



# RYAN FIELD

## THE VIRGIN BILLIONAIRE: **REVENGE**

ra<sup>v</sup>enous  
*romance*

***The Virgin Billionaire: Revenge***

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A Ravenous Romance® Original Publication

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This book is a work of fiction, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

## Chapter One

Jase Nicholas was not an angry man. If something bothered him, he'd either retreat to his office and pace the floor, or he'd go outside for a long walk with his head bowed and his fists clenched in his pockets. And he wasn't big on revenge: he cared more about amicable, intelligent solutions than he did about getting even.

Whenever someone wronged him, he'd usually focus on the positive side, turn the situation around, and move forward without harboring resentment. Though this was one of his best attributes, it was also one of his biggest vulnerabilities.

Forgiveness was the way Jase handled Angus Bernie, the vicious old guy who lived at the end of his property in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, when Angus tried to take control of the easement road that led to Jase's home, Cider Mill Farm. After they found an old map with an original survey of the property, Jase hired Philadelphia attorneys to validate the easement was legally his to use to gain access to his property. Then, instead of fighting Angus in court and draining Angus's bank account, which would have been simple for Jase to do, he offered Angus Bernie a large sum of money. He bought Angus's small stone home for far more than it was worth to get rid of the negative energy. And he even walked to the end of the easement road on the day Angus moved out to personally shake his hand and wish him well.

Whenever Jase and his husband, Luis, had an argument, Luis knew Jase wouldn't remain angry for long. Jase never tried to get even and he never shut Luis out with silent treatment. Either Jase would apologize to Luis first, or Luis would apologize to Jase first, and they'd make love. And since Jase's child, Hunter, had come into their lives, they'd been forced to deal with certain situations all new parents have to face. They were learning there wasn't always a simple

solution with regard to raising a child, especially after Jase's grandmother, Isabelle, went back to Alaska the previous September. When they found themselves alone and dealing with Hunter's needs, conflicts seemed to arise that neither one of them could have predicted.

About a month after Angus Bernie moved out of the little stone house at the end of the driveway, Luis decided to discuss two important things with Jase and he wasn't sure how Jase was going to react. They'd recently returned from spending Easter with Jase's family in Alaska and they were upstairs in their bedroom at Cider Mill Farm watching TV. It was late at night and their eyelids were already drooping. Hunter was in his room, sound asleep, with their little dog, a Chinese crested named Camp, stretched out at the foot of Hunter's bed. Though Luis's and Jase's bedroom door was locked for privacy, they could see and hear every sound in Hunter's room thanks to the nannycam Cory, their handyman, had installed after Jase's grandmother went back to Alaska.

Luis reached down and ran his palm lightly across Jase's upper thigh. "Can we talk about something?" he asked. They were stretched out on the sofa in their underwear. Jase was wearing the tight black boxer briefs that made his balls look huge and his back was resting against the arm of the sofa. Luis wore black mesh briefs and his back rested against Jase's chest. When his palm touched Jase's thigh, Jase wrapped his arms around Luis and held him tighter.

"What do you want to talk about?" Jase asked. They were watching the Home Shopping Channel and Jase's gaze was fixed on the TV screen. One of his older inventions, a home cheese-making kit, was being featured that night and he wanted to see how it was selling.

Luis wanted to talk about two things that night, and he knew both topics had the potential to lift Jase's eyebrows. So he decided to start with the lighter of the two subjects and brace for Jase's reaction. "I've been thinking about hiring a live-in nanny for Hunter. At first I didn't want to do that. I wanted to spend all my time with him. But with your grandmother gone it's been hard to juggle work and Hunter at

the same time. When she was here with us full time I always knew there was a backup babysitter I could trust. But now there's no one. And we never go out anymore alone because we can't leave Hunter with a stranger. When we went out to dinner alone in Alaska this past weekend and your parents watched Hunter, it was the first time we were alone together since September."

"It won't be easy to find someone," Jase said. His eyes were still focused on the TV and his tone remained calm and rational. "I don't want to call an agency and hope for the best. I've heard some really bad stories about people hiring nannies and I don't want to take any chances."

"I know," Luis said. He fully agreed; he knew it wouldn't be easy to find the perfect nanny for Hunter. "I was thinking I'd start asking around and take it slowly. But I do think it's a good idea, especially for Hunter's sake. He's so attached to me. I don't want him to wind up being one of those creepy, clinging kids." Last September, he'd enrolled Hunter in preschool in New York, three half days a week. Even though Hunter had adjusted to the fact that he didn't have a choice about going, months later Luis still had trouble peeling Hunter's fingers away from his each time he dropped him off at school. "Besides, taking Hunter on location where I'm shooting might not be the best place for him." Luis was a model who worked often. His jobs were usually for discount department stores and smaller clothing outlets. And he was starting to wonder whether or not this was the right environment for a small child. The last time Luis took Hunter to one of his modeling jobs, a buxom young blond woman walked onto the set wearing nothing but a skimpy bra and panties. Hunter's head went up and his eyes popped. He fixed his gaze at her huge chest and parted his lips. Luis had to take him for a walk until she got dressed.

Jase pulled Luis closer and kissed the top of his head. "You know, I think it might be a good idea."

Luis's head went up and he smiled. "You do?"

Jase nodded. "But I think it should be someone who is willing to live in, and someone who is willing to help out around the house. Sort of like a live-in nanny-housekeeper."

"I'm so relieved," Luis said. "I was hoping you'd say that."

"Why are you relieved?"

Luis shrugged and ran his fingertips up and down Jase's thigh. "I feel a little guilty about hiring a nanny. I wanted to do it all alone."

"Hey," Jase said, "You work hard and you have a rough schedule. So do I. So do millions of other working parents all over the country. They do what they think is best. This sounds like a good idea to me. And if it gives us more time alone together, I'm all for it."

Luis knew Jase was talking about sex now. He could feel Jase's erection poking his lower back. Since Isabelle had gone back to Alaska, their sex life had suffered a great deal. With all the things going on in their lives, especially with a toddler around the house, they were lucky if they found enough time for sex once a week. "I want to make it clear, though," Luis said. "If I can't find someone who is right, I'm not going to hire anyone. I want a positive role model for Hunter. And I don't want someone who is going to take our place as his parents either. This nanny-housekeeper is backup for when we're both working. In other words, she'll do basically what Isabelle did when she was living with us. She won't be raising Hunter full time."

Jase bucked his hips and rubbed his erection up and down Luis's lower spine. "You have my full approval," he said. "Now pull down your pants."

Luis smiled, but he had to talk to Jase about something else and he didn't want to put it off any longer. Luis had to make a decision about something involving his career and he wanted Jase's approval. "There's one more thing I want to talk about right now."

Jase reached down between his legs and pulled his erection out of his briefs so he could press the shaft against Luis's bare back. "Can this wait until morning?"

Luis closed his eyes and drew a quick breath. The aroma coming from between Jase's legs calmed his nerves more than anything else in the world. And it was hard to concentrate with Jase's dick poking his spine. But he bit his lip and said, "I'd like to talk about this now. I have to make a decision, and a lot of this decision depends on your reaction."

Jase's hand went down between Luis's legs and he started groping the soft spot of flesh below Luis's balls, inviting Luis to spread his legs wider. "Talk to me. I'm listening."

Luis grabbed Jase's wrist and pulled his hand out from between his legs. "Just hold off for another minute. You know damn well I can't concentrate with you doing that."

"Do you know why?" Jase whispered into Luis's ear. "Why?"

"Because you want my burgeoning manhood right now," Jase said, exaggerating each word. "You want me to put my hard member into your tender, pliable opening."

Luis laughed. "Oh, I see. You want to have tasteful literary sex tonight." They hadn't had literary sex for a while, not since they'd gone to a long, drawn-out book reading in the Village, about cosmic science and breaking the universe, with their friends Ben and Percy. When they returned home, Luis invented a new sex game. He called it literary sex, where they talked *almost* dirty the way characters in literary novels talked when they had sex. Where a dick was politely referred to as a *member*, a hole tastefully referred to as an *opening*, and tea-bagging was brushed off in a general sense as *foreplay*. This harmless literary sex game they shared was often more fun than when they played their porn sex game, where they referred to a dick as a *ramrod*, a hole as a *tight little rosebud*, and tea-bagging as *come-sack sucking*. With literary sex they always had a few good laughs in the process, especially when it came time to climax, which in literary sex they referred to as reaching the *penultimate pinnacle of blind emotion* or, on really creative days, when they *brought each other off to heights of ecstasy*. It was interesting, and challenging, to come



up with so-called tasteful literary terms during sex. And far more amusing than porn sex.

Jase bit the back of his neck and said, “My firm manhood is begging to enter your soft opening. May I enter? Please? I want you to bring me off.”

Luis sat up and smiled. “My opening is begging for your manhood. But I want to talk about this other matter first.” He turned and looked into Jase’s eyes. “I’ve been asked to pose in the nude for *Romantic Tidbits and Treasures*.” This was the same blog that belonged to Luis’s friend in Paris, a woman named Elena, who had created a romantic blog that revolved around artful nude images of attractive men and extremely romantic novels about gay relationships. Luis had been contributing romantic blog posts for a while and his readership had grown by the thousands. This blog was still the one place on Earth he could go to relax and find peace when he felt completely stressed. “Elena has a new contributor who wants to do a photo shoot of me in the nude. It’s going to be artistic, extremely professional, and he’s willing to pay a quarter of a million dollars. I’m thinking about doing it.”

Jase sat back and rubbed his eyes. “This *is* something,” he said. “I didn’t expect it.”

Luis shrugged. “That’s why I wanted to talk to you about it. If you’re not comfortable with me doing it, I won’t.”

“Who is the other contributor?” Jase asked. “And why does he want to pay you so much?”

These were the same two questions Luis had asked Elena when she’d approached him with the subject two weeks earlier. He’d been thinking about it since then, not sure how he’d bring it up with Jase. After all, Jase was a world-famous billionaire and together they were a high-profile gay couple. Doing something like this would not only increase Elena’s online readership, it would also call attention to Jase and Luis again, and for the past few years they’d been out of the spotlight. “The other investor, Leck Schneider, is a German publisher. They print the artistic magazine, *Manly Images*, with nude men. There’s very little frontal nudity, and if there is, there are no erections. It’s far from being porn and their

photos are considered the most tasteful, artistic male nudes in the world.” He exaggerated a little here, as he tended to do from time to time. There were other artistic nude publications far better known. “I’ve always been a huge fan of their photos, thanks to Elena’s blog. They have a way of creating magic and making it look so easy. They were also very honest. They think my photos will attract attention because you and I are married, which in turn will give them the desired exposure they want.”

“How did this guy, Leck Schneider, get involved with Elena?” Jase asked. “I’m sure he thinks he’s going to make huge money by using you through me.”

“He noticed her online readership growing and asked if she’d be willing to take on a partner. She thought it over for a long time, wondering whether or not she even wanted a partner, and decided it was the best thing for the blog. She’s still in control of *everything*, and I never gave it a second thought. I kept writing my usual blog posts, and doing my usual thing.”

“Didn’t that C-list actor from the sitcom pose for *Manly Images* once?” Jase asked.

“Yes, Jayden Sparks,” Luis said. “And there are a few others, too. But, according to Elena, most of the famous male actors or models refuse to pose nude because they don’t want to tarnish their images with the mainstream. But I’m not part of the mainstream. I never intend to act in a mainstream sitcom or a movie. I’m not even sure how long I want to continue modeling.”

Jase took a deep breath and exhaled. “Do *you* want to do this?”

Luis looked directly into his eyes. “Yes,” he said. “I want to do it for several reasons. One of them being that I’m not getting any younger and someday I’d like to look back at those photos and see how young I once was. I know that sounds a little silly and self-indulgent but it’s important to me. Another reason is that it will be a first on a blog like this. I’m known as a writer and contributor on Elena’s blog, and when the readers find out I’m going to do a nude photo shoot on the

blog with *Manly Images*, it's going to garner a lot of attention."

"It will garner attention everywhere, trust me," Jase said. "How nude will you be?"

"I won't do full frontal nudity," Luis said. "I'll keep it simple in that respect. I won't do anything tasteless, you know that. I don't want this to be a freak show. I want it to be art."

"If you're doing this for the money," Jase said, "you don't have to. I know a quarter of a million is a lot of money. But you don't have to worry about money anymore."

Luis kissed his cheek. Even though Luis had been making his own money as a model, Jase had made it clear to Luis he didn't have to work if he didn't want to work. They were married, like any other straight married couple, and Jase made it clear Luis owned half of everything he owned in the world. But Luis liked working. He loved modeling, keeping up with the latest trends, and being busy all the time. He also took pride in the fact that he could make his own money. But he wasn't considering this photo shoot for the money and he wanted to make this clear to Jase. "I've already decided to donate any money I make from this to the *Angel Association*." This association was a charity dear to Luis's heart. It focused on helping desperate, pregnant young women find alternatives to abandoning newborn babies in Dumpsters or on doorsteps. Donating a quarter-million dollars to them would help the cause beyond their wildest dreams.

"Wow," Jase said. "That's a sizeable donation. I'm sure they will be thrilled."

Luis shrugged. "It's a good cause," he said. "And it's the only way I know how to make a difference in the world. I'm not a genius, I can't sing, and I don't know how to dance. I know my limitations and I never fool myself. I'm an average guy who happens to have a nice body, is all."

Jase reached down between his legs again and started groping for an interesting spot. "Oh, trust me, you are far from average. Your body isn't nice looking. It's fucking hot. I've seen truck drivers swerve when you walk down West End Avenue in short pants."

“So it’s okay if I do this?” Luis asked, spreading his legs a little wider so Jase could shove his hands up his mesh briefs without having to struggle.

“It’s your decision,” Jase said. “I’ll support you either way. I want you to be prepared for what might come along with that kind of exposure. Even partially nude photos of you, because of my high-profile position and us being a couple, are going to be plastered everywhere, from tabloids on newsstands to the Internet. Are you ready for that?”

“As long as I keep it tasteful I don’t think it can hurt,” Luis said. “I know Elena wouldn’t post any photos on her blog that aren’t artistic. Her blog is the epitome of tasteful.”

“That’s true,” Jase said. “I hadn’t thought about it that way.” He started to chew Luis’s earlobe. “Now pull down your pants, turn around, and face me.”

Luis quickly removed his black mesh briefs and turned so he could straddle Jase’s hips. When the bottom of his ass was resting on Jase’s dick, he smiled and said, “You want me to ride your dick, don’t you?”

Jase slapped his hip, a quick snap followed by a loud crack. “No,” he said. “I don’t want you to ride my dick. I want you to embrace my burgeoning member. This is literary sex, remember?” Then he slapped him again.

“Ouch! That hurt.”

Jase slapped him a third time and laughed. “You know you like it.”

Luis reached over Jase’s head and grabbed a tube of lubricant on the side table. After he lubed Jase’s dick, he grabbed the shaft and slowly sat on it. As he lowered his body and Jase slid inside, he smiled and said, “Take me now. Take me with your blunt, aggressive manhood. Don’t stop until my chest is heaving and my body is trembling with unbridled desire. *Do the deed*, Jase. I want you to *do the deed*.” Luis had trouble keeping a straight face when he said this. He had recently read this phrase, “do the deed,” in a sex scene in a *New York Times* best seller.

Jase laughed and slapped his ass again. “Your opening is causing my member to erupt with passion way too soon.

You're going to bring me off fast this time. I'll be *sore* and *spent* before I know it."

"Then don't hold back," Luis said. Jase was one of those men who could either fuck for hours or five minutes. When it came to getting him off, Luis was never sure what to predict. "I want to *bring you off*." Luis had read this phrase in the same best seller.

"Ah well," Jase said, stretching his legs. "This is one of the reasons why I love you so much. You always know how to *bring me off*."

Luis placed his palms on Jase's shoulders and he leaned forward so he could kiss Jase's forehead. This particular position had always been one of Luis's favorites. Jase would stretch out and remain still, and Luis would slowly ride Jase until neither one of them could hold back. In this position, Jase's dick reached each sensitive spot in Luis's hole. If Luis moved slightly to the right, the tip of Jase's dick hit the spot that made the lips of his anus tighten with pre-orgasmic sensations. If Luis moved to the left and Jase's dick hit the sensitive spot on the other side, all the nerve endings in his body became aroused and his stomach jumped. But more than that, the faster Luis rode him in this position, the closer they both reached climax. Sometimes Jase moved his hips from below; sometimes he remained absolutely dead still with his eyes closed. But one thing always remained the same in this position: at the moment they both climaxed, Jase grabbed the back of Luis's head, pulled it toward his face, and shoved his tongue into Luis's mouth.

When Jase kissed him this time and his cock exploded, Luis's entire body trembled and twitched. As Jase finished doing the deed and bringing him off, Luis closed his eyes and moaned so softly into Jase's mouth it sounded more like a whimper of pain than a sigh of relief.

## Chapter Two

On Saturday morning, a bright, warm spring day in mid-April, Jase took Hunter and Camp down to the Delaware River fishing for shad. Since the river had been cleaned up and the shad had started returning fifteen years ago, the little tourist town across the river in New Jersey held a yearly shad festival. Back in the 1960s the industrial plants along the Delaware River had polluted the river with so many chemicals the shad had stopped swimming north. But after a few serious government regulations in the late 1970s, the shad had returned and locals wanted to celebrate the restored environment.

Luis was in the laundry room doing a week's worth of dirty clothes he'd brought out with him from New York in three heavy sacks. Jase and Luis had ironed out a reasonable schedule with work so they could leave New York on Thursday nights and not have to return until late Monday evening. This way they had four full days in Bucks County. Jase could work out of his home office on Fridays and Mondays, and if Luis had a modeling job he'd join them later. Hunter only went to preschool in New York three days a week. Luis and Jase were even talking about moving out to Bucks County full time so Hunter could start kindergarten out there instead of in New York. But that subject was still up in the air for now. Luis and Jase, both huge advocates of the public school system, were weighing their options between some excellent private schools in Manhattan and the excellent public schools in Bucks County. They wanted to do what was best for Hunter, with regard to his future and his present.

Luis knew he'd have the entire house to himself until at least mid-afternoon, so when he filled the washing machine with a load of white bath towels, he also removed the short white bathrobe he was wearing and tossed it in with the towels. He wasn't completely nude; he'd put on a shiny gold thong earlier. He and Jase had had morning sex while Hunter was still sleeping and Luis decided to surprise Jase with this

gold thong. Though Jase never actually asked Luis to wear his kinky little thongs, Luis could always see by the smile on Jase's face—and the erection between his legs—that Jase was more than pleased when Luis surprised him. This particular morning Jase didn't even remove the gold thong. Luis went down on the bed on all fours, Jake went behind him and pulled the thong to the side, then Jase mounted him without lube. They both knew Hunter would be up soon and there wasn't much time for foreplay. The act took less than fifteen minutes. But when it was over Jase kissed Luis on the lips and said, "I'm always amazed at how even fast sex with you is better than the long hours of forced sex I had with my ex-wife, Jane."

Now, Luis reached for a bottle of bleach on a shelf above the washer and smiled when he thought about this. He liked pleasing the man he loved. Jase had always pleased Luis in return. But when Luis pulled the bleach off the shelf and started to unscrew the cap, the back door opened with a clank and Cory Rhodes walked right into the laundry room without knocking.

Luis jumped and dropped the bottle of bleach into the washing machine. Good thing he hadn't been able to unscrew the childproof cap, otherwise he would have lost half the bleach. He turned and shook his head, "Cory, you almost gave me a heart attack."

Cory was their full-time handyman. But Luis considered him more of an artist than a handyman. If it hadn't been for Cory's innate design talents, not to mention his construction abilities, Luis knew he never would have been able to restore Cider Mill Farm back to its original eighteenth-century splendor.

Cory smiled and looked Luis up and down. He shrugged and said, "Sorry. I saw Jase and Hunter leave earlier this morning and I figured you were alone. I wanted to see if there was any coffee in the house."

Luis pulled the bottle of bleach from the washer and poured a small amount into the little plastic bleach compartment. "There's a fresh pot on the counter. Help

yourself, Cory.” Luis didn’t rush to cover his almost-naked body; he didn’t care whether or not Cory saw him standing there in the gold thong. Even though there would always be a certain amount of sexual tension between them, Luis knew they would never be lovers. Luis felt as comfortable walking around naked in front of Cory as he did with Jase. Cory was his friend, and Cory knew Luis and Jase were happily married. Cory had also had a few revelations of his own in the past year. He’d dumped his girlfriend, he’d finally come out of the closet and admitted he was bisexual, and he’d started dating an old friend of his from high school. For a guy like Cory, a rugged country boy who had once been the star of his small-town high school football team, with black hair, a neat black beard, and a deep throaty voice, coming out of the closet to his family and his small-town friends hadn’t been easy. But Luis and Jase had been there to support him all the way.

Cory came into the kitchen in his heavy black work boots and said, “Can I get you a cup?”

Luis closed the lid on the washer and pushed a few buttons that made light beeping sounds. “No. I’m fine. I already had three cups this morning. I want to clean the house before Jase and Hunter get back.” This was the hard part about Cider Mill Farm. In New York, they had a cleaning service come once a week to take care of their house on the Upper West Side, and Luis only had to do the light daily cleaning like straightening the bathrooms and polishing up the kitchen every night. But Luis did all the housework himself at Cider Mill Farm on weekends, from scrubbing the floors to washing the windows, which left little time for any fun. Finding the right live-in housekeeper-nanny would allow Luis to spend more quality time with Jase and Hunter on weekends.

When Luis walked into the kitchen in his bare feet, Cory was sitting on the handmade pine counter he’d constructed himself sipping a mug of black coffee. He was wearing baggy beige cargo shorts and his hairy legs were dangling in front of the cabinet doors next to the sink. Even though it was warm for April, it still wasn’t warm enough outside for the thin white T-shirt Cory was wearing. Luis



crossed to the sink so he could load the breakfast dishes into the dishwasher. "Aren't you a little underdressed this morning? It's still jacket weather outside."

Cory almost choked on his coffee. He lifted his right leg, rubbed the side of his dirty black boot against Luis's naked thigh, and said, "You should talk. You're walking around bare-assed." He was sitting right next to the sink, only inches from Luis. He gazed down at Luis's naked ass and puckered his lips as if he were about to whistle. Then he grabbed the waistband of Luis's thong and snapped it against Luis's waist.

Luis reached down and grabbed Cory beneath the knee. "Hey, that hurt. What's up with you this morning? Didn't your new boyfriend take care of you? You're in one of those horny moods." He released Cory's leg. "I thought you were used me walking around in my underwear all the time when no one is home."

Cory set the mug of coffee down on the counter and reached for Luis's arm. He pulled Luis between his legs, wrapped his legs around Luis's waist, and crossed his feet tightly so Luis couldn't move. "My boyfriend had to leave for work early this morning. And he left me in bed with a huge hard-on." His boyfriend's family owned the local diner and he was being groomed to take it over one day.

Luis placed his palms on Cory's broad chest and tried to back away. He had housework to do and he wasn't in the mood to play games with Cory that morning. "You'll have to wait until your boyfriend comes home tonight then. Now let go of me. I have work to do." Luis was pinned between Cory's legs and couldn't move. Cory's hairy knees were pressed against his ass and Cory's legs were locked together with such a tight grip Luis could feel the heels of Cory's black boots pinching the backs of his thighs.

Cory leaned forward and reached around. He slipped his thick fingers beneath the string at the back of Luis's gold thong and ran his hand all the way down Luis's ass. "I'll bet Jase liked this thong this morning. You look good in it. It's so cheap and sleazy."

Luis stopped trying to fight him. Partly because Cory's rough palm felt good on his ass and partly because Cory was far too strong and he knew he couldn't win. So he lifted his right hand and ran it lightly down the side of Cory's neatly trimmed beard, as if trying to calm him. "Be a good boy now and let me go. I really do have work to do. And if anyone walked in now and saw us this way, they'd get the wrong idea." Luis had already explained these harmless little flirtations he had with Cory to Jase. Although the average observer with a dirty mind wouldn't have understood what they were doing, Jase couldn't have cared less. But Luis also knew there was always the potential for this harmless little joke they'd been playing with each other to become dangerous, and Luis didn't want that to happen. Luis knew Cory didn't want it to happen either. They both had too much respect for Jase to take advantage of his trusting nature.

