair of clinging white trunks, and sleeveless red shirt. Marshall had had a hell of a time keeping his erection hidden, just thinking about what he’d like to do to that beautiful cock of his.

When the sun went down and Natalie and Jason said they wanted to go to dinner, Marshall placed a hand on Angelo's forearm. He could wait for food. "We're, ah...we'll catch you later," Marshall said with a smile. "We're going to take a walk further down the beach."

Natalie smiled. "Okay, have fun."

Jason waved at them and Marshall watched as the two of them headed back to the hotel, arms around each other.

"It was good for them to come with us, I think," Angelo commented, looking at Marshall.

"Yeah, they needed the time away together."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Yeah," Marshall said, "but not for food." He took his hand. "Come with me. Can't you hear it?"

"Hear what?" he laughed huskily, traipsing down the beach as Marshall pulled him along.

"The music."

"Mi amor, I don't hear any music. How much wine did you drink today?"

"No wine," Marshall laughed, pulling him closer and wrapping his arms around him. "I swore off it, remember. I'm on the wagon with you, baby."

Angelo smiled. "I'm okay. Don't worry about me."

"I'm not worried. I love you."

"I know that," he whispered, feathering his lips along his cheek. "Tell me something I didn't know."

"I want to fuck you."

"Ah," he smiled, "but I know that, too."

"Is there anything you don't know, smarty pants?" he cajoled.

"Ah, let me see, if I don't know it, how can I know that I don't know it?"

Marshall laughed softly. "Touché. Listen, do you hear it now?"

He shook his head, hands moving over Marshall's back to his buttocks. "No. Marshall, there is no music, just the sound of the water and the wind in the trees."

Marshall pulled Angelo's head down and kissed him passionately. "What about now?"

"Do it again. I think I might hear something."

Marshall kissed him again and Angelo took him down in the sand. He pulled off Marshall's swimming trunks and then got up on his knees and pulled off his own.

"Um," Marshall made a sound of appreciation in his throat. "Now, that's a beautiful sight. You in the moonlight, the white sand. I've been wanting to get you out of those trunks all day."

He grinned. "Have you now? You're a naughty boy, Marshall."

Marshall pulled him down on top of him and then rolled over with him on the sand. He began to kiss his chest, his stomach and then move his tongue and lips over his scrotum. "Um, that's nice," Angelo murmured, "but we have no lube."

Marshall raised his head. He laughed. "I know that. You'll have to wait until we get back to the hotel. Can you wait?"

"No."

Marshall chuckled. "Want me to race you back?" He scrambled into his shorts and then began to run. Angelo was way behind, having a little difficulty in the beginning pulling on his trunks.

Marshall was already in the room when Angelo got onto the elevator. The door was ajar when he got there. He walked in, only to be accosted by Marshall, who shut the door and pushed Angelo against the wall. He assaulted him with his kisses and pulled off the trunks, throwing them in the air.

He released him and held up the lube. "If you can get the lube, you can have me," he invited, yelping as Angelo charged him and pushed him onto the bed. They laughed as Angelo frantically tried to get the lube out of Marshall's hand and Marshall tried to stop him.

Eventually Marshall stopped laughing. He handed him the lube as Angelo leaned down over him and gazed into his eyes. Angelo bent his head to kiss him and Marshall moaned softly as their lips met. He moved his hands up Angelo's strong muscular forearms, framed his face with his hands and deepened the kiss.

Angelo's fingers played along Marshall's erection as the other hand slipped under him and a

slippery finger located the spot it wanted to be. He arched his back and moaned again as Angelo's finger touched his prostrate. "Um, baby," he sighed, touching his thick black hair. "You make me so happy, um, and God, so horny."

Angelo lowered his face to his neck. He kept on moving his finger inside him.

Marshall wrapped his legs around Angelo's hips. "Take me. Oh God, baby, fuck me. I'll always belong to you, my Angel. God, Angelo, say you're mine."

Angelo raised himself up. "Of course I'm yours. I've always been yours."

Marshall kissed his chest, his stomach, stroked the hard length of his cock. Angelo licked his lips and Marshall laughed. "I love when you do that."

"I love you," Angelo told him, raising Marshall's feet and joining their bodies together with his cock.

Marshall gasped, reached for Angelo's hand and entwined their fingers. "Ah yes, do it, Angel, take me. I love you so much."

As Angelo thrust inside of him, Marshall trembled on the verge of orgasm. He watched Angelo's face contort as he came, saw the need in his eyes and then the relief. "Oh, God, Marshall," he grunted, lowering himself on top of him, his hand stroking Marshall's shrinking cock. "You're beautiful, baby, so beautiful."

Marshall held him close and wrapped him in his arms, his eyes bright with unshed tears. Angelo was

his life. He was the only man he had ever loved, or would ever love. And what they had to go through to get here, only love could have brought them to this place, only love had the power to forgive. He knew that for sure.

Marshall kissed Angelo's cheek, sighed with contentment as Angelo laid his head on his chest and closed his eyes. Marshall stroked his hair, and just before his baby fell asleep, Marshall asked him, "Can you hear the music now?"

But his loving husband was fast asleep and it didn't matter if Angelo heard the music or not because Marshall did. Angelo was the music.

About the Author

I write not only for my own pleasure, but for the pleasure of my readers. I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't written and told stories. When I'm not writing, I'm dreaming about writing, doing something wild and adventurous, or trying to make the world a better and more open minded place to live in. I adore beautiful men, and I know I'm not alone in this! Eroticism between consenting adults, in all its many forms is the icing on the cake of life!

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