Cory tightened his legs and his boots started to press into Luis's ass. "I guess you're right. We could get into trouble like this. Someone might get the wrong idea. And the funny thing is my dick isn't even hard." He slapped Luis on the ass and laughed. "I've got a hot piece of ass in the palms of my hands and I'm not even sexually excited. Go figure."

"You're not hard?" For some reason, this bothered Luis. Though he wasn't about to cheat on Jase with Cory, it wasn't very flattering to hear Cory wasn't at least a little excited.

"Nope," Cory said. "I'm as soft as raw pretzel dough. See for yourself."

Luis hesitated for a second, but then he reached down, ran his palm up beneath Cory's baggy shorts, and reached for his dick. Only he didn't find soft pretzel dough between Cory's legs. He found a fully erect cock, with a shaft so wide he couldn't wrap his fingers all the way around it. "You lied," he said, pulling his hand out of Cory's pants fast. "Let me go right now so I can wash my hand. That wasn't fair. You tricked me into touching you there." His tone sounded serious, but he couldn't control the way the corners of his lips turned up.

Cory threw his arms up in surrender and he released Luis from his grip. "Calm down. You should have seen the look on your face when you grabbed me. I've never seen eyes open so wide." He leaned back, resting his palms on the counter and spreading his legs wider so Luis could see his erection poking through the fabric of his shorts.

Luis stepped back and frowned. "Well, how was I supposed to react?"

Cory's eyes went down. He pointed to the erection sticking out of Luis's gold thong and said, "Just like that." He hopped off the counter, shoved his hand down his shorts to adjust his dick, then slapped Luis's ass harder this time. "I'm going outside to work on the barn doors. If you need me, yell. And go put on some pants or something. Make yourself decent."

Luis noticed the smug expression on Cory's face, as if he'd been vindicated and released from blame. But Luis wasn't upset with him, because this was part of their little game. "I'll be okay. You sure you don't want a jacket? You can borrow one of Jase's."

Cory smiled and trudged toward the back door. "Thanks, I'm good. It's going to get warmer out today, and once I start working I get overheated anyway."

"I'll bring you down something for lunch later," Luis said, returning to the dishes in the sink, slipping back into normal, nonsexual conversation with Cory. At that point, his nakedness meant nothing at all. But this was the way it had always been with them. There were times when Luis thought if they ever did try having sex together they'd both wind up laughing and rolling around on the floor. It was truly one of the most unusual friendships Luis had ever had with another man, especially with a young man as attractive as Cory. But there was one thing Luis hadn't discussed with Cory, and now was as good a time as any. "Do you ever talk about me with your boyfriend? I mean, do you ever tell him about our stupid little games, like what just happened?"

"His name is *Jasper*," Cory said. "I've told you that a hundred times."

"I'm sorry," Luis said. "I didn't mean anything." He really didn't. Luis wasn't good with names.

Cory smiled. "I tell Jasper everything, even about how you flirt with me to get me to do work around here."

"You flirt with me, too. I'm not the one who wrapped my big old hairy legs around *you* this morning. You did it to *me*."

"I'm not the one walking around naked, wiggling my ass back and forth to get attention."

"Okay. You have a point. But seriously, does Jasper know about our unusual friendship? And most of all, does he know there's nothing going on between us?"

Cory nodded. "Yes. I've explained everything to him like you've explained everything to Jase. No need to worry. No problem."

"That's a relief," Luis said. "I'd hate for him to think I'm trying to steal you away." For all the flirting Luis did, he'd never once cheated on Jase. And if anyone had seen him flirt with Cory and they had doubted his intentions, he would have smiled and told them to go fuck themselves. He'd learned early he couldn't win with people who had dirty minds and irrevocable mindsets.

"I'll see you later," Cory said, turning to leave.

When Cory was gone, Luis went back to his usual Saturday morning cleaning routine, without bothering to get dressed. He wasn't expecting anyone and he figured he'd jump into the shower when he was finished cleaning and get dressed then.

After he'd cleaned the entire house and the last thing left to do was mop the kitchen floor, he decided to get a clean rag and wipe the floor clean on his hands and knees. Mops were good for general cleaning, but Luis had always believed the best way to really clean a floor was with his own two hands. And he hadn't done this in the kitchen for a while. So he crossed over to the sink to fill the bucket with soapy water. But as he turned the hot water faucet and the water came spilling out, a strange face appeared in the kitchen window over the sink. It happened so fast and without warning, Luis

dropped the bucket and screamed for Cory. Then he ran into the laundry room and pulled his white bathrobe from the pile of clean, folded white towels.

By the time Luis put the bathrobe on and stepped out on the back patio to see what had happened to the man peeking into the window, Cory had the man's arm in his hands and he was talking to him at the other end of the driveway. They were standing near the easement road and far enough away so Luis couldn't hear anything. Cory's expression looked stern and serious. The man he was talking to looked puzzled and alarmed.

Then they stopped talking and Cory walked the man back toward the house. Luis took a few steps back and folded his arms across his chest. As they approached, Luis saw the stranger's thick silver hair. He was taller than Cory and much wider in frame. Balancing about thirty more pounds than he should have been, the extra weight mostly concentrated around his middle.

Cory remained a step behind the stranger and shrugged at Luis. "This guy says he's the Reverend Thomas von Klingensmith and he's here about the rental." He lifted his hand and twirled his finger around his temple.

Before Luis had a chance to answer, Reverend von Klingensmith extended his arm and said, "I'm so sorry about the mix-up, young man. I didn't mean to startle you. I was inquiring about the house for rent down at the end of the road. The lovely old stone place with the *fabulous* winding brick path to the front door. I'm Reverend Thomas von Klingensmith, and I just moved up north from Key West. I'm staying with cousins in New Jersey and looking for a place to rent in or near New Hope." He pronounced Thomas as *Thomas*, with the accent on the last syllable instead of the first. He spoke with such a light, singsong voice Luis knew he had to be gay.

Luis smiled at Thomas and shrugged at Cory. Thomas had to be in his mid-seventies, but he was still attractive, with all that thick silver hair. So Luis shook Thomas's hand and said, "I'm Luis Fortune and I'm one of the owners. But I

thought my husband, Jase, had listed the house with a Realtor. I wasn't under the impression we'd be dealing with prospective tenants ourselves." Jase had mentioned to Luis he wanted to rent Angus Bernie's old house out, but he hadn't gone into detail, just that he'd listed it with a real estate agent in town.

"I'm afraid that's my entire fault," Thomas said. "I often become over excited and I move far too quickly. I read about the listing in the local paper, asked a few people where it was, and I decided to check it out myself to get the vibrations. You see, I'm an automatic writer and a psychic. I write spiritual books about new-age concepts and enlightened prospects that deal with diversity, love, respect, dignity, positivity, and captive consciousness. You may have heard of my works. I've been running my own congregation in Key West for years, a new-age church based on the principles of my first book, *Captive Consciousness*. And all my other published books are on the Internet now."

Luis had never heard of him, and he'd never heard of *Captive Consciousness*. It sounded like a breakfast cereal. But he smiled and asked, "Are you looking for a place to escape the Florida heat for the summer? Because this rental is year round. It's not seasonal."

Thomas lifted his head and smiled. He clasped his palms together and said, "Oh, no. I'm moving up here for good. The congregation in Key West became too much for me, what with the radio show and the books, and all the special requests to perform gay marriages. It reached a point where I had no privacy at all. I'm back up here for good and I'm going into semi-retirement. I'll keep writing about captive consciousness, but I want to be near my family in New Jersey. The house down below is perfect. I want privacy and solitude so I can meditate." He lifted both hands in the air and waved them in slow motion.

Cory blinked.

Luis smiled and said, "Why don't you wait here a minute while I run upstairs and get dressed? My husband and son are out fishing today at the shad festival and I was

cleaning and doing Saturday morning things. I wasn't expecting anyone. I'll be right back."

Within ten minutes, Luis jogged down the back stairs in a pair of jeans, running shoes, and a black T-shirt. He found Thomas and Cory standing in the same spots where he'd left them. Thomas was still talking, telling Cory about his psychic gift of automatic writing, where spiritual guides took over his physical body and wrote words on pages he couldn't seem to control no matter how hard he tried. When he told Cory his psychic ability was a gift from God and he'd had it since childhood, Cory offered him a blank glance and rubbed his chin in disbelief. Then Cory sent Luis an eye roll and frowned.

But Luis ignored Cory and smiled at Thomas. "Do you prefer to be called Reverend von Klingensmith?"

"I'm fine with Thomas," the old man said, overemphasizing the second syllable in his name again. "I'm a very simple person."

Cory rolled his eyes and looked down at his boots.

But there was something calm and soothing about Thomas that eased Luis's nerves. When he spoke, the words rolled from his mouth with such a gentle flow Luis felt like plopping down in a chair and sighing. It was almost as if Thomas was at a pulpit giving a sermon, and Luis wasn't at all religious. But Luis had always had a soft spot in his heart for older gay men, ever since his nonsexual escorting days in New York. Luis had learned so much about gay history firsthand from older gay men, and they were always so pleasant and gentle to be around. So Luis gestured toward the back door and said, "Won't you come inside and sit down, Thomas? We can talk all about the house and the lease, then I'll take you down and you can see what it's like inside. I have a feeling you're going to like the house. I think it's going to suit you well."

"Shouldn't you wait for Jase?" Cory said, sending Luis another serious look.

"I hate to make Thomas wait," Luis said. "Jase and Hunter might not be back until later this afternoon. I'd like to show him the house and talk things over now."

“But Jase listed the place with a Realtor,” Cory said. “Won’t that be a problem?”

Thomas smiled. “Not a problem at all,” he said. “If it’s a matter of paying a commission, I’d be more than happy to pay. I’d hate to see anyone go short of a buck because of my eagerness. It will be the easiest commission the Realtor has ever made.”

Cory looked Thomas up and down and frowned again. Then he jerked his head and said, “Luis, can we talk in private for a moment?”

Luis followed him to the other end of the patio where Thomas couldn’t hear them speaking. “What’s wrong? This guy is wonderful. I’ve never met a sweeter old man. Don’t you love the way he pronounces his name?”

“I think you should wait for Jase before you decide anything,” Cory said. “I know it’s none of my business, but I’m only looking out for you guys. There’s something creepy about this guy, and I’m not buying all his bullshit about being a writer and having a church. I don’t even think he’s a real reverend. You know they get their certificates and degrees on the Internet these days.”

Luis shrugged. “I don’t care about any of that. He seems like a nice, pleasant person. He’s absolutely harmless. And if he makes things up and reinvents himself a little, who am I to judge? Besides, I’m not going to sign anything today. I’m going to interview him and show him the house. Then Jase can make the final decision.”

“Well, I guess that’s okay,” Cory said.

Luis turned and started back toward the house. He smiled at Thomas and said, “Cory wanted to ask me about something he’s doing down at the barn. Let’s go inside, talk for a few minutes, then I’ll drive you down and show you the house myself.”

But as they were walking toward the back door, Cory lifted his deep voice and said. “I’ll be right out here if you need me, Luis.” Then he sent Thomas a stern glance and said, “And if you want me to go with you when you show the house, call.”



“Thanks, Cory,” Luis said. “I’ll see you later. I’ll bring something down at lunchtime.” Then he turned to open the back door for Thomas.

As they entered, Thomas smiled and said, “Cory certainly is a protective young man. If I didn’t know better, I’d think he didn’t trust me.”

Luis smiled. “He’s a great guy. You’ll like him once you get to know him. It’s just that he’s a local and they are all very protective when someone new comes to town.” Then he escorted Thomas to the kitchen table without a hint of reservation. He was so excited about finding such a perfect tenant for the house at the end of the road, he couldn’t wait to start asking Thomas more detailed questions about his background. It wasn’t just because Thomas wanted to rent the house. Luis had always been extremely fascinated by anything psychic, and this guy was simply too good to resist.

### Chapter Three

By the time Jase and Hunter returned from fishing, lugging a wet clump of freshly caught shad across Luis's nice clean floor, Luis was about to take Thomas von Klingensmith out to show him the rental house. It was almost three o'clock in the afternoon. Luis and Thomas had been sitting in the kitchen talking most of the afternoon away, and they'd lost track of the time. When Jase walked into the kitchen, they'd finished their third pot of coffee and Luis had just heard about the time Thomas had played the organ at some famous cathedral in Europe. It came out in conversation that Thomas wasn't only a reverend, spiritual author, and psychic, but he was also an accomplished professional organist who had played some of the best organs in the world.

Luis introduced Thomas to Jase, then put the shad on ice and took Hunter upstairs to bathe him. Jase took Thomas down to check out the house. Hunter had worms in his shirt pockets, a frog in his jeans, and he smelled more like shad than the shad did. And Camp wasn't much better. The dog's blond hair on top of his head and around his feet was matted with river water and sand, the only hair the poor bald Chinese crested had on his entire body.

When they came back downstairs an hour and a half later so Luis could start preparing dinner, Jase's truck pulled up outside and Luis and Hunter went out to greet him. Jase climbed out of the truck and smiled. He told Luis he agreed Thomas was the perfect tenant for the house at the end of the road. Then he held up a check for two months' rent and told Luis that Thomas had signed a two-year lease and was moving into the house the following week. Luis hugged Jase and said he was thrilled and that he had a good feeling about Thomas he didn't get often. Then he took Hunter into the house and told him all about the wonderful new neighbor, Reverend von Klingensmith, who was going to be living in mean Angus Bernie's old house.

“I don’t want you getting too friendly with him too soon,” Jase said as he crossed to the back staircase so he could shower before dinner. Luis didn’t say anything, but Jase smelled a little fishy, too. When they were childless they used to eat dinner at eight or nine o’clock at night. But when Hunter came into their lives, they started eating dinner around six or six thirty.

Luis frowned and stared down at the sink. He’d opened a bag of fresh string beans and he was preparing to wash and julienne. “I’m just going to be friendly,” Luis said. “I’m not going to start hanging out with him. I’m not an idiot, Jase.” Sometimes it bothered Luis that Jase always considered him so flighty and carefree, almost as if he were a ditzzy, dumb-blond type without a brain.

Jase smiled. “I know you,” he said. “You’ll be over there all the time, inviting him here for dinner every night, telling him your whole life. You’ll be asking him about his psychic abilities and trying to get him to do séances and God knows what. I think we should take it slowly. After all, we really don’t know anything about him. And he did make it clear he wanted his privacy.”

Sometimes Jase was so level headed Luis wanted to scream. “Okay,” he said, “I’ll take it slowly.” But he didn’t agree. If Thomas had wanted so much privacy, he wouldn’t have been so talkative and open the first time Luis had met him. Thomas, as far as Luis could tell, loved people and he loved companionship. He was probably very lonely.

But for the next two weeks Luis didn’t have a chance to get to know Thomas better. He was too busy working and juggling his time. He had two modeling shoots in New Jersey: one for a hardware store, where he wore coveralls and a fake mustache, and another for a small chain of men’s clothing stores up and down the Jersey Shore, where they sprayed him with fake tanning solution and made him wear flip-flops and broad shorts. On top of that, Luis had set up a preliminary meeting with the German publisher who wanted him to pose nude for Elena’s blog. Luis was almost set on doing the nude photos, and he wanted to meet with them first. At least he

didn't have to fly to Germany. The publisher wanted to meet him in Los Angeles, where he was doing business in their U.S. offices that month. So Luis welcomed Thomas with a fresh bouquet of flowers and a box of homemade cookies on the day he moved into the house. But he only stayed a few minutes, explaining they'd get together when his schedule was lighter, toward the end of May. Thomas, gracious as the first day Luis had met him, thanked Luis and said he was really looking forward to living there and getting to know them better.

Luis hadn't even had time to look for a nanny-housekeeper. So he wound up taking Hunter to Los Angeles with him to meet the German publisher. It was only an overnight trip, because Jase had important meetings of his own that week and he couldn't bring Hunter into boardrooms. It wouldn't have been fair to Hunter, the other board members, or to Jase, for that matter. And Luis couldn't leave Hunter with a strange babysitter from an employment agency while he was in L.A. The only other person Hunter would have trusted enough to watch Hunter was Cory, and Cory had a family wedding to attend in upstate New York, which never happened.

The German publisher didn't seem to mind. He paid for two first-class tickets to L.A. and for one of the best "ultra" bungalows at the Beverly Hills Hotel. And on the day Luis met with the publisher in a top floor suite of offices in downtown Los Angeles, he even sent a town car to the Beverly Hills Hotel to pick him up.

Luis hadn't expected the publisher's U.S. offices to be so elaborate and refined. He'd been expecting the simple rooms of a small annex, assuming the main headquarters was in Berlin. But the U.S. offices turned out to be on one of the top floors of a prominent L.A. high-rise, with walls of glass, high-end Courvoisier furniture, and the thickest, shiniest glass tables Luis had ever seen. Luis had been modeling for a while now, and this German publisher had the most impressive, luxurious offices he'd seen by far. When he thought about the most recent job he'd done in overalls for the hardware store,

he almost smiled. Even the private elevator that led to the reception area was lined with padded leather so soft it felt like satin.

When Luis told the tall, thin, blond receptionist in a black dress he was there for his appointment with Mr. Leck Schneider, Luis practically had to drag Hunter away from a huge wall aquarium so they could sit down and wait on the other side of the reception desk. Luis had never seen Hunter's eyes grow so large. Hunter leaned forward gazed into the humongous fish tank with his mouth half open and his arms dangling at his sides, watching exotic fish in bright colors swim back and forth. This was one of those times Luis looked up and thanked the powers that be Hunter wasn't a hyperactive, fidgety kid who couldn't sit still. Hunter didn't complain or resist. He followed Luis to the seating area with his eyes still fixed on the aquarium, without causing any disruptions. Hunter sat there staring across the reception area at the fish tank until Leck Schneider walked out to greet Luis.

Leck Schneider turned out to be a tall, thin man in his mid-fifties, with graying temples, a ruddy complexion, and large, strong hands. He wore a dark gray business suit with a white shirt and a navy tie. Luis stood and smiled, then he extended his right arm and said, "I'm sorry I had to bring my son along, Mr. Schneider, but I didn't have a choice. I would have had to reschedule the appointment otherwise."

"No problem," Leck said. He spoke with a heavy German accent, but his English was exceptionally good. "Please call me Leck. We're very informal around here." He spoke with a smooth, easy tone, so soft it was almost hypnotic.

"Thank you, Leck," Luis said. "Hunter won't be a problem." He glanced down and sent Hunter a serious look. "He's very well behaved. I've been taking him on location with me for a long time, so he knows his way around."

"The only problem is I'm worried it might not be appropriate to have him come into the studios with us," Leck said, still smiling. "We're in the middle of shooting another one of our little films and it might be awkward."

Though Luis knew what Leck was talking about, he didn't want to go into detail in front of Hunter. They were obviously shooting nude men, and this was not something Luis wanted to expose Hunter to at such a young age, not even if the scenes were tasteful and artistic, as Luis assumed they were. So Luis smiled and said, "If you'd rather have the meeting right here in the reception area, I'm fine with that." Luis still wasn't completely certain he was going to pose nude. He wanted to discuss the details, know exactly what to expect, then make a final decision later that week. He still had a few doubts about posing nude for anyone, artistic or not, and he wasn't ready to sign any contracts yet.

Leck smiled and turned to face the quiet blond woman sitting at the reception desk. "If it's okay with you, my receptionist, Leslie, will care for your son while we're inside. She's very good with children. She has two of her own in day care right now."

Leslie smiled at Luis, then looked at Hunter and said, "Would you like to stay out here with me and watch the fish? I'll get you an ice pop, cherry. I'll put a chair right up against the aquarium and you can sit there and watch them while your daddy is inside with Mr. Schneider. And, it's almost time to feed them. I'll let you do that."

Hunter's head went up and he smiled.

Luis frowned and rubbed his chin. He didn't like leaving Hunter alone with a stranger, and he'd always frowned upon sugary snacks, especially ice pops.

But Leck said, "Our offices are very private. No one comes up here unless they are invited. I can assure you Leslie will give her undivided attention to your son." He smiled at Leslie. "Let all calls go to voice mail until the meeting is over."

Hunter looked up and smiled. "I'm okay, Daddy. I want to feed the fish. You can go inside." Then he left Luis standing there with Leck and ran to the other side of the reception area so he could gaze into the fish tank again.

Luis shrugged, slightly surprised at Hunter's carefree reaction, which he suspected had a great deal to do with the

ice pop. He smiled at Leslie and said, “Are you sure this is okay? We can always reschedule and I can come back out to L.A. alone. I’ll even pay for my own flight. I don’t mind.”

“It’s no problem at all, Mr. Fortune,” Leslie said. “I’ll enjoy it. I love kids, seriously. Hunter will be fine with me.”

So while Leslie carried a black leather chair over to the fish tank for Hunter, Luis followed Leck into the studio. They certainly were friendly people and Luis started to get a thrill up his leg. The first part of the meeting was spent discussing the contract, boiler plate clauses, and basic details with which Luis was familiar from already doing so many modeling jobs. They sat at a large conference table in a secluded office and spoke casually, with a tray of expensive pastries and a carafe of coffee between them. Then they discussed Luis maintaining creative control, and Leck smiled and agreed to all Luis’s terms. It was almost too good to be true.

But the final part of the meeting was unexpected. Leck escorted Luis out of the conference room and into a studio filled with naked young men, more naked young men than Luis had ever seen in his life at one time. Then Leck pointed to a large king-sized bed with black satin sheets, and he told Luis to remove his clothes and lie down on the bed.

Luis took a step back and pressed his palm to his throat. He didn’t want to insult Leck. After all, he’d been so nice to Luis. “I didn’t think I’d be posing for any photos today, Leck. I’m not sure about this.” He didn’t want to be impolite or unprofessional, but Leck could have warned him this was coming.

Leck smiled and sent him a friendly glance. “I have to see you in the nude before we finalize everything. It’s standard procedure for all our models. I guess you could say it’s an audition of sorts. And we are going to pay you over a quarter of a million dollars.” Though Leck was still speaking with the same low, even tone, he wasn’t joking around. He meant business, and he wanted Luis to strip. “We need you to show us what we’re going to get. As you can see, no one is shy around here. We’re shooting a film right now on the other

side of the studio and you're among like-minded friends, I assure you."

Luis was apprehensive at first. Although he and Jase had done a few exhibitionist things together, and Luis did have that unusual little exhibitionist game he played with Cory, he'd never actually removed all his clothes in front of so many other men at one time, and never in a professional modeling environment. He came close to turning around and forgetting about the entire deal. He hadn't signed anything yet. It wouldn't be hard to leave. But he didn't want to insult these nice people, especially Leck. Then he thought about how he'd be disappointing Elena, not to mention all the people at the Angel Association. They didn't even know he was planning to donate a quarter of a million to them, but he knew it.

So he walked over to the bed and slowly started to remove his black suit jacket, keeping his upper lip stiff and his dick soft, maintaining his professionalism. He'd been modeling for a long time, but this time it felt different when he dropped his beige slacks. With each piece of clothing he removed, a creepy sensation ran up the back of his neck to the top of his head, partly because Leck stood gaping at him, and partly because there were so many other naked young men in the studio. When he was finally naked and he went down on the bed in front of Leck and all those other naked young men, it felt as if someone had punched him in the stomach. He got through it by concentrating and telling himself he was a professional and this was just another modeling job. No one else in the studio seemed concerned.

Leck walked over to the bed and gazed down at Luis's body. Leck's eyes moved up and down, taking in every last inch of his naked flesh, as if measuring him for a new suit. While Leck continued to look him over, Luis couldn't help glancing around the room. Now that he was more focused and less nervous he noticed a few things that made his eyebrows go up. In the far corner of the studio, he saw a group of young guys having sex with each other. They weren't posing for art either. They were fucking and sucking with grunts and moans. One handsome blond guy did something very disturbing with



a cherry ice pop: he'd lick it, reach back and rub it up and down his ass, then lick it again. They were too far away to see details, so Luis was spared from witnessing too many images that would last him a lifetime. But they were definitely having sex and doing kinky things with ice pops, and the photos being shot by a photographer on the sidelines weren't the artistic photos Luis had seen from this publisher. This was outright porn, not semi-nude poses with partially visible flaccid penises.

Leck rubbed his jaw, without removing his eyes from Luis's naked legs, and said, "Would you please roll over on your stomach and spread your legs a little for me? You have a beautiful body and I want to see everything."

Luis slowly rolled over on his stomach and spread his legs. When he did this, Leck called two naked young guys over and asked them, "What do you guys think of that?" He pointed to Luis's bare ass with one hand and pressed his index finger to his bottom lip with the other.

One guy shrugged and said, "It's hot." This guy was a ginger type, with reddish blond hair and smooth white, freckled legs.

The other grabbed his dick and said, "I'd fuck him any day." He was rougher around the edges, with dark hair, and his dick was almost as thick as Luis's wrist.

Luis blinked. He hadn't expected a formal critique.

Then Leck bent down and placed his large hand between Luis's legs. He squeezed Luis's ass a few times and whistled back. He touched a soft spot inside Luis's thigh and rubbed it with his fingertips a few times. He even ran his fingers up between Luis's legs and grazed his anus. Then he smiled and said, "Spread your legs a little wider now and arch your back for me a little. I want to see your ass high in the air."

So much for artistic and tasteful.

But Luis didn't want to be a poor sport, so he spread his legs wider and arched his back, wondering how much longer he'd had to pose this way.

When Luis did this, the rough, young dark-haired guy who was holding his chunky dick said, “Oh yeah, Leck, I’d like to jump on top of that right now. That’s the kind of ass guys love to fuck.”

Luis rolled his eyes.

The other guy punched the guy who was holding his dick and said, “We can take turns tapping him. I’ll go first.”

“Be good, boys,” Leck said, moving to the right so he could examine Luis’s ass from another angle. He reached down and gave Luis’s ass a firm squeeze again. This time his fingertips brushed against Luis’s anus harder.

Luis felt his face getting hot by then. He’d finally had enough. His entire body tightened and the only thing he wanted to do was get out of there and forget all about this experience. He didn’t feel like a good sport anymore; he felt stupid. He was sorry he’d come to Los Angeles and sorry he’d agreed to meet with Leck Schneider. If he’d known it would be like this, he never would have bothered. But Luis had never been into porn of any kind and he’d assumed all of Leck’s productions were artistic. There was nothing artistic about what they were doing that day and he couldn’t wait to get back to the hotel and talk to Elena about it. He knew her well, as a writer and a person, and he knew she couldn’t have known what was happening in these studios either. Evidently, the artistic photos this publisher created were a front for the real porn they were doing behind the scenes, and if Luis posed nude in artistic photos he’d only be funding their cause. But what really shocked Luis the most was when the one young guy spoke and his voice cracked. It was at that moment when it occurred to Luis most of these guys were underage.

So Luis sat up and said, “I really have to get dressed now, Leck. I have to get back to the hotel and get ready for our flight back to New York.”

“That’s fine,” Leck said. “I think you’ll be a perfect model for us. You never know. A simple nude photo shoot might turn into a film career.” He turned to the two young guys who were still gazing at Luis’s naked body. “Why don’t you boys help Luis get dressed now?” Leck sent Luis a dark

smile. “You seem to have excited these poor boys beyond what I expected. Feel free to enjoy them if you want.”

Luis noticed both guys had full erections now. But when they took a step forward, Luis stood up and lifted his hands, palms facing them. “I’m fine, guys, seriously. I’ve been dressing myself for a long time. I can manage.” Although he felt like a fool, Luis hadn’t done anything he’d seriously regret. He didn’t want the rest of the afternoon turning into a freak show, or worse, an illegal gang bang with minors. He looked the two young guys over and studied their faces. The one with dark hair still holding his dick couldn’t have been more than sixteen, and the quiet one with red hair, milky white skin, and smooth legs seemed about the same age, which caused a pull in Luis’s stomach that wouldn’t go away. He felt like throwing a cover over them both. If there was one thing Luis could not abide, it was taking advantage of minors and exploiting them for sexual purposes.

Leck walked away, leaving the two young guys with Luis in case Luis changed his mind and wanted some help from them. But when Leck was gone, Luis pulled up his pants and asked, “How did you guys get involved in this line of work?” He was hoping they’d trust him because they’d think he was one of them. He wanted to be sure what he was thinking was the truth, because if they were underage, and he knew this for certain, he’d try to put a stop to it.

The one with red hair punched his buddy and said, “We met Leck on Santa Monica Boulevard and the rest is history.”

The guy with the chunky dick scratched his balls and said, “We make good money here. Better than we did turning tricks on the street.” He was no Einstein.

“But you’re both over eighteen, right?” Luis asked. He knew he was taking a chance by asking this so openly. But they seemed to trust him.

Both guys laughed at the same time. The one with red hair said, “Seriously, dude. Do you have a life? We wouldn’t be here if we were over eighteen. We’re both sixteen. There’s always at least one *chicken* in a Leck Schneider film, but

usually about two or three. Leck knows what he's doing, and he knows what *they* want."

The one with the chunky dick moved forward and reached around for Luis's ass. "I hope we get to work together soon. The films with hot older guys like you get a lot of attention, especially when the older guy like you is the bottom."

Luis took a step back and smiled. He was in his twenties and had never thought of himself as an "older" guy. How old did this kid think he was? "It was nice meeting you guys. But I really have to get moving now. I'll see you around."

They both shrugged and started walking toward the other end of the studio. When they were gone, Luis dressed fast and walked back into the reception area where Leck was standing beside the reception desk. Luis grabbed Hunter by the arm, thanked the receptionist for watching him, then took the cherry ice pop out of Hunter's hand and tossed it into a trash can. He turned and hurried to the elevator without looking back. He didn't even shake Leck's hand before he left. He stepped into the elevator and said, "I'll be in touch, Leck. Thank you." But he knew he'd never see Leck Schneider again, and he knew if he ever did pose for nude artistic photos it would not be with this publisher. All he wanted now was to get back to the hotel, pack his bags, and return to New York as quickly as possible. The first person he wanted to talk to was Jase. The second was Elena. She, above all people, had to be informed about this, because what he'd seen going on that afternoon in those studios was everything she'd worked hard to keep her blog from becoming.

\* \* \* \*

Luis returned to New York on a commercial flight he paid for with his own money that same night. Leck had sent him return first-class tickets for the next day, but Luis wanted to get home fast and he didn't want to accept another thing from Leck. After he told Jase what had happened during the meeting with Leck, they both agreed Luis would not pose nude for this publisher and Jase would call a few friends in

Los Angeles and let them know Leck was creating porn with minors. Luis told Jase he couldn't be completely sure they were all minors; just the two he'd met. But he had a pretty good suspicion half the guys in there weren't legal enough to vote, let alone have sex in front of a camera. Then Luis phoned Elena in Paris and told her all about his disgusting experience with Leck Schneider and she was so shocked, she said she had to mix herself a strong drink and call him back.

The next day, a calmer Elena phoned Luis and said her partnership with Leck Schneider was over and she had regained control of her blog. She thanked Luis a thousand times for being so honest and for letting her know all about this up front. After all, Luis could have kept his mouth shut, posed in the nude, and taken all the money without saying anything. Most people would have done exactly that, especially for a quarter of a million dollars. An hour after Luis hung up the phone with Elena, he opened his laptop and went to her blog. All signs of the German publisher were gone, including the tasteful nude photos. The only thing Elena said in a short blog post, and Luis knew this was to cover herself, was that she'd decided to keep her blog small and not let anyone else become part of it.

A few days after that, the phone in New York rang late at night and one of Jase's friends in Los Angeles called to let them know the district attorney had, in fact, been secretly investigating Leck Schneider for child pornography for almost a year, along with German authorities. Thanks to what Luis had witnessed firsthand, they'd finally raided Leck's studio and were now gathering evidence in order to indict him. Luis had been right. Leck had been using the artistic photos as a cover, and producing sexually explicit material with underage models to generate revenue. Jase's friend said they hadn't arrested Leck yet; the investigation could take time.

But Leck wasn't allowed to leave the country, they'd shut down all his business operations in Los Angeles and Germany, and they'd seized his assets. They even said it was possible Luis would be called in as a witness to testify because the two guys had admitted they were only sixteen.

Luis agreed to do this without thinking twice about it. It was still unclear as to whether or not Leck would be returned to Germany to face charges, or if he'd face them in the U.S. but at least Luis found comfort in knowing Leck wasn't going to harm any minors again.

Jase was still punching pillows and grinding his teeth an hour later. He asked Luis, "Why didn't you tell this guy, Leck, to go fuck himself when he asked you to strip?"

Luis shrugged and looked down at his lap. "They were so nice, Jase. You had to be there. I didn't want to insult them and I had no idea they were working with minors. I didn't think it was a big thing to strip, being I was there for that reason. I'm not sure why you're still so upset. Nothing actually happened to *me*."

Jase sent him a glare. His face turned red and he shouted, "They were drooling over you, Luis, from what you told me. It was obscene."

"You and I have done far worse in the parking garage in front of the parking attendant," Luis said. "And you know about how I walk around in my underwear with Cory once in a while. Don't get so upset. It's all over now. Would you like a nice popsicle?" Jase had been going through a popsicle obsession lately, thanks to Hunter's private popsicle requests behind Luis's back. He'd also been sneaking them to Hunter when Luis wasn't looking, knowing full well how Luis hated Hunter to eat too much sugar and unhealthy foods. Luis suggested the popsicle to calm Jase down, hoping to throw him off track.

"It's not the same thing," Jase said. "First, what we do together as a couple in front of the parking attendant when no one else is looking is our business. We make a conscious decision and no one is exploiting us. Second, though I'm not fond of what goes on between you and Cory, I know Cory is a good guy and I trust him. But this guy Leck is no fucking good. He's a criminal. It's very different. And you do know this will be in the papers now. Your name will be mentioned and you'll most likely have to testify as an eyewitness. I know it's not bad publicity. You did a good thing this time, and

you're helping out young guys even if they don't realize it themselves. But now you're going to be involved in something you never wanted to be involved with in the first place."

Luis felt a sting in his eyes. "I'm sorry. I guess I should have left when he asked me to take off my clothes. I don't know what I was thinking." He felt a lump in his throat, mainly because he'd upset Jase so much and that was the last thing he'd wanted to do. He had to be more careful, and less carefree and trusting, even if his intentions were innocent. So he looked up and said, "I won't do anything with Cory anymore. No more teasing him to get work done, and no more walking around in my underwear. I didn't know it bothered you so much."

"Ah well," Jase said, "I told you I trust Cory and that doesn't bother me at all. I trust you, too. I'm not upset about that. I'm upset because some fucking creep wanted to take advantage of your good nature and you didn't see it coming. I swear I've never been this mad in my life. I could literally get on a plane right now, go to L.A., and strangle that bastard with my bare hands."

Luis walked to where Jase stood by the window. This was a side of Jase's personality he rarely saw. He placed his palm on Jase's stomach and said, "Jase, you know you don't mean that. Leck has been caught and he's going to get what he deserves. Nothing terrible really happened to me. I knew I had to get out fast and I did."

Jase pulled him closer and wrapped his arms around his shoulders. "I guess this is something that could only happen to you. But you have to be more careful. There's nothing wrong with being impolite when you think you're right about something."

Good thing Luis had decided not to tell Jase about the way Leck had felt around between his legs, or about the two young guys who had made comments about fucking him. It would only have made Jase angrier, and he may have gone to L.A. seeking revenge.

Luis took a deep breath and rested his cheek on Jase's chest. "I'll try, Jase," He said. "I'll work harder to be more careful. At least this wasn't as bad as the time I got mixed up with the drug-dealing real estate agent who was buying my used underwear. At least I didn't get arrested for doing nothing."

"I guess you can't help yourself," Jase said, kissing the top of his head. "Maybe the world isn't ready for someone like you."

\* \* \* \*

In the days that followed, Luis tried to forget about his experience with Leck Schneider. He wanted to focus on another way to raise money for the Angel Association and to start looking for a nanny-housekeeper as soon as possible. But when Jase and Luis received another call from Los Angeles while they were spending the weekend at Cider Mill Farm, and found out Leck Schneider had shot himself in a downtown Los Angeles hotel room, it was a bittersweet moment. On the one hand, Leck would never harm another minor again. But the violent way he'd died caused a cramp in the pit of Luis's stomach that lasted for days afterward. If it hadn't been for Luis agreeing to testify, the case against Leck wouldn't have been as strong. Leck must have known he'd never win. Jase tried to explain Luis hadn't done anything wrong. He wasn't responsible for what had happened to Leck and he'd done what any decent law abiding citizen would have done. And Luis knew deep down Jase was right about it not being his fault. But it still made him uneasy to think about what Leck had done to himself. And, on a certain level, it angered him, too. Now Leck, coward that he was, would never receive the punishment he truly deserved.

It was during these trying days when Luis was thankful Thomas von Klingensmith had come into their lives. Summer was approaching and Thomas was moved and settled into the house at the end of the road. When Luis told Thomas about what had happened with Leck, the underage porn, and the way Leck had died, Thomas was the only one who could actually offer Luis comfort. He had a way of counseling Luis



without Luis even knowing he was being counseled, which helped Luis see he'd done the right thing by exposing Leck to the authorities. There were times during that late spring, as the days grew longer and the nights grew warmer at Cider Mill Farm, when talking with Thomas von Klingensmith was better than taking the strongest dose of medicine or the stiffest drink. But more than that, for Luis it was refreshing to know there were, indeed, still people on Earth with decent intentions who wanted nothing more than to live a good, clean life.

## Chapter Four

On a warm Monday morning in June, Luis crept out of bed and tiptoed into the bathroom stark naked. He walked with a slight limp. His right leg was still asleep because Jase had been sleeping on top of him all night in the same position, grinding his dick into the small of Luis's back and snoring into Luis's ear. Luis didn't mind being pinned to the bed by Jase. In fact, Luis hadn't slept this well in weeks. And he liked waking up with Jase's spicy, masculine scent all over his body. There was nothing like the scent of Jase. It made Luis feel secure and comfortable and exciting all at the same time.

Jase was still sleeping and Luis wanted to surprise him before he left for work. They had decided to spend the summer at Cider Mill Farm again this year, only Jase was busy working on a new invention launching in the fall and he would be commuting back and forth from New York from Monday to Thursday. This time Jase had come up with an ingenious new household tool that would change the lives of many homeowners. He'd invented a long, sturdy extension pole that could attack multiple household tasks, from yanking wet leaves off hard to reach places on roofs to dusting the tall ceilings in many of the newer homes built in the latter part of the twentieth century. People would even be able to attach paintbrushes and rollers to this pole so they could paint formerly impossible places to reach without dangerous ladders. It would save the do-it-yourself crowd thousands of dollars by not having to hire professional painters. Though the product wasn't even out on the market yet, it had already been nominated for several design awards and written about in more than a few home renovation magazines.

But Luis wasn't thinking about Jase's new sturdy household pole when he went into the bathroom that morning. He was thinking about the sturdy pole between Jase's legs that was waiting for him back in the bedroom. The sun had just risen and Hunter would remain asleep for at least another hour. Jase was commuting to New York that day, but most of

his meetings were in the afternoon and he rarely ever had a set time schedule. Jase actually said if he left for the city around nine in the morning he missed all the heavy rush-hour traffic and got to his office at the same time he would have arrived if he'd left an hour and a half earlier.

Luis wanted to take advantage of this warm, sweet morning. They hadn't had sex since late Thursday night, which had only been a quickie where Jase had fucked him on his stomach for about five minutes before they'd fallen asleep—a fuck so violent they broke a lamp. The one thing Luis had learned how to do since Hunter had come into their lives was to balance his time between Jase and Hunter so neither one of them ever felt left out. It was often more complicated to do this with Hunter. Kids, he'd learned, tended to be very needy even when they weren't trying to be needy. But with Jase it was always easier. Most of the time all Luis had to do to please Jase was spread his legs and smile for a few minutes.

This morning, Luis had planned a particular treat for Jase he hadn't performed in a long time: an expert massage. He reached for a bottle of baby oil on a shelf in the medicine cabinet and grabbed two clean white towels from the linen closet. Before he went back into the bedroom, he covered his entire body with a shiny layer of oil, rubbing a few extra drops up and down his ass crack so he wouldn't have to bother with lube later. Then he quietly crossed back into the bedroom and climbed onto the mattress on his knees. The only problem with this little act was it tended to be messy, which meant Luis would spend a good deal of the morning trying to get baby oil out of the white sheets. But for the first time in months, he didn't have any modeling jobs for the next two weeks and he was looking forward to doing simple things like housework and laundry.

Jase was still sleeping on his stomach, so Luis gently pulled down the white top sheet and climbed up on Jase's back. He straddled Jase's waist, opened the bottle of baby oil, and poured a light stream across the top of Jase's wide shoulders. The morning sun was hitting Jase's back and the

silky oil defined each strong muscle. Luis licked his bottom lip and placed both palms on Jase's shoulder blades, still amazed this muscular hunk of a man was all his to play with.

When his gentle fingers pressed into Jase's back, Jase lifted his head and turned it sideways. He looked up and smiled. "Hmmm, that feels so good. You have such a light touch."

Luis leaned forward and kissed him on the lips. He knew Jase loved to be babied, not handled roughly. "Don't talk. Just close your eyes and relax, sweetie. Let me do all the work." Then, with the precision of a trained massage therapist, Luis started working on Jase's shoulders with calculated movements, balancing light and rough at different intervals.

He worked his way down Jase's spine, taking extra time to massage the small of his back. When he dug his fingertips into Jase's tight, muscular buttocks, he spread them apart and spent a few minutes licking his ass crack from the bottom all the way up to the top. Luis didn't rim Jase often, because Jase was usually the one rimming him, but when Luis did rim him he made sure he didn't miss a spot, especially the soft part in the middle that tasted the best.

After that, Luis moved down slowly and worked each muscle in Jase's legs, running his fingertips up and down Jase's calves with featherlike strokes. He massaged Jase's feet, then each individual toe. When Luis turned Jase over so he could work on the front of his body and he saw how hard Jase was, Luis sucked in his bottom lip and rubbed more baby oil around the lips of his own anus so he'd be ready to get fucked when the massage was finished.

Working on the front of Jase's body, Luis began with Jase's feet and started working his way up to the good parts. On the way, Luis purposely spread his legs and rubbed his balls as many times as he could against Jase's hairy legs. Though Luis loved every single inch of Jase's hard, baseball-player body, there had always been something extremely sexy to Luis about Jase's athletic legs. They weren't too hairy, nor were they too smooth. They were slightly bowed, but not in an obvious way. Sometimes, when Luis and Jase were out in

public in the summertime and Jase was wearing short pants, all Luis had to do was glance at Jase's legs and he felt his own pants tighten. Every locker room fantasy Luis had ever had since puberty began and ended with a set of legs like Jase's.

But what Luis was doing to Jase wasn't about locker room sex. It wasn't about literary sex or kinky porn sex, or any other sexual fantasy they did to keep things different once in a while. On that morning, this particular act Luis was performing was their own quiet brand of sex, the validation of the love and respect they shared with each other no one else would ever be able to understand.

Luis worked his way upward, pouring oil and rubbing it into Jase's muscles. When he reached the middle of Jase's body, he spread the oil everywhere except on Jase's dick and balls. He didn't want to massage this part of Jase with his hands. He wanted to massage the dick and balls with his lips and his tongue. He didn't want anything to mingle with the natural taste between Jase's legs, which had always seemed to Luis one of the sweetest pleasures on earth.

He took a long time sucking Jase's balls, individually and both at the same time. He spent even longer sucking the head of Jase's dick, milking for pre-come. While Luis did this, he spread his legs and stretched his arms so he could massage Jase's chest muscles at the same time, giving himself completely, wanting nothing more than to please, and impress, the man he loved. His ass went high and the lips of his anus parted. Whenever Luis made love to Jase, he always made certain he dove into the moment without any reservations, and his body language reflected this. He wanted to feel as dirty and seductive as he felt loving and appreciative. In other words, he didn't just bend over a little. He spread his legs and arched his back and crawled like an alley cat on the prowl. He didn't simply stick out his tongue partway and lick with the tip. He stuck it all the way out, to the point of exaggeration, and lapped with his mouth wide open.

When he finished massaging the tops of Jase's shoulders, he glanced down and kissed Jase on the lips. By that time his ass was rubbing against Jase's shaft and his heart

was racing. He pulled his tongue from Jase's mouth and said, "Can you taste your own dick in my mouth?"

Jase lifted his arms and placed both palms on the sides of Luis's ass. He nodded yes and said, "I'm not sure. I've never tasted my own dick before. What does it taste like?"

Luis started rocking his hips, with both palms against Jase's chest. He loved when Jase held the sides of his ass this way. He was indeed in good hands; it was a small part of the all the things he loved about getting fucked by Jase. "It tastes like you. There's no other taste like it in the world, so I can't really compare it to anything else." He leaned forward and kissed him again.

"It's a shame I can't taste it myself," Jase said, biting Luis's chin.

"It is a shame," Luis said. "I would love to watch you suck your own dick. We should try it sometime, to see if you can do it. I've heard some guys can, you know."

"I'm not one of them," Jase said, squeezing Luis's ass harder, pushing his hips back and forth across his dick.

"Fuck me," Luis said. He whispered this into Jase's ear with a sultry tone.

Jase slapped his ass hard. "Say please."

Luis's body jerked. "Please, fuck me."

"You know what to do."

Luis lifted his hips and reached around. He grabbed the middle of Jase's shaft and pointed the head to his hole. With one hand pressed to Jase's chest, he guided the erection into his body with the other and drew his head back. When he lowered his hips and it slid all the way inside, he closed his eyes and moaned softly. The baby oil was smoother than water-based lube. One of the best parts of being a monogamous couple was not having to worry about safe sex.

A minute after that, Jase started bucking his hips and Luis started riding. Luis closed his eyes, lifted his arms, and laced his fingers behind his neck. In this position, with Jase deep inside his body, he went into a trance. The faster he rode, the more Jase bucked. Each time Luis went down and his ass slapped against Jase's pelvis, Jase filled him, creating the

familiar sensation Jase was splitting him open without even trying too hard. Luis concentrated on tightening his sphincter muscle to create suction, and he knew he was doing a good job by the sounds coming from his ass and the way Jase was moaning and moving his legs around. They lost track of time and the fucking continued to increase. Luis eventually wound up bouncing up and down so fast the mattress began to squeak. Then the covers and top sheet fell off the bed and the pillows slid in different directions. When Jase's body finally went rigid and he filled Luis with a four-day load, Luis stroked his own dick a few times and blasted his all over Jase's chest.

When the mattress stopped squeaking and the pillows were on the floor, Luis rested the bottom of his ass on Jase's pelvis, as if holding his cock prisoner. When Luis sighed and opened his eyes, he glanced down and saw how red Jase's face was. There were beads of perspiration trickling down from Jase's temples to his ears, and the sandy blond hair above Jase's forehead had darkened and formed tiny wet fishhooks. Luis wiggled his hips. It took a while for Jase to go flaccid and Luis still felt every inch inside his body. "Now that's what I call a morning workout."

"The massage was nice," Jase said. "You haven't done that in a long time, not since the first year we were together. Thank you."

"I enjoyed doing it," Luis said. "How many chances does a guy like me get to feel up a hot guy like you?" It was usually the other way around, with Jase feeling Luis up.

"Feel free to grope me whenever and wherever you want," Jase said. "Exploit my body any way you want."

"You know what else I feel now?" Luis asked, glancing down at Jase with a smile.

"What?"

"I can feel you dripping out of me. You must have had a big load this morning." He knew Jase liked it when he talked about his big loads. For some reason, the bigger the load the more Jase lifted his chin and squared his shoulders. Luis figured it was an ego thing, and Luis was more than happy to placate for Jase's sake.

“You’re bad,” Jase said. “I knew you were a very dirty guy the minute I met you.”

“I was nothing like that back then,” Luis said. “If you recall, you’re the one who corrupted me. I hardly ever had sex before I met you.” Luis had done his fair share of teasing the older men he’d escorted to parties and night clubs and restaurants. But he’d never slept with one of them. He’d been waiting for his real life to begin, not looking for sex around every single corner of New York City like so many of the other guys his age.

Jase slapped his ass hard. “You forget. I was the virgin. I’d never been with a man. You’re the one who corrupted me.”

“And you loved it. You like it dirty.” Luis smiled, dipped his finger into a puddle of come he’d left on Jase’s chest, and licked his finger. He repeated this until all the come on Jase’s chest was gone.

“You have a point there,” Jase said. “You’d better clean up now. If you’re dripping you might ruin the sheets.”

Luis smiled. “Right now I’m going to do something else I haven’t done in a long time.”

“What’s that?”

“You’ll like it. It will give you something to think about all day while you’re in New York.”

Jase cocked his head, quirked his eyebrows, and sent Luis a quizzical stare. Then his eyes widened as he watched Luis slide gracefully off his dick and crawl down between his legs. But Jase’s jaw didn’t drop until he saw Luis open his mouth and stick out his tongue so he could slip Jase’s shrinking dick back into his mouth one more time.

\* \* \* \*

After breakfast, Luis kissed Jase on the cheek and watched him walk down to his truck at the other end of the driveway. “I’ll see you later tonight,” he said, calling from the back door. “Drive safely.” He always worried about Jase’s driving, especially in the city.

Jase stopped and turned. “Have a good day. I love you.” They’d just finished discussing Luis hiring a live-in



nanny-housekeeper because Luis had been putting it off for so long. Jase was serious and Luis knew it. With Luis's work schedule and taking care of Hunter full time, Luis had wound up so exhausted a month earlier he'd lost most of his energy. His doctor had diagnosed him as anemic. It wasn't anything serious, just that Luis was overworked and not paying enough attention to his health. But Jase had been after him to either hire a nanny-housekeeper or lighten up with his modeling jobs.

"Love you, too," Jase said. "And don't forget about what we talked about this morning with the housekeeper thing. I don't want you getting sick on me, seriously."

"I know," Luis said. "I'll deal with it. I promise."

He'd already called an employment agency in New York last week, against his better judgment. What more did Jase want?

When Luis turned to go back inside, he waved at Cory. He was down near the barn talking with the guys who would be installing the new swimming pool Jase had been dying to get since they'd bought Cider Mill Farm. "Good morning," Luis said. "If you want some coffee, there's a fresh pot in the kitchen."

"Thanks," Cory said. "I might take you up on that. I want to finish up here and make sure everything's set for the pool." They'd put him in charge of overseeing everything at Cider Mill Farm.

Luis turned and walked back into the kitchen. Hunter was sitting at the table eating dry cereal and Camp was sitting on the floor beneath his chair, glancing up with wide eyes. Hunter didn't think Luis could see him dropping pieces of cereal down in Camp's direction. He was fast about it. One quick swipe of his tiny hand and right into Camp's open mouth.

"Do you have all your things ready?" Luis asked. He was talking about Hunter's small back pack and his materials for the summer camp in which Luis had enrolled him. It was basically a softball camp for kids—boys and girls—between the ages of four and six, sponsored by the local town library. Luis and Jase thought it would be nice for Hunter to get to know a few of the local kids. They were still undecided about

whether or not they wanted to raise Hunter full time in New York or Cider Mill Farm.

Hunter jumped off the chair and patted Camp on top of the head. He grabbed his backpack and told the dog, “You be good while I’m at baseball camp. I’ll be home this afternoon.” Then he sent Luis a glance and said, “I can walk to the end of the driveway alone, Daddy. It’s cool.”

Luis blinked. “I know you can, Hunter. But I think I’ll walk you down this morning to get a little exercise if that’s okay.”

Hunter shrugged. “I guess so. Just don’t hug me or kiss me when the bus comes. You can do that right now.”

So Luis hugged and kissed him and they stepped out the back door. Hunter walked ahead of him all the way down the driveway, swinging his backpack and kicking stones. Luis couldn’t figure out whether to smile or start crying. In a matter of less than a month, Hunter had undergone a transformation Luis hadn’t predicted. He no longer needed the nightlight when he went to bed. He’d actually jumped up and down when Luis had mentioned the baseball camp. It was as if he’d gone from baby to little man overnight, especially when he told Luis not to worry about him while he was at camp. And now, this announcement about walking to the end of the driveway alone—a year earlier Hunter would have been clinging to Luis’s side, clutching his hand and staring down at his shoes. Though this new independence was a good thing, Luis was secretly hoping Hunter wouldn’t stop asking for his bedtime stories for at least another year.

## Chapter Five

When the big yellow school bus pulled away from the driveway, Luis folded his arms across his chest and watched it slog up the road with its loud, grinding engine and rough gears. Hunter had boarded without giving Luis so much as a backward glance. Luis saw him run to the middle of the bus to sit with his best friend Justin, Josh's and Roland's son, whom Luis hadn't seen since around Christmastime. Even though Josh and Roland were a gay couple raising a child just like Luis and Jase, and they commuted back and forth from New York like Luis and Jase, Luis made a point of not getting too friendly with them. He didn't stop bothering with them altogether; he just maintained a distance. Luis was already friendly enough with Josh's ex-wife, Hillary, in New York, with regard to the Angel Association. Though Hillary never stopped talking, and the way she liked to take control of everything often made Luis clench his teeth, they were both very dedicated to helping unwed mothers find solutions to abandoning their newborn babies. And Hunter seemed to like Justin, even if Justin was a little older and a bit slower intellectually. Luis's problem with Roland and Josh had to do with their open relationship. They thought nothing of bringing other men into their bed, which left them with little in common with Luis and Jase. And Josh, the younger of the two, was forever trying to get into Luis's pants when no one was looking. No matter how many times Luis told him he didn't cheat on Jase, Josh was always sending him seductive glances and patting him gently on the ass.

As Luis turned to walk back to the house, he glanced over at Ted Barker's empty house. It was to the right of the driveway, an old white stucco over stone farmhouse that sat close to the road. Ted had booked a three-month trip to Europe that summer and he wouldn't be around at all, which seemed to make Jase smile more than usual. Though Luis had never been sexually attracted to Ted, he had bonded with him as a friend, which often caused Jase to shove his hands into

his pockets so no one would see him clenching his fists. Sometimes he even popped a stick of gum into his mouth and chewed so fast his ears moved. Jase wasn't normally the jealous type. He didn't seem to mind the way Luis was always harmlessly teasing and flirting with Cory, and he laughed at the way Josh was always trying to get into Luis's pants. But there was something about Ted Barker that could set Jase's jaw and turn his face red with rage. Maybe it was because Ted treated Luis with respect on an intellectual level. In other words, Luis wasn't a sex toy to Ted, and Ted was interested in more than fucking Luis's hot ass. To Ted, Luis was a smart guy who held serious conversations. And no matter how many times Luis assured Jase he wasn't attracted to Ted, Jase always glared at Ted whenever he was around.

Luis sighed and turned to look at Angus Bernie's old stone house, which flanked the other side of the easement road. The Reverend von Klingensmith's big black Cadillac sedan was parked in the driveway and there was a white pickup truck parked behind it. The pickup truck was an older model, a compact-sized truck, with extra-large tires that seemed to lift it into the air and create an off balanced, uncertain image. Luis thought about knocking on Thomas's door, but when he saw the pickup truck he decided not to interrupt him without calling first.

But as Luis turned to walk back to the house, Thomas shouted his name from the front yard. Then his voice went up with a singsong inflection and he said, "I was going to phone you, Luis. This nice young man has been looking for you and he stopped to ask for directions." Thomas gestured to a handsome young blond guy on his right and said, "He says he was sent here by an employment agency in New York." Thomas was wearing beige shorts pulled high above his extra-large waist, and his pure white, hairless legs looked almost transparent in the strong morning sun. He'd just had his silver hair tinted with a blue rinse, which had been a big mistake.

Luis turned and smiled. The employment agency he'd contacted last week hadn't called to set up any appointments. The young man standing beside Thomas wore shiny bright

blue basketball shorts, white cross training shoes, and a baggy white T-shirt. The blond hair on his athletic legs—the shorts came down below his knees—was a shade darker than the short blond hair on his head. He had deep cleft in his strong, square chin. For a moment, Luis thought he'd met this guy somewhere before. But when he caught his breath and realized it was probably his imagination, he crossed to the white picket fence that surrounded the stone house and said, "Good morning Thomas." He smiled at the young man. "What can I do for you?" Luis forced a smile. He'd expected the employment agency to send a middle-aged woman with a gray bun, half glasses, thick ankles, and gum-soled shoes. Something along the lines of a cross between Nanny McPhee and Mary Poppins, with or without the bad teeth and magic umbrella. He hadn't expected a college basketball jock with dimples in his cheeks and bright blue eyes. Frankly, it crossed Luis's mind this guy should be auditioning for modeling jobs instead of housekeeping jobs.

Thomas said, with his glance set at the protrusion between the young guy's legs, "This nice young man is Darius Denby. He says he's here about a nanny-housekeeper position at Cider Mill Farm." Thomas's voice went higher and sounded excited. He was one step away from dropping to his knees and sticking out his tongue. His face turned pink and he smiled so widely Luis could see his gold crowns. Good-looking young Darius-the-jock had driven Thomas into a state of sheer giddiness and the poor guy hadn't done anything but stand there and smile.

Luis had seen this reaction before with a lot of his former older clients. They simply couldn't help themselves. Whenever older gay men like Thomas were in the company of handsome athletic young men like Darius Denby they always seemed to lose their senses and bubble over with uncontrolled excitement. It had something to do with basketball shorts, hairy blond legs, and sneakers.

So Luis pretended to ignore Thomas's excitement. He maintained an even voice and said, "I'm Luis Fortune. I live at the other end of the road. Were you sent by the agency? No

one contacted me about it.” Luis wasn’t sure whether or not it was considered discriminatory to be against hiring a young man like Thomas for a nanny-housekeeper position. So he spoke with no emotion, paying close attention to each word that came from his mouth. The least the employment agency could have done was contact him ahead of time to let him know someone was coming.

Darius took a few steps forward and lifted his right arm across the fence. When he shook Luis’s hand, he smiled and said, “I’m sorry about that. I was told the agency had contacted you and you’d be waiting to interview me.” He laughed and shook his head and his voice was deep and sincere. “I’m sorry I bothered you. I’ll leave and wait for the agency to contact you. I feel so awkward now.” Then he turned, lowered his head, and started walking back toward his truck.

Thomas’s smile turned into a frown. He sent Luis a pleading stare, as if to say, *please don’t let him leave*. For a moment, Luis was worried Thomas might throw his arms around Darius and console him.

So Luis shrugged his shoulders and said, “As long as you’re here, you may as well come back to the house and we’ll talk.”

Thomas smiled again. His faith in Luis had been restored.

Darius stopped walking and turned. “Are you sure, Mr. Fortune? I don’t want to put you out in any way. I can always come back at another time.”

Though Luis wasn’t thrilled about interviewing a guy who looked like a personal trainer at his gym, he started to feel bad about turning him away now that he was already here. “It’s no problem,” Luis said. “And please call me Luis. I have a light schedule today and as long as you’re here I may as well interview you.” It was the least he could do, after all. But he had no intention of hiring him. He was doing it to be polite.

So Darius left his truck in Thomas’s driveway—Thomas said he’d keep a “watchful” eye on it and continued to gaze at the slight bulge between Darius’s legs—and they

walked back to the house. On the way, Luis learned Darius was the oldest child of seven, from a household in Utah with a single working mother. Darius had helped raise his brothers and sisters, from doing their laundry to cooking their meals. He knew how to clean house, shop for groceries, and play the piano. After high school, he'd won a scholarship to Temple University in Philadelphia and he'd majored in psychology. His goal was to get his master's degree in clinical psychology, but he was taking a year off to save money so he could go back to school and study part time. He said he was looking for a job as a live-in housekeeper so he could save up enough to pay for his own tuition, and he wanted to continue working full time when he went back for his master's. But more than that, he loved working with kids and was hoping to find a job with a family that had kids. When he said he missed his own brothers and sisters, he looked down at his sneakers and frowned.

When they reached the patio off the kitchen, Luis turned and said, "You certainly sound like you've been working hard all your life. Is there anything you can't do?" Luis respected hard work. He'd always worked hard himself, and he was still working hard, proving to himself he could do anything he set his mind to.

"I'm not great with construction or anything mechanical," Darius said. He shrugged and lifted his large hands. "The best I can do is screw in a light bulb. Even then I'm not too sure what I'm doing."

Luis laughed. "Well, there's nothing mechanical about this job, and we already have a full-time handyman. Basically the job involves housekeeping and taking care of Hunter when Jase and I are working." Then Luis went into a detailed explanation of the actual job requirements. He made a point of telling Darius that whomever they hired would be expected to go back and forth with them between New York and Bucks County, and possibly spend some time in Alaska on holidays.

Before he had a chance to finish speaking, Cory walked up to the patio and looked Darius up and down. He rubbed his jaw and asked Luis, "Do you need any help right

now? I was going to knock off for lunch. But I can stick around if you need me.” Then he frowned at Darius and looked him up and down again.

Luis smiled. Cory had always been protective. “Cory, this is Darius. He’s applying for the job as housekeeper.” Luis left off the nanny part. It didn’t seem right calling a young man like Darius a nanny. “Darius, this is Cory, our handyman, designer, and the one who does almost everything around here.” He added the last part to boost Cory’s male ego. He didn’t want Cory to feel threatened by Darius.

Cory sent Luis a blank stare. He didn’t make a move to shake Darius’s hand, not even when Darius extended his. “Can I talk to you about the pool over there?” He gestured to the back door.

They left Darius standing alone and walked to the back door. When they were out of listening distance, Cory said, “This guy doesn’t look like the housekeeper type to me.”

“He didn’t look like the housekeeper type to me either,” Luis said. “But I’ve been talking to him and asking questions and he really does seem competent and reliable.”

“Did you notice the way Camp didn’t go running over to him?”

Luis had missed that completely. He looked at a lounge chair on the patio not far from where Darius was standing and saw Camp. The little dog was sitting up on the end of the chair, glancing at Darius’s back. He wasn’t making a move one way or the other. “Maybe Camp is tired. He’s getting older now.” Camp had been a rescue dog Luis had found in a back alley, so he had no way of knowing exactly how old he was. Their vet said he could do tests to find out, but Luis figured they were better off not knowing. If it turned out Camp was actually ten years old, or even older, it would have killed Luis to think he wouldn’t have him as long as he’d hoped he’d have him.

“And look at what he’s wearing,” Cory said. “Who goes to a job interview dressed like *that*?”

Luis wouldn’t have gone to an interview in basketball shorts and sneakers. But he knew most people were dressing



more casually these days. They dressed in shorts and sneakers on planes. They went to the movies the same way. Who was he to judge the way anyone else dressed? Besides, Luis knew the shorts and sneakers Cory was wearing weren't cheap. They'd probably cost him as much as a pair of khaki slacks and brown shoes would have cost. "He looks neat and clean," Luis said, "and that's all I care about. He's not applying for a job as a fashion model. To be honest, I like his casual look. He's not pretentious at all."

"I'd wait until Jase gets home to make a decision about this guy," Cory said. "At least think about it first. Don't jump into this with blinders."

"Are you implying I'm impulsive, Cory?" Luis asked. "I happen to have very good instincts. Look at Thomas. I knew he'd be the perfect tenant for Angus Bernie's house. I've never met a more pleasant man in my life. And he's even promised to pull out his crystal ball and tell me my future."

Cory rolled his eyes when Luis mentioned the crystal ball. "Look," Cory said, "it's none of my business and I don't want to speak out of turn, but I know you. You're too trusting sometimes. You think everyone is honest and they aren't. Just think about it before you hire him. Please wait for Jase."

"Now you sound like Jase," Luis said. He didn't need two husbands.

"I'm looking out for you, is all."

"And sometimes you don't trust enough," Luis said. "But I promise. I won't make any decisions unless I'm absolutely sure he's the right person for the job."

However, after Cory left, Luis made a fresh pot of coffee and wound up spending the next hour with Darius at the kitchen table. They went into more detail about Darius's experience with taking care of a household, about his experience with kids, and about what his actual responsibilities would be. Luis even showed him the small back bedroom and bathroom off the kitchen where he'd be living if he took the job. During the interview and the tour, Luis couldn't find anything wrong with him other than he didn't look like a housekeeper.

Darius answered every question with a look in the eye and a friendly, even tone. He didn't hesitate once and he didn't have to gaze up at the ceiling to think about anything too long. When it finally came out he'd coached a Little League baseball team back in Utah, Luis sat back and pressed his palm to his chest and listened. Hunter's serious interest in baseball was starting to surface, and this was one area where Luis couldn't help him. The only thing Luis knew about baseball was that baseball players were fast in bed, good with their hands, and looked hot in their uniforms. He'd dated a professional baseball player before he'd met Jase, but he knew nothing about the game of baseball and couldn't have cared less. Though Jase was great at all sports, and he made all the time he could to be with Hunter and talk about sports, it certainly couldn't hurt to have a guy around who used to coach baseball, especially Little League.

By the time they finished the pot of coffee, the only question that remained in the back of Luis's mind was whether or not Darius was gay. It didn't matter one way or the other, but he wanted Darius to know what he was getting into if he took this job. With guys like Darius, being gay wasn't always obvious. So Luis finally asked, choosing his words with care, "Do you feel comfortable working in a gay-friendly atmosphere? My husband and I live like everyone else. But we do have a lot of gay friends over, mostly gay couples. We don't hide this from anyone, especially not from Hunter. We're public figures and we learned a long time ago it's best to be honest and open up front."

Darius sent him a glance and smiled. "I admire gay couples who have been in long-term relationships. I'm hoping someday I can find the same thing myself." When he said this, his blue eyes grew wide and innocent, as if he still had so much to learn about life.

So he was gay. Luis tilted his head to the side and nodded. He didn't care what Cory had said. Darius made Luis feel as though he'd found the most perfect housekeeper in the universe. So he smiled and asked, "When can you start?"

"As soon as you want," Darius said. "The lease to my

studio apartment is up and I can move in tomorrow if you like.”

Luis stood up and shook his hand. “We’ll be here. With a child in the house, we’re always up early. I’ll get your room ready and you can move in tomorrow morning.”

Darius stood and said, “Thank you so much. I promise I won’t disappoint you.”

Then Luis escorted him outside and watched him walk back to Thomas’s house alone so he could retrieve his truck. As he was crossing the driveway, Cory was getting out of his truck with tile samples for the new swimming pool. When Darius saw Cory, he lifted his arm and said, “See you tomorrow, buddy. I got the job.” He smiled and waved his hand. The next thing Luis saw was Cory’s lugubrious expression coming in his direction.

Cory handed Luis the tile samples and said, “I knew you were going to hire him when I left. I would have bet money on it.”

Luis shrugged. “He’s perfect for the job. And he’s gay.”

Cory frowned. “I could have told you he was gay.”

Luis sent him a sideways glance. “How did *you* know?”

“I saw the way he was looking at your ass,” Cory said with a blank expression.

Luis quirked his right eyebrow. “Well, I didn’t notice that, and I can promise you the reason I hired him had nothing to do with that.” He was telling the truth. Although Darius was young and attractive by anyone’s standard, he wasn’t the type of man Luis would ever look at twice. Luis liked his men to be like Jase: a little rough around the edges, and preferably over the age of thirty. Besides, the rules of attraction had always been more emotional for Luis than physical.

“I know that,” Cory said. “I know you. It’s *him* I don’t trust.”

“Give him a chance,” Luis said. “He’s really a smart guy with good intentions.”

Cory turned and started walking down to the grassy area to the left of the barn that had been staked for the new pool. "We'll see," he said. "At least you have me around to make sure you guys are okay."

"You know, that's one of the nicest things you've ever said, Cory." Luis bent down, picked up a small pebble, and tossed it at Cory's back. "Did I ever tell you you're a sweet guy?"

Cory looked back over his shoulder. He sent Luis a somber glance, and in his driest tone he said, "If you did, it must have been one of those times when I wasn't paying attention to you."

Luis laughed. "You're an asshole, too."  
"I know."

## Chapter Six

Early the following morning, Darius Denby opened his eyes before the alarm on his cell phone sounded. He'd set it for five o'clock so he could arrive at his new job before Jase Nicholas left for work, and it was only quarter to five. He switched on the light beside the bed and rubbed his eyes. He remained in bed for the next half hour, uncovered and stark naked, with his long legs slightly parted and his right hand clutched to his erection.

The dingy motel room outside of Philadelphia he'd been staying in since he'd arrived from Los Angeles had a lumpy, sagging mattress; brown shag carpet that was so ancient it had matted together in high-traffic areas; and chipped, Danish modern furniture that had been haphazardly repaired too many times with duct tape and metal clamps. The old-fashioned television Darius had been using to watch porn had dials and knobs, and the toilet in the white tiled bathroom had so many rust stains a sand blaster wouldn't have been able to make it shine again. On the cloudy windows that looked out to a row of parked cars, an adult bookstore, and a discount department store in the distance, hung white sheers that had yellowed and turned brittle to the touch over the years. Darius didn't bother to close them. In fact, he'd purposely switched on the lamp because he was hoping someone would pass by his room and see him spread naked across the bed, stroking his dick. On the cross-country road trip he'd recently taken, he'd learned that in motels like this leaving the curtains open and the door unlocked was the perfect invitation for closeted gay men. Darius needed a little extra cash, just something to tide him over until he received his first paycheck from his new employers, Jase Nicholas and Luis Fortune.

Darius heard the door in the next room slam shut, so he started stroking his erection again and glanced up at the ceiling. When he noticed a shadow pass by his window, he pointed his dick up straight so whoever was passing by

wouldn't be able to miss it. He struck a seductive pose and started playing with himself in a very blatant way. He sighed and closed his eyes for a moment, wondering how in the world he'd been reduced to living this way again. He hadn't had to turn a trick or wiggle his jock ass for money since he was sixteen years old, not since he'd been discovered by Leck Schneider ten years earlier. Though Darius had started out at the tender age of sixteen by posing nude and working as a young top stud in Leck's adult films, it didn't take Leck long to fall in love with Darius and move him into his home, and his life. They'd spent ten glorious years together, then, thanks to Luis Fortune agreeing to testify against Leck, Darius had lost everything he'd worked so hard for with the click of a gun. When Luis confirmed to the authorities Leck was producing underage porn, and Leck pointed the gun to his own head and pulled the trigger, Leck might as well have been pointing at Darius's head, too. Leck, the bastard and the love of Darius's life, had left him high and dry, with nothing but the clothes on his back. If Darius hadn't been smart enough to locate the pittance of cash Leck kept in their bedroom hidden in the closet wall, Darius would have been so broke he wouldn't have been able to buy his used pickup truck and pay for the gas on the cross-country trip.

The shadow outside the motel room window remained still. For a minute or two, Darius knew he'd attracted attention and he spread his legs wider so whoever it was could see everything he was offering. A moment after that, the shadow moved to the right and Darius heard the doorknob slowly turn. He took a quick breath and put his other hand behind his head. When he looked up and saw the middle-aged man in the dark business suit cross through the doorway, he nodded and said, "Hey, buddy." Darius figured him for another married salesman on the road. These guys were always looking for action on the down low, even more than the truck drivers. At least this one wasn't bad looking: a calmer version of Charlie Sheen.

The man closed the door behind him and stepped into the dingy room. He glanced up and down at Darius's naked,

muscular body and bit his lip for a moment. Then he moved closer and said, "What are you into, buddy?"

Darius smiled and released his dick. When the shaft slapped against his flat stomach he spread his legs wider, reached down to tug his balls, and said, "I'm more interested in what you're into, man. I know how to do any number of things to please guys like you. I work hard." He knew he couldn't come out and ask for money directly. But he wanted to get the point across this wasn't a freebie. This guy could have been an undercover cop and Darius had already been arrested once for soliciting men. It happened the first week he'd landed in Los Angeles. He'd only been fourteen years old and hadn't had enough money to buy a fast-food meal. Oh, he'd done what he'd had to do to survive.

The guy shrugged and glanced down at Darius's naked legs. He pursed his lips and sucked in some air. "I guess you could say I'm the submissive type." His hands were smooth, and Darius didn't miss the gold wedding band on his ring finger.

Darius smiled. He knew exactly what to do now. He rose from the bed and walked up behind the guy. When he wrapped his arms around the guy's waist and pressed his erection into the guy's ass, he lowered his voice and whispered into the guy's ear. "Why don't you drop your pants and climb up on the bed on your hands and knees? I'll take good care of you. I know what you want, man."

The guy took a quick breath and arched his back. "Fuck me," he said. He reached back to hold Darius's cock. "I want this inside me. It's been a long time."

Darius smiled. He now knew for sure this guy wasn't a cop and he wasn't going to get busted. "I'll fuck your fucking brains out, but it's gonna cost you three hundred for that kind of a fuck." His strong hands went down and he started to unbuckle the guy's belt. While he did this, he rubbed his morning stubble across the guy's neck and moaned into his ear. Darius knew he had this guy where he wanted him; there weren't many submissive men who could resist the strong hands of a twenty-six-year-old like Darius.

The guy's head went back and he closed his eyes. "I'm sorry. I only have two hundred in cash."

Darius had expected this; he knew the guy was telling the truth. That's why he'd asked for three hundred in the first place. So he reached down between the guy's legs and grabbed his ass hard. It was firmer than he'd expected. "For two hundred I'll fuck you doggie style," he said in a low, raspy tone. "I'll mount that pretty ass and ride you like a fucking stud horse. You won't be able to walk when I'm finished with you."

The guy nodded yes and reached down to unfasten his pants. When they dropped to his ankles, he stepped out of them and said, "Yeah, stud. Fuck me."

It turned out this guy wasn't as shy as Darius thought he'd be. He didn't even bother to remove all his clothes. He kicked off his shoes, climbed onto the bed, and spread his legs. He knew how to take every single inch and he wasn't ashamed to beg for more. The entire act took less than twenty minutes. By the time the guy pulled up his pants and left two hundred dollars on the foot of the bed, Darius was leaning against the headboard with his feet crossed and a cigarette dangling from his lips. The condom was still on his dick and he watched the guy finish dressing. The guy tucked in his shirt and fastened his belt, then adjusted his pants and looked down at his shoes. When he patted his pockets to make sure he still had his wallet and car keys, he said, "Thanks, man. You really are a *stud* horse. I'm already having trouble walking."

Darius laughed. He seemed like a sweet guy in spite of the circumstances under which they'd met. "Don't mention it, daddy."

Then the guy turned and headed back to the door with his head pointed down and part of the back of his suit jacket tucked into his pants. He lifted his arm and waved, then turned back for one last look at what might likely have been the best fuck of his life to date.

Darius pulled the condom off and reached down for the two hundred dollars. He spread the twenty-dollar bills out



fan style and sighed. He'd been able to make five times this amount back in Los Angeles on a good night; he'd fucked fat-assed Nellie old queens for more than ten times this amount without giving it a second thought. And now, in a dank motel room on the fringes of fucking Philadelphia, he'd been lucky to get this much. Darius tossed the money on the bed and clenched his fists. At least he'd given someone something to remember forever. But Darius wanted his life back, he wanted Luis Fortune and Jase Nicholas to suffer, and he wanted revenge for what they'd all done to Leck Schneider. For Darius, it hadn't only been about money and lifestyle with Leck. Leck had been the only man Darius had ever really loved.

\* \* \* \*

The further north Darius drove, the more overcast the sky became. Even though it was June, it felt more like April. By the time he pulled into the driveway at Cider Mill Farm, the old guy with blue hair at the end of the road was outside watering his small container garden. It was still early, almost nine o'clock. Darius stopped and lowered his window to say hello. He had to think hard to remember the old guy's name was Thomas, pronounced with an accent on the last syllable. "Good morning, Tho-mas," Darius said. "I'm moving in today." Then he spread his legs wider and pulled up his shorts so Thomas could look into the truck and see part of his underwear.

Thomas lifted his head and smiled. "Well, isn't that nice? I think you're going to like it around here. I haven't been here for long, and I love it." He set the watering can down and moved closer to Darius's truck so he could look inside. When he reached the picket fence, he looked into the car, gazed at Darius's fuzzy blond legs, and said, "If you need anything, let me know. I'm always around." He sounded as giddy today as he had the day before when Darius first met him.

Darius smiled. The old guy was gaping between his legs now and practically drooling at his innocently exposed underwear. "Thanks, man," Darius said, enjoying the attention.

"I'll remember that." Then he waved and started driving toward the main house, wondering if old guys like Thomas knew how obvious they were. Darius had a feeling if he'd pulled out his dick and asked Thomas to come over and play with it, he could have made even more money that morning. But he didn't want to stir anything up. He knew how important it was to maintain a good standing with this job. If he didn't, they'd never trust him and he'd never be able to accomplish what he wanted.

When he pulled up to the house, he rubbed his jaw and looked it over. It reminded him of one of those drafty old-time historic houses he'd read about in middle school, the kind of place where George Washington had spent the night. The exterior was white stucco over stone, with a few sections of stone purposely exposed in just the right places. Each window was identical: tall and thin, with white trim. The shutters on the first floor were black; on the second floor, white. Although the house was massive, there was also something plain and simple about it, too. Even the neat round boxwoods surrounding the house had a toned down appeal. Coming from L.A., where everything was exaggerated to the point of gaudy, Darius wasn't sure whether or not they wanted the house to look this plain or they were cheap. In his opinion, a few marble statues, fake palm trees, and Grecian columns would have been an improvement.

He parked around back in an out-of-the-way parking space. The ancient house didn't seem to have a garage and he didn't want to overstep on his first day by parking next to everyone else. There was already a small black Cadillac sedan parked close to the back patio, which he figured had to be Luis's pretentious car. Beside the Cadillac there was a big black pickup truck and a Jeep Wrangler. He figured the black pickup belonged to Jase, the infamous virgin billionaire, whom he hadn't met yet. He'd read that Jase only drove pickup trucks. When he'd seen that irritating young handyman with the dark beard—he couldn't remember his name—walking around by the barn, he'd figured the Jeep belonged to him.

The handyman looked up and sent him a glare. Darius opened the door and climbed out of his truck. He waved at the handyman and nodded. But the handyman looked down at what he was doing and didn't return the wave, which made Darius frown. He knew he'd have to be on his best behavior and watch every step with this guy. This handyman would be watching every move he made. It wasn't worth the effort to try to win him over. Darius had run into guys like him before and there was nothing he knew he could do to please them. The best approach was to remain quiet and do his job.

And if he had to shut him up, he'd deal with him in due time.

So Darius ignored the handyman and reached into the back of the truck for two suitcases that held everything he owned in the world. They were filled with clothes and other toiletries, jock straps, and sweat socks. The only personal item from his old life was a small framed photo of Leck that he'd wrapped and hidden in three pair of boxer briefs. He'd have to unpack the photo quickly and shove it under his mattress so no one would see it. He knew he should have thrown it away, but it was the only thing he had left of his former life with Leck, and the one thing he couldn't seem to part with no matter how hard he tried. It always amazed him at how he could feel such peace, and still hurt so much at the same time, whenever he looked at the photo.

He knocked on the back door a couple of times, but they were speaking so loudly no one heard him. So he swung the screen door open and stepped inside. The funny-looking little bald dog was the first to notice him enter. Darius couldn't remember his name either; it was something like Champ, or Chance, but couldn't be certain. The little dog jumped off a bench next to the kitchen table and started barking. Darius hadn't expected the sound to come from such a ratty-looking runt. He felt like kicking it as hard as he could, so he could see it sail across the room and land against the wall. But he only smiled and looked down. "Hey, little guy. It's only me, Darius."

Luis was the first to come over and greet him. He smiled and said, “Just put your suitcases down right there and come over and join us. I’d like you to meet Jase and Hunter. Jase is leaving for work in a few minutes and Hunter is leaving for baseball camp a few minutes after that, but I’d like you meet everyone before they leave. I’ve been telling them all about you since yesterday.”

Darius smiled and walked over to the table. The little boy, Hunter, was on a chair on his knees picking at a bowl of dry cereal. Jase was reading the newspaper and sipping a cup of coffee. Darius had seen photos of the famous Virgin Billionaire from Alaska, but he was amazed at how little justice the photos had done him. Jase Nicholas, sitting there in a casual white polo shirt and beige slacks, was probably one of the most attractive men Darius had ever seen. With his short sandy blond hair and fair features, he could have passed for Darius’s older brother. But definitely not his father. Darius had heard Jase was in his early forties, but he looked more like he was in his early thirties.

Darius sent Jase one of his warmest smiles and said, “Good morning.” Then he reached across the table and shook Jase’s hand.

“This is our new housekeeper, guys,” Luis said in a jaunty tone, as if trying too hard to impress them with the new man he’d hired. “His name is Darius Denby and he’s a big fan of baseball.”

Hunter looked up from his bowl of cereal and gaped at Darius. “*Seriously?*”

Darius smiled and said, “That’s right. I used to coach Little League in my own hometown back in Utah.” This was an outright lie. Though he was a fan of baseball and he had played Little League for a few years, he’d never actually coached anyone. He’d spent most of his time in the dugout, selling pot and other illegal substances to the other boys, occasionally getting them stoned so he could suck them off after practice and blackmail them for petty cash at a later date.

Hunter smiled. “Cool.” He turned to Jase. “Did you hear that, Dad?”

Jase smiled and made a move to stand. “Yes, I heard.” He turned to Darius and said, “Luis has been telling me all about you, Darius. I’m glad you’ve decided to join our little family.”

“Please don’t get up, Mr. Nicholas,” Darius said.

“That will be enough of that,” Luis said in his perky, casual, irritating voice. “We’re all on a first-name basis around here. It’s very casual. We’re Luis and Jase.”

Darius smiled and said, “I hope I’m not too casual. I basically dress like this all the time, if that’s okay. If you’d rather have me wear some type of uniform, though, I don’t mind.” He gestured to the outfit he was wearing, a pair of white basketball shorts, a black oversized T-shirt, and the same white cross-training shoes he always wore. The shoes been the last expensive gift he’d received from Leck, who’d gone shopping at an expensive shop on Rodeo Drive and bought them for Darius as a surprise.

Jase waved his arm. “Don’t be silly. You look fine. Like Luis said, we’re very casual. I know a lot of people think we live like English royals, but we really don’t. We’re simple people, in spite of what you read in the tabloid newspapers.”

*Yeah right, Darius thought. You’re simple folk with billions of dollars and not a care in the world. Try telling that to someone who just fucked a married guy, with an asshole like the Lincoln Tunnel, in a horseshit hotel room for two hundred bucks.* But he continued to smile. He turned to Luis and asked, “Is there anything I can do right now?”

Luis was standing over the sink, rinsing out a frying pan he’d just used. “Why don’t you sit down for now?” he said. “Have a cup of coffee and get to know everyone. After I get Hunter off on the bus, I’ll go over everything about the job with you.”

Hunter looked up. “Can Darius walk me down to the bus this morning?”

Darius noticed Luis exchange a glance with Jase, as if he hadn’t expected this question to come up the first morning Darius was there. And while Luis and Jase looked at each other, Darius reached around for a knob on the gas cooking

range and turned it on. This was an impulsive move on his part, something Darius hoped would get him in good graces with Jase. He'd noticed Luis had left a paper bag on top of the stove and it was an accident waiting to happen. All Darius had to do was give it a little fuel.

Jase shrugged his shoulders. "I guess Darius can walk you down to the bus." While he spoke he continued to stare at Luis, as if waiting for Luis to react.

Luis set a dish towel down on the counter and said, "I don't mind walking you down, Hunter. I like walking you down to the bus."

Darius smiled. Evidently, Luis was the clinging type of parent.

"But I'd like Darius to walk me from now on," Hunter said. "We can talk about baseball on the way. Please, Daddy."

Though Darius could see Luis he was not thrilled by this turn of events, he did take it in stride.

Luis smiled. "Then I guess Darius will walk you to the bus this morning."

When Jase reached for his coffee, he looked up and sniffed. "I smell something burning."

Then the ugly dog started to bark and Hunter pointed to the gas cooking range. The bag Luis had left on top of the burner had caught fire and the flames were reaching up to the hood over the range. If it had been left to burn out of control, the fire would have spread to a dish towel on the counter and possibly the Roman shades on the window above the sink. But before Luis could pull out the fire extinguisher from beneath the kitchen sink, and before Jase could run over from the table, Darius grabbed the burning bag with his bare hands, tossed it out the back door, and stomped on it in the grass beside the patio with his cross-training shoes until the fire was completely out.

When the commotion was over and Darius went back into the kitchen, he watched as Jase gazed down at the gas stove and frowned. Jase switched the burner off; it had been set so low the flame was barely visible. Then Jase looked up at Luis and said, "I've told you a million times not to leave

paper bags, or anything, on top of the stove. It's a dangerous habit, Luis, and you do it all the time." His tone was gentle, but his expression serious.

"I know," Luis said, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. I was certain the stove was off. I know I turned it off after I made your eggs this morning." Luis's face had gone pale and he spoke as if he had a lump in his throat.

Darius turned to face the fireplace and smiled. This had worked out better than he'd planned. Evidently, Luis had absentminded tendencies.

Jase crossed the room and gave Luis a hug. "It's okay," he said. But while he patted Luis on the back, he sent Darius a friendly glance and said, "Thankfully, Darius saved the day."

Darius smiled and shrugged. "I acted on impulse. It really wasn't a big deal."

"Nonsense," Luis said. "I agree with Jase. You did the right thing, Darius. Even though I was stupid enough to not only leave the bag on the stove and the burner on, you saved the day. I can't tell you how thankful we are. You're our new hero."

Oh, brother. Darius felt like gagging. Could Luis get any sappier? Part of Darius wanted to punch him in the face, and part of him wanted to bend Luis over and fuck his brains out until he begged for mercy. He had a feeling Luis was one of those guys who liked to lie back, lift his legs, and get fucked for hours. Darius would have bet his left nut Luis sucked cock like an industrial Wet-Vac.

Hunter climbed down from his chair and patted the disgusting ratty dog on top of the head. What a poor excuse for a dog. He hugged Jase and Luis, then grabbed his backpack. "C'mon, Darius. We can walk down to the bus now and talk about baseball. My friend Justin's favorite team is the Yankees. But I like the Phillies better."

"Cool. I love the Phillies, too," Darius said. He despised the Phillies. He gave Luis a cautious look to see if it was okay for him to walk Hunter down early. They thought he was God now and he didn't want to ruin things.

Luis smiled. "I'll see you this afternoon, Hunter. Have fun." He smiled and nodded at Darius. "When you come back, Darius, I'll help you get settled in. I'm going to be working in the office on a new blog post I'm writing for a blog in France and if you need anything I won't be far."

Darius smiled. A fucking blog post. Luis was probably one of the silliest, most frivolous gay men he'd ever met. He felt like slapping him in the face with his dick and giving him two black eyes. But all he said was, "I'll be back soon."

Before they left, Darius noticed how fast Jase moved to open the back door for him. So he sent Jase one of his warmest, most helpless smiles and said, "Thank you, Jase. It was nice meeting you this morning. I'm really looking forward to working here."

Jase smiled. "I'm looking forward to it myself," he said. "And I can't tell you how thrilled I am Luis decided to hire you. At first I was a little concerned because he didn't talk to me first. But now that I've met you, I can see there's nothing at all to worry about."

"I told you he was perfect," Luis said, looking down at the stove to be sure all the burners on the stove were off.

Hunter was already outside waiting. He shouted through the screen door. "Let's go, Darius. I want my friend Justin to see you, so I can tell him you're a real baseball coach."

Darius smiled once more at Jase, then turned to join Hunter on the patio. He walked with his head up and his jaw set. This introduction had gone better than he'd ever dreamed it would. Thanks to fast thinking and Luis's carelessness, the burning bag had made him a hero his first day there. But as he turned and headed down the driveway, he saw that scruffy-looking, bearded handyman standing beside his old Jeep. He was bent over, fumbling for something in a rusted old tool box. He smiled at Hunter and told him to have a good day. Hunter called the guy by name—Cory—and told him he'd see him later that afternoon. Darius tried being friendly again. He smiled at Cory and nodded, hoping there was still time to win



him over. But the only thing Darius received in return was a reserved nod and blank glare.

## Chapter Seven

“I like having Darius around,” Jase said, running his hand down between Luis’s legs. “We get to sleep later and I get to do nasty things to you more often.”

Luis smiled. “What kind of nasty things?” He wanted to hear Jase say it out loud.

“Nasty things like playing with your ass and shoving my fingers between your legs, or rubbing my dick across your lips while you’re still sleeping.”

Jase’s fingers found Luis’s ass crack and Luis smiled. “I’m not sure I like the way you’re talking now. You’re starting to sound like a dirty old creep.”

“I want to sound creepy,” Jase said, lowering his tone.

“I have to get up, Jase,” Luis said. “Be good. It’s after seven and Hunter will be up soon. He’s all excited about going to Josh’s and Roland’s Fourth of July party today.” But Luis didn’t make any obvious moves to actually get out of bed. The lower Jase’s hand went between his legs, the wider he spread his legs apart and welcomed the intrusion.

Jase cupped the bottom of Luis’s ass in his palm and squeezed hard, then rested his middle finger against his anus. He started tapping his finger gently and said, “Darius can handle Hunter. Darius is always up at six and always in the kitchen waiting for us. He’s probably cleaned the entire house by now.”

Luis had to admit having Darius around had improved their sex life. If he hadn’t hired Darius, he would have had to leave Jase alone in bed with an erection and fumble downstairs to make coffee. Though he felt a little guilty about not getting up that morning, his legs went higher, he wrapped his right arm around Jase’s shoulders, and said, “I guess it won’t hurt if we’re a little late getting downstairs this morning. I’m sure Darius will understand, and Hunter loves him so much he won’t mind at all.”

Jase shoved the tip of his finger into Luis’s anus and kissed him on the mouth. A minute after that, he pulled the

covers off and climbed on top of Luis's naked body. Luis's sighed and caressed the back of Jase's head. Then he wrapped his legs around Jase's waist and laced his fingers at the back of Jase's neck. They were at the point Luis always enjoyed. They were still kissing and the tip of Jase's dick was poking him. When Jase reached for a tube of lube on the nightstand, Luis lowered his arms and grabbed Jase's biceps, waiting for Jase to enter him. Though Jase had a well-defined, muscular body, he was one of those men who tend to build their bicep muscles more than any other muscle in their body, and Luis always experienced a thrill between his legs whenever he held Jase's biceps. When he squeezed them with the tips of his fingers, his heart started to race and his own erection pulsed. When he gently bit them while Jase was fucking him, his toes curled back. There were times when he'd literally fallen asleep with his lips resting on one of Jase's biceps.

Jase covered his cock with lube and said, "Get up now." Then he slapped Luis on the ass and climbed out of bed.

Luis lowered his legs and sat up, reaching down to stroke his own erection. "Why?"

Jase grabbed his greasy cock and slapped it across Luis's cheek. "I want to fuck standing up."

Luis unfolded from the bed and asked, "You want me to lean into the wall and bend over?" They'd fucked in almost every position imaginable by then. Luis had taken Jase's dick in the back of pickup trucks, against public bathroom walls, and over a pile of tires that used to be next to the barn. Jase had even fucked Luis upside down once on the floor in front of the sofa in their old apartment in Trump Tower. Luis had backed up against the front of the sofa, spread his legs into an almost perfect split, and braced his palms on the floor. Then Jase climbed up on the sofa cushions and fucked him upside down. Luis had a sore neck and bruises between his legs for a week.

"No," Jase said. "Grab the bedpost with both hands and spread your legs."

Luis's heart started to beat faster. He smiled and reached for the bed post, then Jase reached down and grabbed

his left leg. He lifted Luis's leg up as far as he could with one hand and guided his cock into Luis with the other. Luis closed his eyes and tossed his head back; Jase had entered him with such a strong thrust, his eyes stung. But in this position, with his right leg braced to the floor and the left lifted up as high as it could go, Jase's dick slid into his body with little effort. When Jase was all the way inside, Luis stretched out the leg that was suspended in mid-air, as if he were rehearsing in a ballet studio, and pointed his toes. This wasn't bad at all, even better than a sideways fuck with his leg wrapped around Jase's back.

Jase started bucking his hips slowly, kissing the back of Luis's neck, holding Luis's left leg up with seemingly little effort. Only a strong man could fuck and balance Luis this way. Only a man who liked to fuck would bother using his strength this way.

Luis sighed and said, "We have to remember this position for the future." His voice filled with a slight tremble.

Jase bit his neck. "You like it?"

Luis nodded. "It feels like you're hitting places you've never hit before." Then, in order to maintain his balance, Luis removed his left hand from the bedpost and gently rested his left arm across Jase's shoulders. He squeezed Jase's shoulder muscle and tried to lift his left leg even higher so all the weight wouldn't be resting in Jase's hand. Jase bucked his hips faster; their tongues met, and they started to kiss.

It wasn't long before Luis's left foot was arched and his toes were curling back. With his right leg, the one still braced to the floor, he went up on his tiptoes and balanced most of his weight between the bed post and Jase's shoulders. He felt suspended in air, almost swinging. Jase held his left leg up high, banging him so hard now it seemed as though Jase were drilling his ass with his fist instead of his dick. When Luis looked into a mirror on the other side of the bed and saw the way Jase's thick shaft was sliding in and out of his hole, he felt the beginning of his own climax. It always amazed Luis something so large and intimidating could actually fit into his tiny hole. The climax he was about to

experience came from deep down inside, from one distinct spot, then started traveling through the rest of his body. Sex with Jase was always different and whenever they fucked Luis was never sure what to expect. But this time, probably because they were in a standing position, Luis felt as though he were being bred by the prized bull. And as clichéd as this sounded in his own head, it was exactly what he wanted.

The harder Jase rammed the louder Luis wanted to scream for more. If they'd been alone, he would have been moaning as loud as he could, begging Jase to ram harder and go deeper, and pleading with Jase to bang him into the next room. But there were Hunter and Darius to consider, and Luis knew the best he could do was whisper and grunt. It took all the discipline he had not to scream out loud when Jase brought him to climax without even touching his dick once.

There was nothing more satisfying in the world to Luis than coming this way. An orgasm from being fucked by Jase, without touching his own dick, sent shocks of outrageous pleasure speeding through every last nerve ending in his body. When Luis was alone and thought about this, he always became erect. When he was actually performing the act, he felt this kind of internal climax from his head to feet. His scrotum tightened and the head of his penis expanded. This morning, when he finally erupted at the exact moment Jase climaxed inside his body, he shot so far his come landed in the middle of the bed.

Even though the central air conditioning issue they'd had the previous summer had been resolved thanks to Cory and a very clever electrician, Luis's entire body dripped with perspiration. He knew Jase was sweating as much; he felt it on Jase's slick shoulder. He took a quick breath and turned his head so he could kiss Jase again. Jase was still fucking him, slower now, with a more even rhythm. He closed his eyes and shoved his tongue into Jase's mouth, holding Jase's shoulder as hard as he could, trying to savor every last inch of Jase before Jase pulled out.

But while Luis was still standing and Jase was still holding Luis left leg in mid-air, the bedroom door opened and

Darius walked into the room. When Darius glanced across the room and saw the way Jase's cock was still wedged up into Luis's hole, he shut the bedroom door fast and turned to face the opposite wall.

"*Darius*," Jase said. "What are you doing in here?"

Luis stopped moving. There was nothing he could do but remain where he was: spread like a wishbone, stuffed like a wine bottle. He couldn't pull a cover over his naked body and he couldn't run into the bathroom. The best he could do was smile and hope Darius would understand.

"I'm so sorry, Jase," Darius said. He remained facing the wall, with his head down and his palm on his throat. "I knocked but no one answered. I wanted to ask you if it was okay to take Hunter for a walk this morning before we go to the Fourth of July party."

Jase released Luis's leg and pulled out of his body. There was a quick pop and a loud suction noise that made Darius blink. He grabbed a sheet for himself and handed a cover to Luis. Then he wrapped the sheet around his waist and said, "Luis, I thought you locked the door last night."

Luis shrugged and pulled the cover up to his chest, wishing he could bend and stretch his legs now. "I was certain I did. I always do. I even double checked to make sure it was locked last night before I went to bed." It was one of the last things Luis did before he went to bed at night, especially on weekends if he thought there was a chance they'd have morning sex. After he checked to see Hunter was in his room sleeping soundly, he'd checked the lock and the security camera to be sure he could see and hear what was going on in Hunter's room. Since he'd become a father, he'd learn to sleep with one eye partially open.

"I'm so sorry, Jase," Darius said. "I'm sorry, Luis. I've never been so embarrassed in my life. I'll never be able to look you guys in the eye again." His voice trailed off to whisper. He continued to gaze down at his sneakers.

"Calm down, Darius," Jase said, crossing the room to where Darius was standing. "We're all adults and these things happen." Then Jase opened the door slightly to check the lock.

"I know I locked that door, Jase," Luis said. "I vividly remember turning the latch." He felt one of those moments coming on and his heart sank, where Jase would send him a glance that suggested he was a ditzzy dumb-blond type.

Jase leaned over and turned the doorknob. He clicked it back and forth and jiggled the lock. "Ah well," he said, "There's something wrong with the lock. It's not working for some reason."

Luis sighed. At least this time he hadn't screwed up again. For the past month, he'd been forgetful and absentminded. It started with the paper bag incident on top of the stove, then there was the incident with the parking brake in the car. He even left the back door open one night by accident and a raccoon almost had Camp for a midnight snack. Thankfully, each time Darius had been at just the right time there to save the day.

"I should have knocked harder," Darius said. "I should have figured you guys might be fooling around this morning. It's all my fault."

"Stop worrying," Jase said. He sent Luis a glance and nodded. "Tell him we're okay, Luis."

"Jase is right," Luis said. "We'll pretend this never happened." Then he smiled and looked up at the ceiling. When he thought about the image they'd given Darius for the rest of his life, he almost started to laugh.

"I'll tell Cory to come up and take a look at the lock today," Jase said. "And it's fine to take Hunter for a walk. We'll shower and get dressed. We'll be downstairs in a little while."

Darius took a couple of backward steps toward the door. He was wearing the electric blue basketball shorts and a tight black T-shirt. Without looking up, he opened the door partially and slipped through it sideways. "Sorry again, guys. I will definitely knock a lot harder next time I come into *this* room."

Luis and Jase exchanged glances. When the door was shut and Darius was gone, Luis dropped the sheet and said, "I'm glad Hunter didn't walk in on us that time. I think we

should get up and check the door from now on before we do anything like this again. We have to make a point of it, Jase.”

Jase reached for the ends of the dresser resting up against a wall beside their bedroom door. He pulled the dresser back, dragged it a few feet, and stopped when it was blocking the door.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m making sure no one can get in here.”

“Why?”

Jase let the sheet drop from his waist and he crossed the room naked. His dick was now semi-erect and it was swinging back and forth. When he reached Luis, he put his arms around him and kissed him. “We’re going to take a shower together now,” he said. “And the door has to be locked because you’re going to be on the shower floor on your knees washing my dick.”

“Oh, you have no shame whatsoever,” Luis said, reaching down to cup Jase’s balls. “You’ve not only scarred poor Darius for life, but now you want to turn me into your personal sex slave.”

Jase slapped his ass. “You *are* my personal sex slave. Besides, we haven’t had a morning like this to ourselves since I can remember, and I plan to take advantage of it completely.” He smiled. “Get in the bathroom now and do your job.”

\* \* \* \*

Luis set the clothes he was planning to wear to Josh’s and Roland’s Fourth of July party across the bed. He chose a new white cotton polo shirt and a pair of navy blue walking shorts. This was the first time he’d ever worn the white polo shirt. It had a large embroidered emblem below the left shoulder, with a guy on a horse playing polo. Jase had seen it in the window of a store in the city and he’d surprised Luis with it a week earlier. Though Luis had never been the type to save clothes for specific occasions, he had been saving this particular shirt for the Fourth of July party. The local gay couples in the area that would be attending the party were the type that only wore an outfit to a party or event once. Luis had



a feeling after these guys wore an outfit they packed it into a plastic bag and marked it with a date to be sure when they'd worn it last. This one time, Luis wanted to compete with them. Even though he was married to a billionaire and had a thriving career as a model, he always felt inferior to these small-town gay guys, with their stuffy candlelight dinners, their department store dining room sets, and their Martha Stewart pots and pans. They were friendly enough on the surface, but smug and superior if you looked close enough. Luis knew this new polo shirt would turn them all into jealous maniacs. Of course Jase found it on sale for less than a hundred dollars at a discount store, mainly because there was a small snag under the arm no one would ever notice. But everyone else would think Jase had spent retail, well over three thousand dollars, and this alone would make Luis smile all afternoon.

Luis slipped into a plain white jock strap and walked into the bathroom to check his short dark hair. That little wave above his forehead wouldn't go right no matter how hard he tried or how much product he used. Jase was downstairs with Hunter waiting for him in the driveway. Luis had been working on a blog post for Elena and he'd lost track of time. He could see Jase now, leaning against the truck, with his arms folded across his chest, tapping his right foot. Jase would be forcing a smile for Hunter's sake but he'd be thinking, *where the hell is dizzy dumb Luis now? He knows the party starts at two and it's already after two.*

But Luis was in no rush to get to Josh's and Roland's house, so he took his time getting ready. He told himself he was going to make a serious effort that day to be extra nice to Josh and Roland. He wasn't going to pass judgment on their lifestyle and he wasn't going to let himself get annoyed by Josh's ex-wife Hillary's never-ending talk about what she was doing for the Angel Association. And if Josh tried to get into his pants that afternoon the way he was always trying to get into his pants, Luis would smile and take it in stride.

But when Luis walked back into the bedroom in nothing but his jock strap, there was a knock on the door and

Darius asked, "Are you sure I should come to the party with you? I don't want to intrude on a family event."

Luis sighed and said, "Come in, Darius." This guy was so shy about certain things it made Luis feel like screaming sometimes. On the one hand, Darius was strong and capable of doing anything. On the other, he disappeared into the floorboards whenever it came to anything social.

Darius stepped into the room and gaped at Luis in his jock strap. He blinked and stared down at his shoes.

Luis frowned. "Calm down, Darius," he said. "We're both men and I am wearing a jock strap. Frankly, if you think about it, you've seen me in less."

Darius took a breath and looked up at Luis. He shrugged and said, "I know. I'm just kind of shy about these things. I hated changing clothes with the other guys when I was in school. I always felt so weird about it. I guess I'd never be a good porn star." He laughed and rubbed his jaw.

Luis smiled. He hadn't seen this kind of sweet, adorable innocence in a long time. He wasn't sure whether or not Darius was still a virgin, but he wouldn't have been shocked if he was. He walked across the room and reached for Darius's hand. He said, "You're a very sweet guy. And don't change at all." Then he released his hand and went back to the bathroom to check his hair one last time.

"Are you sure it's okay if I go to the party with you?" Darius asked.

"Of course it's okay," Luis said. "We think of you as part of the family now." Especially after what Darius had seen that morning. But Luis didn't mention this aloud.

"Okay. I don't want to be in the way, is all."

"You're fine," Luis said. "I think Josh and Roland are going to love you." He knew this was cruel. But he couldn't wait to see the expressions on Josh's and Roland's lust-hungry, sex-starved faces when they saw how attractive young Darius was. Luis had a feeling they'd run out and get a housekeeper like him for themselves before the summer was over. Only in their case the housekeeper would wind up in

bed between them giving them both head, not in the kitchen preparing meals.

"I'll go back down and let you finish getting dressed, then," Darius said. "Thanks for being so nice to me."

"You're welcome," Luis said, switching the bathroom light off. "Tell Jase I'll be right down."

He went back to the bedroom and carefully pulled the new white polo shirt over his head so he wouldn't mess his hair. But when he looked into the mirror to adjust the shirt, he saw a dark smudge on the right side of the collar. He could have sworn it wasn't there a minute ago. His chest caved in and he sighed. He must have accidentally dropped something and didn't realize it. How could he have missed the smudge when he'd set the shirt out on the bed? He must have been in such a hurry he wasn't paying attention. So he removed the shirt and settled for a plain white T-shirt he had in his closet. He didn't want to fool around with the stain on the new shirt and make it worse. He'd deal with that tomorrow when there was time.

When he joined the others downstairs and Jase asked him why he wasn't wearing the new shirt, he sent Jase a glare and said, "Don't I look good in this shirt? Is there something wrong with it?"

Jase gulped and said, "You look wonderful in any shirt you wear."

Luis frowned, feeling disingenuous, and said, "Thank you." Then he climbed into the truck and pulled his seatbelt across his chest. The last thing he needed that afternoon was Jase reminding him about all the clumsy, absentminded things he'd been doing all month. He'd get the stain out of the shirt without Jase knowing about it and he'd wear it to the next event they went to that summer.

## Chapter Eight

When Jase and Luis introduced Darius to Roland and Josh, Darius took a step back and forced a friendly smile. They were all standing in Josh's and Roland's hallway because they'd arrived for the Fourth of July party. Getting used to being introduced as the hired help frustrated Darius to the point of distraction, especially since he'd been the center of attention in Leck Schneider's life for the past ten years. At parties in Los Angeles or Berlin, Darius had greeted the guests and floated through the rooms playing host. He'd organized the caterers and the service help. He'd chosen the menus, organized all of Leck's events, both business and social, and Leck had always patted him on the back and congratulated him for making everything so special. After a particularly successful event once, Leck handed Darius the keys to a new Mercedes convertible, a car that vanished when Leck shot himself in the head. Standing there now in Josh's and Roland's hallway, Darius found it so difficult to believe his life had dwindled down to being a common housekeeper, not to mention male nanny, that he felt like kicking Luis Fortune in the ass every time he had to fake a smile.

But Darius didn't have a choice now, not if his plans to ruin Luis and Jase would reach full circle. Oh, he had plans for them. So he smiled, shook Josh's and Roland's hands, and said he was pleased to meet them. He even humbly thanked them for inviting him to their Fourth of July party. Then he shot Luis a knowing glance and smiled quickly. He suspected Luis wasn't too fond of Roland or Josh and he wanted Luis to think he was on his side. He could see why Luis wasn't fond of them. Josh's sexy, muscular body and handsome strong-boned face would have made any silly little queen like Luis Fortune jealous. The way Josh's dark blond hair fell so naturally into the latest style and the way his smile lit up a room must have driven Luis out of his mind with envy more than once. And though Roland was quite a few years older than Josh, he'd kept his body in better shape than most

twenty-year-olds, and he had one of the nicest asses Darius had seen in a long time. Luis had mentioned in passing Roland owned a large multi-million-dollar health care company of some sort that produced everything from skin care products to vitamins. Though Josh and Roland didn't have billions of dollars like Jase and Luis, they certainly could compete with them financially without trying too hard.

Josh's and Roland's home in Bucks County made Darius smile. It wasn't one of those creaky old George Washington places, with crooked walls, big stone fireplaces, and too many uneven wooden floors, like Luis's and Jase's. Josh and Roland's home was a modern affair with an Asian theme, like the homes in the Hollywood Hills Darius was used to. It was long and flat, with marble floors, walls of glass, abstract paintings, and sleek furniture with thin, simple lines. When they all walked through the main hallway and headed back to the swimming pool, Darius almost felt as if he'd gone home again—to the home he'd lost, thanks to Luis agreeing to testify against Leck. If it hadn't been for Luis blowing the whistle on Leck, Darius would have been throwing his own Fourth of July party that weekend in Palm Springs instead of attending one in fucking nowhereville Pennsylvania as the hired help.

Leck had told Darius everything before he'd shot himself. He'd sat on the end of their bed with his head in his hands and cried. He said the authorities had been investigating him but they'd never had an actual witness. But now that Luis Fortune was willing to testify against him, the authorities had all they needed to shut down his entire life and send him to prison for years.

When they crossed through the kitchen and stepped into an outdoor living area that surrounded an elaborate swimming pool with statues and water features, Roland asked Jase, "Where's your grandmother?" Darius had heard all about Jase's ninety-year-old grandmother, Isabelle, enough to turn his stomach upside down. He forced himself not to roll his eyes. They spoke about the tired old bag the way everyone spoke about their older relatives: as if she was something

special and one of a kind. Darius imagined another ordinary old woman with a creased mouth and too much to say. Whenever her name came up in conversation, Darius slipped out of the room so he wouldn't have to listen to the dull stories.

"She's in Alaska," Jase said. "We've been trying to get her back here. But she's always busy with one thing or another." His eyes seemed to light up when he talked about her. "We'd love her to meet Darius."

Darius smiled. "I can't wait to meet her, too. She sounds like a wonderful woman." Yeah, right. Talk about the last thing Darius wanted to do in life.

"There's Justin," Hunter said, pointing to a little boy playing with an asinine battery-operated helicopter on a grassy area near a round table at the other side of the pool. He looked up at Jase and asked, "Can I go over there?"

Jase patted his annoying little head and smiled down at his spoiled-rotten face. "Yes. We'll be over in a few minutes to say hello to Justin's mom. But be good."

Justin's mom, Hillary, as far as Darius could gather, was the woman sitting at the round table. She'd been married to Josh right out of high school, a shotgun wedding because she'd been pregnant with Justin. When Josh eventually confided to her he was really a cocksucker and they'd divorced, they'd maintained a politically correct friendship. Now Josh, Roland, Hillary, and Justin were one big happy modern family. Darius had heard all this from Luis very quickly since he'd started working for them. At the time he'd smiled. But he'd really been holding back his gag reflex. From what he could see across the pool, Hillary was another one of those way-too-thin, always dressed in black, left-wing feminist types from Greenwich Village. She walked around in flat ballerina slippers and let her black hair fall down over her pale face in narrow strands. She was hunched over the round table reading something that afternoon, probably something to do with that ridiculous organization Luis belonged to called the Angel Association. That was another thing Darius couldn't understand. Why the hell Luis cared about young

women leaving their babies in Dumpsters went right over his head. As far as Darius saw it, if a young woman was planning to do something like that no one was going to stop her, not Luis, Hillary, or any other bleeding heart with good intentions.

Roland reached for Jase's arm and said, "Wait until you see the new grill I got this summer. C'mon over and I'll show you." He spoke with a gentle tone. Darius pegged him for the bottom in the relationship. These things were always so obvious. Darius didn't have to work hard to imagine Roland bent sideways with one leg in the air while the younger lover, Josh, fucked his brains out.

Jase told Luis he'd be right back, then followed Roland over to an outdoor kitchen area situated beneath a few tall oak trees. Darius looked around and sighed. The disco music was too loud and too out of date for Darius's taste. Though he wasn't familiar with old disco music, he knew what it was when he heard it and he pressed his palm to his stomach and frowned. The other guests that surrounded the outdoor living space and splashed in the pool almost made him turn and leave. Most were out of shape, some more than others. Most had outdated hairstyles, some longer and puffier than others. Most wore skimpy little bikini bathing suits when they should have been wearing long, oversized swim trunks to camouflage their flabby, sagging bodies. This party was even more dismal than the time Leck Schneider decided to make a *Men Over Fifty* porn film and he asked Darius to help him with the auditions.

But good old Josh didn't waste any time moving in on Luis when Jase disappeared with Roland. Darius watched closely as Josh put his palm on the small of Luis's back and backed him into a wall of glass. Josh looked at Luis's face, his eyes drifting between Luis's eyes and lips, and said, "You have a nice tan this summer." Then he lowered his hand to Luis's ass and grabbed it.

Luis slid away from Josh fast, sending Darius a smile. "Be good, Josh," he said. "You're going to give Darius the wrong impression." He turned to Darius and said, "Josh is one of those aggressive guys who have trouble keeping his hands

to himself. He and Roland have an open relationship. He means no harm.”

Darius smiled, suspecting Luis would have loved a good fuck from Josh.

“Don’t be so critical,” Josh said, trying harder to rest his hand on Luis’s ass.

Luis jumped back. “I’m not critical. I’m not interested in anyone but Jase.” Then he smiled at Darius and said, “But Jase and I have talked all this out with Roland and Josh. We don’t practice their lifestyle. But it’s none of our business and we don’t judge it.”

Darius laughed and said, “I understand.” But he was thinking, *too much information, asshole*. What the fuck did he care who Luis fucked? His stomach was turning and he felt like rolling his eyes. He could see by the elated expression on Luis’s face how he enjoyed the attention from Josh. Besides, Luis wasn’t fooling Darius. Darius had seen Luis in action: the little slut liked dick, the bigger the better. He’d seen the way Luis had lifted his leg while Jase had fucked him earlier. He’d seen the pleasure in Luis’s eyes while Jase’s dick had been up his ass, splitting him apart. Darius knew an alley cat who knew how to arch his back when he saw one. He also suspected if it hadn’t been for Jase Nicholas, Luis would have been turning tricks instead of strutting around like a queen.

“Let’s go over and join Hillary,” Luis said. “I haven’t seen her all summer. The last time we got together in the city was at an Angel Association meeting in her bookstore on Bleecker Street.”

Josh said he’d join them in a little while. He wanted to talk to a few of the other guests. So Darius and Luis walked around the pool while the older guys inside the pool gazed up at them as if they were fresh meat, and joined Hillary at the round table. She stood halfway up and gave them each air-kisses on the cheek. Not a drop of makeup, straight black hair parted dead center. If she dressed like that when she’d been married to Josh, no wonder Josh wound up fucking guys. She sat down again and went right into her latest project about that confounded organization. Luis smiled and nodded as if he



were truly interested. Darius sat back and folded his hands on his lap, watching Luis pretend to be interested when he probably wanted to yawn right in her skinny, pale face.

After they had something to eat—overcooked chicken breast and some kind of mushy whole-grain pasta salad Darius couldn't identify—the two little boys started to argue. Darius had been watching them while Luis and Hillary had been talking about their organization. Hunter tried to explain how to get the battery-operated helicopter higher in the air and Justin didn't want to listen to his suggestions. In all fairness, even though Hunter's irritating voice made the short hairs on the back of Darius's neck stand at attention, that Justin kid sure was a dumb shit, just like his father, Josh. Hunter tried to explain if they pointed the helicopter at a certain angle, it would fly better. But shit-for-brains Justin wanted to continue to do it his way, which only lifted it off the grass about eight inches. So Hunter ripped it from Justin's hands to prove a point, and Justin clobbered Hunter over the head with the handheld remote control device. It wasn't long before they were both rolling around in the grass, jabbing each other in the ribs, and Luis and Hillary were pulling them apart.

When they had them separated, Hillary took Justin inside to change his white shorts because they were covered with grass stains. Hunter ran over to Jase and Roland so Jase would take him swimming. Luis sat back in his chair and sighed. He smiled at Darius and said, "This happens between Hunter and Justin all the time. They fight, then they're best friends again. I've never seen anything like it."

Darius smiled and looked down at his lap. "Kids are like that." Especially spoiled brats like those two.

"Did you want to go swimming?" Luis asked.

Darius shook his head and gazed down at the grotesque guys in the pool. It looked like troll soup. "I think I'll pass today."

Luis laughed. "I know what you mean. More than half the guys at this party are gaping at you. Out here in the country, guys like you are a rare commodity: young, athletic,

good looking, and a killer body. If you jump into the pool you never know what might happen. But then again, you might want to meet someone new. I know there are a few single guys here today.”

He knew what Luis was doing. Luis was trying to find out more about his personal background and about his love life. He’d been making little insinuations since Darius had started working for them. So Darius smiled and said, “I’m really not interested in meeting someone right now. I didn’t mention this before because I don’t like talking about it. But I lost my partner recently.”

The corners of Luis’s lips went down and he leaned forward. “I’m sorry to hear that. Was it sudden?” His expression remained eager, waiting for Darius to say more.

Darius lifted his head and gazed into Luis’s eyes. “He was murdered.”

Luis’s face went blank. He tipped his head sideways. “*Murdered?*”

Darius nodded yes. “And they never caught the murderer. But I have a feeling eventually the murderer will be caught. People always get exactly what they deserve in life.”

Luis frowned. “That’s awful, Darius. I’m so sorry.”

Before Darius had a chance to respond, Jase came over to the table and handed Luis an envelope. He said, “Will you please hold on to this for me?”

Luis looked the envelope over fast. “What is it?”

“It’s a proposal for something Roland and I are considering working on together. It’s a remote control that can see through things.”

“See through things?”

Jase nodded. “It’s for cold winter nights when people are lying in bed watching TV and they don’t want to keep their hands and arms out to change the TV channels. This remote can pick up signals from beneath the thickest covers. It can even work through those cover-up fleece things people wear in the winter while they are watching TV on their sofas. Roland came up with the idea on a cold night last winter when he was in bed watching TV and I think it’s a great idea. Just

hold on to it while I take Hunter into the pool. I don't want to lose it. It's the only copy Roland has."

Luis smiled and said, "No problem." Then he left the envelope on top of the table in front of where he was sitting.

But when Jase left to take Hunter swimming, Hillary called for Luis from the glass doors that entered into the kitchen. Luis rolled his eyes at Darius and smiled at Hillary. "She wants me to look at something she's done for the Angel Association. It's a new ad campaign and she's been bugging me about it for weeks. I told her to handle it alone and I'd trust her, but she wants to torture me now. I have to go. Would you like to join me? You might find it interesting, and I might get away from her sooner."

Darius smiled. He would have rather taken a tour of a cinderblock factory than listen to that drivel. "I'm sure it is interesting," he said. "But I have to use the bathroom."

Hillary called Luis again, with a high-pitched squeal that resembled a cat in heat. Luis frowned and stood up, forgetting all about the envelope Jase had handed him. He pointed to a small structure opposite the outdoor kitchen area and said, "The bathrooms are in there. If I'm lucky, I'll be back in fifteen minutes. If I'm not, send help."

Darius laughed and said, "I'll see you later."

When Luis left, Darius watched him cross back to the house. He didn't get up right away to use the bathroom. But he did rest his palm on top of the envelope, waiting for Luis to disappear. A minute or two after that, he looked back and forth to make sure no one was watching him before lifting the envelope, folding it in half, and shoving it under his arm. He stood and walked to the bathroom in the pool house, a medium-sized room with two urinals and three private stalls. He checked to be sure he was alone and entered the last stall on the right. He flipped the lock and pulled the envelope out from under his arm. Then he set his teeth firmly and tore it into tiny little pieces. As they fluttered into the toilet in front of him, he furrowed his eyebrows and pretended he was tearing Luis Fortune into little pieces instead of this insignificant envelope. He punched the walls a few times,

pretending he was punching Luis's face. When there was nothing left in his hands and the toilet was filled with shreds of paper, he pulled out his dick, peed on the envelope he'd ripped apart, and smiled.

On his way out, as he reached for a paper towel to dry his hands, Josh came into the bathroom. Darius stopped short, wondering if Josh had seen him enter with the envelope. But Josh looked him up and down and smiled. "I saw you come in a minute ago and wanted to see if you needed anything." Josh had removed his shirt and his swim trunks were so low on his waist a line of pubic hair became visible.

Darius smiled. He now knew why Josh had followed him in there. He sent Josh a secretive smile and said, "There are some things I always need, especially from a man like you." Darius was one of those rare gay men who were versatile when it came to being a top or a bottom. He could fuck or get fucked. Though he knew there was nothing he could get in the long run from Josh, he had to admit Josh's looks were superior. Besides that, he hadn't had a good fuck in a long time.

"Why don't you let me help you with what you need?" Josh said, reaching down between his legs to grab the front of his swim trunks.

When Darius looked down, he saw Josh's full erection protruding through his trunks. It looked to be at least eight or nine inches. "Won't Roland get upset?" Darius asked, licking his lips.

"Luis told you Roland and I have an open relationship," Josh said.

"I wasn't sure how open, though."

Josh pulled down the front of his trunks and let his erection fall out. He grabbed the shaft and said, "We fuck around with other guys. Mostly we do this together. But sometimes, when opportunity arises, we do it alone. We always tell each other about it and we're always safe."

Darius smiled. "You want to fuck me, don't you?"

"You're very smart," Josh said. "And you remind me of a blond version of Justin Timberlake. When I first met you

I couldn't figure out who you reminded me of, and then it dawned on me you look like Justin Timberlake."

"I've been told that before," Darius said. He was thankful he looked like Justin Timberlake, too. Josh could have remembered him from older porn films he'd done for Leck and ruined his cover.

"But you're blonder. And your ass is hotter."

Darius blatantly pulled down his white basketball shorts and stepped out of them. Then he kicked off his sneakers and yanked off his pale blue T-shirt. He stood there stark naked except for a pair of white ankle high athletic socks, as his erection grew and his heart started to race. "We have to make it fast," he said. "I don't want to upset Luis and Jase. I'm not sure how they'd react if they found out the host of the party was humping their new housekeeper in the men's room."

Josh turned to lock the door. "It will be our little secret." Then he stepped out of his trunks and crossed to where Darius was standing near a wall of sinks. He stood in front of Darius and rested his palms on Darius's hips. Darius reached up with both arms and wrapped them around Josh's shoulders. While they kissed, Josh backed him into the sink. He pushed him with force, but not too hard, until Darius's ass was up against the cold granite counter. Darius sat on the counter, still kissing, and spread his legs wide.

"Do you have a condom?" Darius asked, rubbing his foot up and down Josh's thigh. Darius hadn't slipped through his teenage life as a hooker, porn actor, and all-around slut this long by taking chances.

Josh reached into a small bowl on the counter and pulled out a lubricated condom. He lifted it up in front of Darius's face and waved it. "We keep bowls of condoms all around the house. We have a rule about safe sex here."

Darius set his back against the tiled wall and lifted his legs higher so Josh could mount him with easy access. Then he rested both feet on Josh's wide shoulders and said, "Then cover your dick and fuck me."

Josh smiled. "I like your honesty."

The entire act ended before anyone even had a chance to knock on the door to use the bathroom. It was really nothing more than a couple of good slams and grunts. After they came, Josh flushed the condom down the toilet and they put on their clothes. Josh didn't offer to kiss Darius, and Darius didn't expect it from him. But at least Josh was decent enough to give him a hug, pat him on the ass, and thank him before he went back to his party.

Darius waited a few minutes before he left the pool house. He didn't want any of the other guests to think he'd spread his legs for the host, especially not Jase or Luis. When he finally did leave, he slowly walked back to the same table where he'd been sitting with Luis. Jase and Roland were there now, and Hunter and Justin were back to playing with that fucked-up helicopter again. Jase sent Darius a smile when he saw him coming toward the table, and Darius returned it with the most innocent expression he could force. But at that moment he couldn't stop thinking about his dead lover and partner, Leck Schneider, because this was the first time since Leck's death another man had fucked him. Actually, it was the first time in ten years another man had fucked him. He'd been monogamous with Leck, as Luis was monogamous with Jase, even though he'd never been sure whether or not Leck had been monogamous with him. None of that had ever mattered to Darius; he didn't care what Leck did as long as Leck came home to his bed every night.

As Darius approached the table a wave of exhaustion crept over him. His legs felt heavy and his chest felt as though it was about to cave in. Though what he'd just done with Josh in the bathroom hadn't been a bad experience by any means, it had left him ice cold on one of the warmest days of the summer. Darius still couldn't believe he was all alone again in the world, with no money and no partner, and he'd never see Leck's handsome face again.

## Chapter Nine

“Thanks for dropping me off,” Cory said. He was talking to Jasper, his boyfriend. Since the weekend of Super Bowl Sunday, they’d been a couple and Jasper was dropping Cory off for work at the end of the long gravel easement road that led back to Cider Mill Farm. It was July fifth and the climate had turned warm and humid almost overnight.

Jasper leaned over the seat in his vintage two-seater Mercedes convertible and kissed Cory quickly on the lips. “Just call me when you need a ride home.” He worked as a manager for his family’s diner in town and he could take off whenever he wanted.

Cory frowned and lifted his hand to open the door. For some reason he couldn’t explain, his trusty old Jeep Wrangler had let him down that morning. He knew it was old, with more than one hundred thousand miles on the odometer, and lately it had a tendency to burn motor oil. But it had never let him down before. Cory checked the oil daily and to make sure it was level, and he hadn’t seen any oil leaks in his driveway. He serviced the Jeep regularly and made sure the tires were always inflated to recommended pressure level. Before Cory unfolded from the car, he turned and smiled at Jasper. “I’ll call you around five,” he said. “I hope whatever is wrong with the Jeep can be fixed. The last thing I need right now is to worry about the expense of a new truck.” He’d had a friend from a local gas station tow the Jeep from his apartment, and they said they’d call him sometime that afternoon.

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” Jasper said, reaching over to set his palm on the back of Cory’s hand. “You take care of that Jeep better than some people take care of their kids.”

Cory sent him a warm smile and stood up to close the door. “I’ll see you later. Love you.”

“Love you, too,” Jasper said, shifting into gear and swerving onto the road.

Cory watched him drive away. He raised his hand and waved, smiling when Jasper sent him a backhanded wave.

Aside from his car problems, Cory had never been happier in his life. Thanks to Jasper, he'd finally come out of the closet and he'd come to terms with being bisexual. After dating more women than he could count, yet still being attracted to men at the same time, it was more of a relief than anything else to finally be the man he wanted to be. He'd grown tired of pleasing his family and his small-town friends. And he couldn't have done any of this without Jasper's help. They'd known each other for years. Their relationship began as a good friendship in high school and continued for a long time without either of them ever mentioning their true feelings for each other. Though Jasper had been openly gay since his high school graduation, Cory had always considered himself bisexual and he'd hidden his gay tendencies from everyone, including himself. It took almost ten years, on a cold snowy night in late January, for Jasper and Cory to finally validate their love. Cory had been smiling ever since.

As he turned to walk back to Cider Mill Farm, he heard Hunter call out his name. "I'm late, Cory. I hope I didn't miss the bus."

Hunter was running toward him, now visible from the slight bend in the road. Cory smiled. Hunter's little legs were moving as fast as they could carry him. His backpack jumped at his side and his hair bounced on his forehead.

Then Luis came jogging up behind Hunter. "Did you see the bus, Cory?"

Cory knew they were talking about the bus that took Hunter to baseball camp every morning. He shrugged and said, "I just got here, buddy. I didn't see anything."

But as Cory was about to turn, the school bus pulled up to the side of the road and Hunter sped past him. The school bus door opened with a familiar clank. "See you later, Cory," Hunter said, running for the open door. Without looking back, he called to Luis, "I'll see you later, Daddy."

Luis slowed to a stop beside Cory. His face was red and his chest was heaving. "Have a good day, Hunter. I'll see you this afternoon."



When the bus pulled away, Cory and Luis waved goodbye. Then Luis bent over and rested his palms on his knees to catch his breath and said, "That was a close call. I always set the alarm clock to go off at seven, and this morning nothing happened. I never even bother to check it. I reset it when I switch it off in the morning so it's ready for the next day. But this morning it didn't ring, and we all wound up oversleeping. Jase had an important meeting in New York and he practically flew out the door, knowing he'd get stuck in traffic. I can't believe how forgetful I've been lately. I'm going to have to start writing notes to myself."

Cory smiled and nodded. Luis *had* been forgetful lately, especially since that creepy new housekeeper, Darius, had come to Cider Mill Farm. "At least Hunter didn't miss the bus and Jase got out in time. All's well that ends well." He didn't feel like talking about Luis's forgetfulness this morning. His stomach was still turning thinking about his Jeep.

"You don't know the half of it," Luis said. "Yesterday Jase handed me a proposal Roland had given him at Roland's Fourth of July party. It was the only copy in the world, some kind of new invention Jase is going to work on with Roland. I somehow managed to lose it. I was certain I'd left it on the table. But when it was time to leave the party, I couldn't find it anywhere. I felt awful. Jase and Roland were nice about it. Roland said he'd write up another proposal. But it's not like to me lose something that important. Maybe I have been working too much and I need this time off. I don't know. I'm going to have to concentrate harder."

Cory rubbed his jaw and frowned. "It must have been somewhere at the party. Things don't disappear into thin air."

"That's what Darius said. But we looked everywhere and couldn't find it. Darius even looked in places no one would ever think to look. He's such a great guy. I don't know what we'd do without him."

Cory frowned. "Was Darius with you when Jase handed you the proposal?"

Luis sent him a blank stare. "Why?"

"I'm curious," he said. He would have bet his last dollar Darius, indeed, knew where the proposal was.

"I'm honestly not sure," Luis said. "All I remember was Jase handed me the envelope, then Hillary called me into the house to look at something. I guess I was too worried about Hillary torturing me with her big mouth and her endless jabbering that I forgot all about the envelope. I'm not even sure if I brought it into the house with me."

Cory shrugged without saying anything. But he couldn't help thinking all these little issues had started to happen around the same time this Darius Denby guy had arrived at Cider Mill Farm. He could see Luis had had a stressful morning and he didn't want to make it worse. So he smiled and said, "Hop on my back and I'll carry you back to the house." They hadn't flirted or teased each other in a while and he felt like lightening the mood. At the very least, it would shut Luis up the proposal. And he'd get to grope Luis's soft legs.

Luis tilted his head and smiled. "Be good, Cory. I thought we decided to stop all the silly carrying on we always do with each other. Besides, now that you have a boyfriend and you're in a relationship, it only makes it worse. We have to be good from now on. People will get the wrong impression and they'll think we really are playing around with each other."

Cory reached around and lowered his palm to Luis's ass. He squeezed and said, "We were never definite about anything. So hop on my back and wrap your legs around my waist." Luis was wearing beige shorts. His smooth legs were tan and shiny.

But Luis shrugged. "I can't. I'm not going back to the house yet. I'm going to spend the morning with Thomas. He's finally agreed to read for me. He's going to use his tarot cards, his crystal ball, and a special candle he keeps for special occasions. I'm very excited about it." He rubbed his palms together and smiled. "I love this sort of thing."

“Maybe he can help you locate the missing proposal,” Cory said in his driest tone, squeezing Luis’s ass harder. Whenever Cory heard someone say they were psychic, he usually rolled his eyes. Images of carnivals and bearded ladies passed through his mind. He thought feng shui was laughable at best, and when people started rambling on about healing crystals and acupuncture, he had to hold back a groan.

“Don’t be a skeptic,” Luis said, taking a playful step backward so Cory couldn’t reach his ass. “I think there’s something to all this. I think Thomas is going to be very good at it. He’s been psychic all his life. His mother used to take him to psychic events all over the east coast when he was a child.”

“Sounds like Thomas’s mother was a fucking nut,” Cory said.

“Keep an open mind. There are things in the universe no one can explain.”

“Fuck the universe. I like to live in the real world.”

Luis shook his head. “You sound like Jase now.”

“Jase is a very bright man.”

“Well, I’m a believer. I think there’s something to psychic energy, and what we put out in the universe.”

“Don’t talk about putting out,” Cory said. “At least not unless you actually intend to put out right now.”

Luis smiled. “Ah well, not that kind of putting out. And you know it.”

Cory moved forward, backing Luis off the road and into a large tree trunk. “I think it’s all a big joke. But I also think it’s kind of cute you buy into it. It’s part of your charm.” He reached down and grabbed Luis’s hips with both hands and smiled. He knew this was as far as it would go between them. If Jasper caught him playing around with Luis this way, Jasper would kick him in the balls and hit him over the head with a baseball bat. There was something about Luis that brought out the naughty side of Cory, and no matter how hard he tried to stop, he couldn’t seem to control himself.

Luis placed his palms on Cory’s chest. He gently pushed him and said, “Back up. I told Thomas I’d be at his

door ten minutes ago. He's probably standing at the door waiting for me. You know how older people are. Besides, you need to trim that beard. It's getting scruffy looking. You're starting to look like a cave man."

Cory could tell Luis was having as much fun as he was. When Luis touched Cory's chest and pushed, Luis also started to feel Cory's chest muscles. Though Luis's head was down, he was looking up at Cory with those dark, dangerous eyes. So Cory moved closer and inhaled his scent. "I left my beard scruffy on purpose because I know you like it that way."

Luis reached up and caressed the side of Cory's face. He ran his fingertips back and forth across Cory's dark beard. "Why are you walking to the house this morning? Where's your Jeep?"

Cory shrugged. The way Luis touched his face was getting him hard as a rock. "The Jeep wouldn't start this morning. I had to have it towed and Jasper dropped me off a few minutes before you and Hunter came running down the road like maniacs."

"I hope it's nothing serious."

"Me too. But it doesn't look good. When I checked the oil this morning it was empty. I hope the engine didn't seize. The last thing I need is a car payment."

Luis caressed his beard one more time. Then he pushed harder on Cory's chest and stepped away from the tree. "Keep me posted about what's wrong," Luis said. "If you need to use my car, or you need a ride, let me know."

"You're a sweetheart," Cory said.

"I'll be back in time for lunch," Luis said. Before he turned to walk over to Thomas's house, he pointed down and said, "You'd better walk close to the side of the road."

Cory shrugged. "Why?" He was thinking about his Jeep.

"Because you could get arrested walking around in public that way."

Cory looked down and gaped at what had happened between his legs. He'd been wearing loose basketball shorts

that morning and Luis had given him such an intense erection he'd not only pitched a huge tent in his shorts the shorts had risen up and his dick was sticking out of the right leg. He bit his bottom lip and quickly covered his cock. He tried to point it down but it was still too hard to bend and the fabric of his shorts continued to stick out. "It's your fault," he said. "Now I'll have to walk around with a painful hard-on all morning."

"You should wear a jock strap."

"It's too hot for underwear. I like things to breathe down there."

Luis laughed and made a face. Then he turned and started walking toward Thomas's house. Thomas lived at the end of the driveway, beyond a section of thick shrubs. "You should strap that big ugly thing down with duct tape, then," Luis said, without looking back. "It's obscene."

Cory laughed. He grabbed his dick and said, "I heard you like it big, ugly, and obscene."

"Don't be an asshole," Luis said, still walking.

"Thanks to you I'll have to rub one out in the woods now," Cory said, watching the way Luis's sweet round ass moved and turned. He sometimes wondered what would happen if Luis didn't have Jase and he didn't have Jasper.

"That's your problem, not mine."

\* \* \* \*

When Cory reached the house, his balls were a little sore but his erection subsided and he decided to get the ladder out and work on a loose shutter outside Jase's and Luis's bedroom. The pool guys hadn't arrived yet and Cory knew it would be too hot to climb the ladder later that day, so he decided to get the most annoying job of the day out of the way fast. He went down to the barn for the ladder, then remembered he'd left it up against the side of the house, along with his tool belt, the day before so they would be there waiting for him first thing this morning. He smiled and shook his head. He was getting as forgetful as Luis.

He saw no signs of Darius, which was fine with him. The creep was probably in the kitchen or the laundry room doing something wonderful and exciting for Luis and Jase.

The less Cory saw of Darius, the happier he was. There was something about Darius he didn't trust. Darius was always too eager to please, too willing to back down and agree with everyone. If Jase or Luis needed anything, Darius jumped to their rescue. Darius reminded Cory of a rotten little kid in school who is always helping the teacher out and stabbing the other kids in the back at the same time.

Cory walked to the other side of the house and wrapped his tool belt around his waist. Luis was right; he should have worn underwear with those shorts. Though his dick had gone down, it was still swinging heavily between his legs. When he started to climb the ladder and realized anyone from below could look up his shorts and see his privates, he was glad he'd decided to do this job while everyone was out of the house.

But when he reached the open window and looked into Luis's and Jase's bedroom, he stopped moving and pressed his palm to his throat. The shock wasn't because the window was open and the air conditioning was running. Luis often opened the bedroom windows in the morning to get fresh air into the house. The shock was because Darius was in their room, prancing around in nothing but Luis's see-through black thong. Cory stood frozen with his mouth half open. Darius, who thought he was alone, reached for a photo on the dresser. He took the photo of Jase's face and rubbed it up against his dick, then bucked his hips and said, "Fuck me, Jase. I'm better than prissy fucking Luis. Fuck me as hard as you can. I can do things to you Luis could never dream of doing."

Well! Cory remained still. He knew if he started back down the ladder Darius might hear him.

Darius climbed up on the bed and propped the photo of Jase up against the pillows. He got down on all fours, spread his legs wide, and pulled his erection out of Luis's sheer thong. Cory didn't bother to notice Darius's athletic body. He didn't care about the size of his erection. And he didn't gape at the way Darius's back arched when his legs were spread. At that moment, everything about Darius

repulsed him to the point of nausea. Though Cory and Luis flirted with each other openly, there was nothing dirty or perverted about it. But what Darius was doing in their bedroom made Cory feel so creepy he had to concentrate hard not to climb through the window and beat the shit out of him.

It wouldn't have been difficult for Cory to kick his blond boy ass. When he saw the way Darius rubbed Jase's face against his dick, Cory imagined his fist meeting Darius's nose. When he saw the way Darius stuck his fingers in his ass and pretended Jase was fucking him, Cory felt his foot kicking Darius's ass as hard as he could. When Darius finished himself off on the photo of Jase and then licked it clean, Cory pictured his fist going down Darius's throat.

But all Cory did was lurk, absorbing the decadence he'd suspected was there all along. He knew if he went inside and confronted Darius, or if he went in and beat the shit out of him, Darius would turn the story around and Cory would wind up looking like the bad guy. So he decided to slowly climb down the ladder and allow Darius to finish what he'd started in their bedroom without saying a word. He'd keep this secret to himself for now, saving it for a day when it might come in handy. He knew one thing for sure: he'd never take his eyes off Darius when Hunter was around. If the creep made one wrong gesture toward Hunter, Cory would, in fact, kick his ass until he couldn't walk again. Cory had come to love these guys like family and he wasn't going to let anyone harm them, especially not some creep who put on other people's underwear and licked come off pictures. Just thinking about this turned Cory's stomach around again.

However, as Cory's right leg went down, his tool belt scraped the side of the ladder and made a loud noise. Cory froze and remained in the window. Darius stopped licking Jase's photo and turned to see what the noise was. Their eyes locked for a moment. Neither one of them moved a muscle or said a word. Then Cory lowered his eyes and descended the ladder, hoping Darius had the brains not to confront him about this, ever.

\* \* \* \*

Later that afternoon, as Cory walked to the end of the driveway to meet Jasper, he removed his shirt and wiped sweat from his forehead. The entire day had left him with a splitting headache and all he wanted to do now was go home, lie down beside Jasper, and make love. He wanted to forget about what he'd seen Darius doing in Luis and Jase's bedroom. He'd tried hard to erase it from his mind but it wouldn't seem to go away. He'd avoided all contact with Darius, and Darius seemed to be avoiding him, too. And there was his Jeep to worry about. When he'd called the garage earlier, he'd learned the engine had seized from lack of oil and it was useless to try to fix it. How this had happened was anyone's guess. Cory had been checking his oil fanatically for months. He knew Jasper would help him out with rides to and from work, but he'd have to get a new truck or Jeep and he hadn't planned on that. Jase and Luis had been paying him very well and he'd been saving his money to buy a small condo with Jasper, so he could get out of his rented apartment over a garage and Jasper could get out of his parents' home. A new truck would set him back at least a year.

When he reached this middle of the driveway, he heard a car coming toward him. He knew it wasn't Luis. Hunter had risen from his afternoon nap and Luis had been in the middle of a new blog post for that romantic blog he contributed to. Cory could never quite remember the name of this blog. Although he'd often made mental notes to check it out to see what Luis wrote, he'd never actually bothered. The blog was part of Luis's and Jase's life in New York, and Cory didn't like to think about them that way. He preferred to think about them in Cider Mill Farm all the time, where things were casual and relaxed. In spite of his pragmatism, not to mention his flirting with Luis, he'd grown to love them both.

The car came closer. Cory turned and saw Darius's white pick up truck heading toward him. He was speeding, leaving dust in the background, barreling in Cory's direction without a hint of slowing down.

At first Cory tipped his head sideways and glared at the oncoming truck in the distance, not taking in the



magnitude of the situation. He clenched his fist and set his jaw, hoping Darius had come to confront him about what he'd seen earlier that morning. But when he realized Darius had no intention of stopping, his body jerked and he started running toward the road. He thought about jumping behind a tree, but Darius was so close now he didn't want to slow down. He figured he'd be safer on the main road, out in the open. Thomas's house was there and he could run into the yard for help. He could tell everyone what he'd seen that morning and he could tell them how Darius had tried to run him down.

Darius's truck was gaining on him. He couldn't look back; he had to keep running for his life. Beads of perspiration formed on his forehead, and he could almost smell the rubber on Darius's tires. If he did look back, he might trip and Darius would ride over him. When he saw the road approaching, he started running faster, knowing he was almost safe and minutes away from letting everyone know Darius was dangerous and couldn't be trusted. He heard the truck slow down; it wasn't on his back anymore. But when he felt safe enough to glance over his shoulder, he wasn't thinking about anything but Darius. He ran into the road and right into the path of the Reverend Thomas von Klingensmith's big black Cadillac. Evidently, Thomas had been making a right turn into the easement road. Cory heard a screech and a horn. He saw a flash of light, then a million little white stars as his body lifted and sailed through the air. When he landed in the ditch with a thump, he closed his eyes and remembered the sinister look in Darius's ice cold eyes when he'd caught Cory looking through the open window earlier that morning.

## Chapter Ten

When Darius came into the kitchen, Luis was finishing up an e-mail to Ben and Percy, his two older friends in New York. Jase and Luis had met Ben and Percy back when they'd first met each other and the two couples became very good friends. But when Luis and Jase bought Cider Mill Farm and started spending less time in New York, Ben and Percy seemed to take it personally, almost as a rejection of their friendship. There were times when Luis thought Ben and Percy resented Hunter for taking up so much of their time. Then Ben and Percy became very friendly with this awful woman named Celeste who lived down on East 24<sup>th</sup> Street, a mortgage broker who hated sex with her husband because, of all things, his dick was too large, and spent her weekends watching rare birds. Ben and Percy started giving Luis and Jase the silent treatment and turning down invitations, which Luis thought was their defense mechanism because they felt left out now that Jase and Luis had a house in the country and a child.

So Luis wanted to patch things up with them and he was sending them an e-mail to let them know he still cared and still wanted to remain close. Although there was a huge age difference between the two couples, Luis regarded them as two of his best friends and he was willing to work a little harder for their friendship.

As Luis clicked "send" and the e-mail went off into cyberspace, Darius crossed into the room and said, "There's been an accident." His face was red and his eyes bulged; he was out of breath and perspiring everywhere. He'd only driven to the end of the easement road to get the mail. But it looked more like he'd run a marathon.

Luis knew Hunter was in the next room watching TV. His first thought was Jase. "What happened?" He stood up and grabbed Darius by the arms.

"Thomas had an accident," Darius said. "He was pulling into the driveway and he ran Cory over."

“No.”

Darius nodded yes.

Luis’s stomach jumped. “How bad is it?”

Darius shook his head. “You’d better not go down there. He’s lying in a ditch. Thomas is there with him and his friend, Jasper, pulled up. They are waiting for the paramedics.”

Luis took a quick breath. He ran to the counter, grabbed his car keys, and said, “Stay here with Hunter and don’t say anything about what happened.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t go,” Darius said. “It’s pretty bad. Let them take care of everything.”

Before Darius could finish his sentence, Luis was outside starting the truck. Jase had taken Luis’s car that morning because it was easier to maneuver in city traffic. Luis hit the gas and turned the wheel. The big black pick up truck fishtailed halfway down the driveway and didn’t right itself until Luis was speeding on the easement road. He had to get down there to see what had happened. He didn’t know Jasper well and he knew Thomas was older and not very quick. Luis wasn’t going to waste any time in getting help for Cory.

When he reached the end of the easement, he saw Thomas’s Cadillac parked on a slant. There was a small twenty-five-year-old Mercedes convertible parked behind it and the driver’s door was wide open. Luis hit the brakes and skidded sideways. He jumped out of the truck and ran to the end of the easement. When he reached the road and turned right, he saw Thomas looking down at the ditch with both hands pressed to his face. He mumbled something Luis couldn’t make out; he rocked and swayed, ready to tip sideways.

Thomas turned and faced Luis. His skin was pale white and his eyes filled with terror. When he found his voice, he said, “I was coming back to drop off a few healing crystals. Cory ran into the middle of the road before I had a chance to brake. I have no idea why he was running. He looked like he was afraid of something.”

When Luis saw how Thomas was shaking, he grabbed his arm and said, "Go sit in my truck and calm down. Everything's going to be okay."

Then Luis looked down at the ditch. Cory's body was twisted sideways, his eyes were closed, and his legs were stretched all the way out. There was no blood and it wasn't as bad as Luis had expected visually. But he saw no signs of movement. Jasper kneeled beside him, running his palm across his forehead with one hand and wiping tears from his own eyes with the other. Luis climbed into the ditch and asked, "Did you call the paramedics?"

Jasper nodded. "It's the first thing Thomas said he did. He called about fifteen minutes ago."

Luis felt a sharp pain in his stomach, the kind of pain that hits without warning and lingers for a long time. At least he didn't see any blood, which had to be a good sign. There was no visible damage to Cory's face or body. So he reached down to check Cory's pulse, then leaned over and pressed his ear to Cory's mouth. Luis's first partner back in Tennessee had been a medical doctor and Luis had learned a few things about how to handle an emergency by watching quietly. When he felt a trace of Cory's breath against his ear, he closed his eyes and exhaled. Cory was still alive. But Luis had this strong feeling in his gut they had to do something fast or they'd lose him.

"He has a pulse and he's breathing," Luis said, reaching for Jasper's arm. "Has he regained consciousness?"

Jasper, clearly in shock, shook his head and said, "No. He hasn't said a thing or moved a muscle."

Luis leaned forward again. He patted Cory's cheek and asked, "Can you hear me? Can you open your eyes, Cory? It's Luis. You're going to be fine. I'm going to take care of everything. Nothing's going to happen to you. I promise." He felt a sting in his eyes and he sniffed back. Then he looked up at Jasper. "Where the hell are the paramedics? They should be here by now. We're not that far from town."

Jasper shrugged. "I don't know. Thomas said he called them."

That could be trouble. Luis turned and glanced up. Thomas was still looking down at them. His hands were still shaking and his lower lip quivered. Luis clenched his fists and tried hard to maintain a smooth, even tone. He didn't want to frighten Thomas. "What did the 911 operator say, Thomas, when you told her the address? Did she say how long it would take?" Luis didn't even hear sirens blaring from town, which he should have heard by this time.

"I don't remember," Thomas said. "I couldn't remember the name of the road so I gave them directions from town. I told them, 'turn left by the old school house, then go straight. When you get to the big yellow house, turn right by the sycamore tree.' I tried to make it very clear. I'm so sorry, Luis. The woman wanted me to stay on the line but my cell phone battery went dead and I lost her."

"Why didn't you tell us this?" Luis asked. There was a strong chance Thomas had given the paramedics directions that would lead them all over Bucks County.

"I guess I wasn't thinking," Thomas said. "I'm so sorry. He was running so fast I didn't have a chance to stop or swerve. If I'd seen him coming, I'd have hit the tree instead. Oh, this is so bad. He has to live."

Luis didn't get mad at him. How could he? The poor old man was so grief stricken and in so much shock by then that Luis was afraid he was going to fall over with a heart attack. So he looked down at Cory again and said, "You're going to be fine, Cory. I promise." Then he grabbed Jasper's arm and said, "We're taking him to the hospital ourselves. I'm not waiting any more. If I have to call the paramedics again it could take another half hour and I'm not sure how much time he has left." The strong feeling of urgency passed through him again. They didn't have a minute left to waste.

"Should we move him?" Jasper asked. "They say not to move people like this because it could cause more problems."

Luis looked into Jasper's eyes. He shrugged and said, "I don't know what else to do. His pulse is so low I'm afraid we're going to lose him." Though Luis normally would have

waited for the paramedics, this time a little voice in his head kept saying, “Get him to a hospital fast.”

So Luis ran back to the truck. He pulled it as close to the ditch as he could. Then he and Jasper lifted Cory out of the ditch and placed him gently in the back seat, which thankfully had enough space to keep him comfortable. Cory remained unconscious the entire time, not even a blink. Jasper kneeled on the floor in the backseat beside Cory and Thomas climbed into the front passenger seat.

Luis started the truck and hit the hazard lights. He drove fast, without stopping for traffic lights or stop signs. He passed slower cars on the right and honked his horn at a group of those arrogant people on expensive bicycles who thought they owned the road. He ignored their obscene gestures, sped past them on the wrong side of the road, and continued driving without glancing back. He took mostly back roads, remembering the way from a trip to the emergency room when Hunter sprained his finger last summer.

When they finally pulled up to the emergency room entrance, he jumped out of the truck, ran into the hospital, and screamed at the person at the reception desk for help.

The three of them waited to hear news about Cory’s condition in the emergency room family area, a long, narrow football field of a room. CNN broadcasted the latest news and the Reverend Al Sharpton yammered about something political Luis wasn’t familiar with. Thomas sat at the end of a long row of blue vinyl seats staring down at his lap. Jasper remained standing, pacing the waiting room floor. He’d phoned Cory’s family to let them know what had happened. Evidently, Cory’s mother and father were on vacation at the Jersey Shore and they wouldn’t get to the hospital until late that night. Luis called Jase and told him what had happened, then sat down beside a middle-aged woman with reddish brown hair who kept sighing and biting her fist. People came and went: a little boy with a sprained wrist, an older woman who had chest pains and thought she was having a heart attack, and a guy with yellow skin who was having a bad reaction to chemotherapy. By the time a doctor finally walked into the

waiting area and looked around, Luis was the first one to stand and run over to him.

The ER doctor said Cory was still alive and he'd been moved up to the Intensive Care Unit. He said they could go up to the ICU waiting room where a doctor would talk to them about Cory's condition. So they went up to the second floor and waited for another half hour. At least the ICU waiting room was empty and they could sit and sulk alone. At that point, Jase called and said he was home and he wanted to come to the hospital. But Luis told him to stay home and take care of Hunter. There was nothing Jase could do and Luis promised to call him when he got some news.

When the ICU doctor finally came out, he told them Cory's condition was critical and they weren't sure he'd make it through the night. His expression remained lugubrious and his tone grave. The doctor said even though he normally thought it best to wait for paramedics to arrive it was a good thing they hadn't waited this time. Cory's heart stopped the minute they'd rolled him into the ER. But they'd brought him back and his vital signs were stable. He had internal injuries, multiple head injuries, several broken ribs, and both arms had been broken. They'd put him on a ventilator and into an induced coma so he'd remain stable.

After Luis asked a few questions his condition, the doctor asked about Cory's family: his next of kin and who was responsible for making decisions. Luis told him Cory's mother and father were driving up from the Jersey shore and they were responsible for him. The doctor didn't want to let Jasper or Luis into the ICU to see Cory until his family arrived and gave permission, but Luis reached for his arm and said, "We're going in to see him right now. You can call security, you can call the police. But we're going in there one way or the other." So the doctor relented and allowed them ten minutes each. It was the fastest ten minutes of Luis's life. When he left Cory's room, the bells and beeps from the machines attached to Cory's body remained with him for the next three days whenever he closed his eyes.

By the time Cory's mother and father arrived, Luis could barely move his arms. He hugged Cory's mother and shook Cory's father's hand. This was the first time Luis had ever met Cory's family and they were much older than Luis had imagined they would be. They were both in their mid-sixties. The mother's hair was bluer than Thomas's, with tight little permed ringlets, and she wore a pink flowery old-fashioned dress with a full skirt and low-heeled white pumps that matched her white vinyl purse. Cory's father was tall and thin and bald, with age spots on his face and thick eyeglasses resting on the bridge of his nose. He wore baggy gray slacks, a white button-down shirt, and a navy blue cardigan. Luis and Jasper sat them down and explained everything in detail. Thomas hugged Cory's mother and apologized so many times she finally patted his wrinkled hand and smiled sadly to let him know she didn't blame him.

By the time Luis returned to Cider Mill Farm it was well after midnight. He walked Thomas to his front door and told him to get some rest. Then he walked Jasper to his car, which was still parked at the end of the easement, and hugged him tightly. "He's going to be fine," Luis said. "He's strong. I know he'll be fine."

Jasper smiled and said, "Thank you for everything. If we had waited for the paramedics he might not have made it."

Luis shrugged and smiled. "Cory would have done the same thing for us. All I knew was we had to do something fast. It was the weirdest feeling I've ever had in my life. And I hope I never have it again."

"I can't thank you enough."

"Go home and get some rest. If there are any changes in Cory's condition, call me at any time. I'll see you at the hospital tomorrow."

"I'll call if I hear anything."

When Luis pulled up to the house, he noticed the lights in the kitchen, which appeared strange at this late hour. He figured Jase would be sitting up waiting for him, but in the bedroom not the kitchen. He unfolded his tired body from the truck and crossed to the back door. But as he reached for the



door handle and looked inside, he saw Jase sitting at the kitchen table in his boxer shorts and Darius walking around in a plaid shirt with no pants. The plaid shirt almost covered his hips. But it was obvious Darius wasn't wearing any underwear. Luis waited for a moment and watched, wondering why Darius would be up this late at night. Luis couldn't hear what they were saying, but they were having a conversation and looking into each other's eyes. Every so often, Darius would turn and gesture with his hands. And when he did, the back of his shirt rose up and exposed his bare ass. Jase didn't look down at his ass and gape. He didn't reach for it either. They weren't doing anything wrong, not exactly. But Luis did notice Jase's eyes dart up and down very quickly, as if he were trying a little too hard not to look at Darius's bare ass.

Luis couldn't keep his eyes open and all he wanted to do was fall into bed and sleep. But when he opened the door and walked into the kitchen, Jase and Darius stopped talking and stared at him as if he'd interrupted something important. Luis crossed the room, without looking down at Darius's naked legs, and he kissed Jase on the mouth. Then he sat down on Jase's lap and put his arms around Jase's shoulders. He kissed him again and said, "This has been the longest night of my life." He looked up at Darius and smiled, caressing the back of Jase's head to claim his territory. "I'm glad you're here, Darius, to keep Jase company this way." It was a lie. He felt like throwing a sheet around his half-naked body. But he decided not to jump to any conclusions.

Darius set his palm on Luis's shoulder. "How is he? We've been so worried."

"He's stable and they think he's going to live," Luis said. "But they can't say much more right now. They won't know anything for certain for at least a few days. He's in an induced coma and everyone is hoping for the best."

Jase put his arms around Luis and frowned. "It must have been awful. Were there any witnesses? Does Thomas know how it happened?"

Luis sent Darius a somber glance. “Thomas doesn’t have a clue. And there are no witnesses. All Thomas remembers is seeing Cory running toward the car with a terrified expression.”

Darius placed his palm on his shirt. The shirt rose up and exposed part of his genitals. Not much. But Luis could definitely see the tip of his dick. “The poor man.”

Luis sighed, wondering if Darius knew his dick was exposed. He told them about the accident, about how badly Thomas was taking it, and about how they’d had to drive Cory to the emergency room in the back of the truck because Thomas screwed up with the paramedics. Darius stood there gaping down at them, listening to every detail, legs spread wide. He didn’t say a word until Luis asked, “Did you see anything, Darius? You were on your way to get the mail when all this happened. We can’t figure out why Cory was running so fast.”

Darius shrugged. “I didn’t see a thing. By the time I got there Thomas had already hit him.”

“Well, I’m sure we’ll find out what happened as soon as Cory regains consciousness, which I’m sure he will,” Luis said. He smiled at Darius, trying hard not to look down at his naked legs, and said, “You can go to bed now, Darius. We’ll see you in the morning.” He said this with his driest tone, letting Darius know he was the boss and Darius was intruding now.

Darius backed up and nodded. “I’ll go right now and leave you both alone. I’m sorry. I should have known better. I’m such an idiot sometimes.” Then he quickly went back to his own bedroom off the kitchen and shut the door.

When he was gone, Jase said, “That was awfully abrupt. You basically dismissed the poor guy from the room. I hope Darius isn’t insulted now.”

Luis sighed again, now wondering if Darius’s self-deprecating remarks were sincere. He rested his head on Jase’s shoulder. “There’s something about him sometimes that bothers me. He’s always trying so hard. Why wasn’t he wearing any pants tonight?”

Jase laughed. "He thought he was alone. When I came down here to get a glass of water, he was looking inside the refrigerator for something to eat. He thought I was upstairs sleeping. He had no idea I was coming downstairs. It was all very innocent."

"I'm sure it was," Luis said. He thought it best not to argue the point. Jase seemed very fond of Darius and Luis knew when it was time to end a conversation that could have been harmful. In fact, Luis could have been all wrong about Darius. "Let's go upstairs now. I want to sleep. I want to go to the hospital early tomorrow morning."

Jase rubbed his back and said, "I'll stay home tomorrow and go to the hospital with you."

Luis stood up and stretched. "I'd like that. We can take Thomas with us. I'm worried about him. He's distraught over all this. I'd hate to see him get sick."

"Does Cory have health insurance?" Jase asked.

Luis frowned. "No. But Thomas told me on the ride home he has good insurance and he'd pay for everything. He assured me he plans on taking full responsibility for all Cory's costs. I'm sure his auto insurance will cover it."

"I'd better call the hospital right now and speak to one of the doctors in ICU," Jase said.

"Why?"

"I want them to make sure Cory has the best care available," Jase said. "I want them to know if there are any problems with Thomas's insurance company, I'll cover the costs personally. You have to be firm about these things nowadays when it comes to health care."

Luis sent him a surprised glance. "You'd do that?"

"Of course," Jase said. "Cory and I have had a few of our own long talks, some of which involved you and all that teasing business. He's always been open and honest with me. And I've not only grown to like Cory, I've grown to trust him more than any employee I have. He doesn't know it yet. But I have plans for his future."

Luis felt a sting in his eyes. "This is only one reason why I love you so much. You are the finest man I've ever

known. You don't know the meaning of the word revenge.” Luis knew deep down he wasn't as fine a man as Jase. Luis tried hard to be like him. But he had flaws and he knew it, especially when it came to craving attention from good-looking young men like Cory.

At that moment, as Jase reached for the phone to call the hospital, Luis made a vow. If Cory lived and came out of this, Luis would never flirt or tease him again. He'd never drop his pants and he'd never wiggle his ass in Cory's direction. He'd never sit on Cory's lap, wrap his legs around Cory's waist, or joke about Cory's dick again. Unless, of course, Cory really, really begged him to do it.

## Chapter Eleven

On the way to the hospital the next morning, Jase and Luis picked up Thomas. He was waiting for them at the end of the easement road, holding a large canvas tote bag in one hand and a small bouquet of red roses fresh from his garden in the other. He climbed into the truck and twisted his elderly body sideways to sit down, as if he were about to lie flat across the backseat. He told them he hadn't slept at all that night and he'd called the hospital every hour to check on Cory's condition, which had remained stable. He clutched the canvas bag on his lap and said he'd filled it with healing crystals, meditation candles, and a bottle of holy water from a famous shrine in Europe he'd visited the previous summer. Then he gazed out the back window and watched the scenery pass by in silence the rest of the way.

When they arrived at the hospital and walked into the ICU waiting room, they found out the doctors were giving Cory a test and they had asked the family to wait outside until they were finished. When Luis saw Jasper sitting alone on one side of the waiting room and Cory's parents sitting on the other side, he knew they hadn't arrived a moment too soon. Jase and Thomas went over and sat with Cory's parents. Luis plopped down beside Jasper and asked, "How's it going?"

"Cory is still stable," Jasper said. "But they still can't predict anything yet. They said it was a good thing he'd survived the night."

Luis smiled and reached for Jasper's hand. "I'm not talking about Cory," He said. "I called the hospital several times last night to check. I'm talking about how you're doing?"

Jasper smiled. "I'm good. I fell asleep for about an hour last night."

"I didn't know you were coming back so early this morning," Luis said. "When I dropped you off at your car last night I figured you'd sleep late."

"I didn't go home at all," Jasper said. "When I got into my car I drove right back here. I couldn't leave him alone in this condition. I wouldn't have been able to sleep anyway."

"You should go home now and get some rest," Luis said. "And so should Cory's parents." He glanced across the room and noticed their heavy expressions and the dark circles beneath their eyes. "They look exhausted. We'll stay here all day until you guys come back later. Jase wants to speak with someone in administration about Cory's medical bills. If Thomas's insurance won't pay, Jase insists on paying for everything."

"That's very nice of Jase." Jasper glanced at Cory's father and frowned. "I'm sure Cory's father will be relieved. He's been worrying about that all night."

"How are you getting along with them?" Luis asked. He wasn't prying, but he knew Cory's circumstances. Cory had just come out to his friends and his family, and then he'd introduced Jasper to them as his partner in the next breath. And from the distance between them all in the waiting room, Luis wasn't sure what to think.

Jasper shrugged. "We've been civil. But there's a strain. We speak when we have to speak to each other. But for the most part we remain in separate corners. Sometimes I catch Cory's father staring at me with an odd expression. It's like he's dying to ask me a question, yet terrified to hear the answer."

Luis sighed, remembering how his own Bible-carrying family back in Tennessee had disowned him after he'd come out of the closet. They tossed him out in the street, and he'd been forced to move in with an older man. "You have to be patient. This is all new to them and they are trying to process everything during a very difficult time and under very serious circumstances. I actually think it's a good sign they haven't banned you from his room or had you thrown out of the hospital. I've seen that before with gay couples. It's not pretty."

Jasper yawned and said, "I guess you're right. They seem like decent people, and right now they are too

heartbroken to do anything but sit and wait for the next doctor's report. It's like every time a doctor or nurse comes into the waiting room my heart stops beating and I get a lump in my throat. I just want to know there's hope, is all."

"I'm going to go over and talk to Cory's parents," Luis said. "I think they should go home now and rest. I think you should go, too. The last thing we need is one of you getting sick."

It wasn't easy to talk Cory's parents into going home, but he finally convinced them he and Jase would remain at the hospital while they were gone and if anything significant happened they'd call them. His mother was harder to persuade than his father. At first, she set her jaw and folded her arms across her chest. When Luis suggested they both needed rest she grabbed his hands and started crying again. He hugged her and told her he believed Cory was going to be fine and he'd be back on his feet in no time. Jase supported him, and Thomas even went so far as to say he'd been reading Cory's tarot cards and they said he'd survive this without any doubts. So the father finally reached for the mother's arm and agreed going home for rest was the best thing they could do. When he stood up and glanced across the room at Jasper, he smiled and said, "I think you should go home now and get some rest, too. Do you need a ride, son?"

Jasper's head went up and he looked slightly startled for a moment. Then he stood up and crossed the room. "I'm fine. I have my car outside. But I'll walk you both down to the parking lot if that's okay."

Luis cast a glance in Jase's direction and pressed his palm to his heart. Even though there was still awkwardness, he now knew there was hope, from this one small gesture made by Cory's father.

Cory's mother wiped her eyes and smiled. "We'd like that, Jasper," she said. Then she turned to Thomas, Jase, and Luis, and thanked them so many times for helping out and for being there that Cory's father finally had to grab her arm and guide her toward the exit.

After the first awkward day, the situation between Jasper and Cory's parents improved with each small improvement Cory made. By the third day, Luis and Jase met them in the elevator and they were all joking around about how Cory had a tendency to be too distant sometimes. The mother said, "He's been that way since he was a little boy. He was never much of a talker." Jasper lifted an eyebrow and said, "I'm lucky if I can get him to tell me one thing about how his day went." Then the mother cast a glance toward Cory's father and said, "That's where Cory gets it." The father looked down at his shoes and frowned.

By the fifth day, the doctors slowly started bringing Cory out of the induced coma. They hadn't given anyone advance notice about this and Luis was the only one in the room when they began. Jasper had gone back to work part time and he wasn't due at the hospital until later, and Cory's parents were home resting. Jase had gone into New York for a meeting. And Thomas was in the hospital chapel meditating about Cory's condition. Luis sat and waited in a far corner of the small room as doctors and nurses monitored the machines attached to Cory's body. Luis sat forward in the red vinyl chair with his elbows on his knees and his fingers laced together as the doctors waited for Cory to open his eyes.

But he didn't open his eyes right away, which the doctors said was still perfectly normal. When they knew Cory was stable, they left Luis alone in the room with him and went on to examine other patients in the ICU. Luis remained seated, watching for signs of movement, waiting for Cory to open his eyes. Fifteen minutes went by before he decided to get up and stand beside Cory's bed. He reached down and grabbed Cory's hand. He leaned forward, as close to Cory's ear as he could get, and whispered, "I'd really love it if you'd squeeze my hand right now. Or at least open your eyes." His spoke with a soft tone, almost a stage whisper. Though both Cory's arms were broken, Luis was still able to touch his fingers very lightly.

In less than a minute, Luis heard the sheets rustle. When he looked at the end of the bed, he saw Cory's right leg



move very slowly. No more than a fraction of an inch, but at least it was something. Luis smiled and his eyes welled up. He said, "I knew you could do it. I'm so happy I could kiss you." He leaned forward and gave Cory a friendly kiss on the lips.

Then he felt Cory's fingers wiggle. A second later, his eyelids fluttered and slowly opened.

Luis kissed him again and said, "You're going to be all right, sweetie. We're all here making sure of it. Your mother and father are getting along very well with Jasper. Jasper's working right now, but he'll be back this afternoon."

There was a breathing tube down Cory's throat and he couldn't move his arms at all. But Luis noticed a tear trickle down the right side of his face, as if he were trying to say thank you with his eyes. He even tried to speak. His lips twitched but nothing happened.

"You have a breathing tube, sweetie," Luis said, gently caressing his fingers. "Don't try to talk. And don't worry. It's only temporary. The doctors said they are going to wean you off the breathing tube as quickly as possible."

Luis had been so excited about Cory's eyes opening he hadn't been paying attention to the machines hooked up to his body. The beeps were louder and going off faster; one machine was making fast swishing noises that sounded like, *push, push, push*. When a nurse walked into the room, Luis was still gently massaging Cory's fingers with one hand and caressing the side of his face with the other.

"What's going on in here?" the nurse asked, crossing to the machine that was monitoring Cory's heart rate. "His heart is racing, almost a hundred twenty-two beats a minute. His blood pressure hit the roof. The rest of the machines are going berserk."

Luis pointed to Cory's face, ignoring her concern. "Look, his eyes are open. I even saw him move his legs. Isn't it wonderful?" What did he know?

The nurse frowned and put her hands on her hips. Then she glanced down toward the middle of Cory's body and took a quick breath. "I think you'd better step back and let him rest now. He's a bit overexcited, if you get my drift. In

twenty years of nursing I've never seen anything quite like *this* before."

Luis sent her a confused glance. Then he looked at the middle of Cory's body himself and gasped. He tipped his head sideways and blinked. The white hospital sheet covering Cory's middle, had risen, forming a solid tent, and Cory's obvious erection stood tall and firm beneath it. So Luis released Cory's hand and took two steps back. The moment he stepped back the heart monitor began to stabilize and the bed sheet descended. Luis smiled at the nurse and shrugged. She looked at him with her tongue pressed to her cheek, without commenting further about the erection, then said she was going to get the doctor to examine Cory now that he was awake.

When she left, Luis put his hands on his hips and turned to face Cory. Cory's eyes were still on him but he wasn't crying anymore. "No more of *that*," Luis said. "You have to save your energy for getting better. You need all the strength you can get. I made a vow if you lived through this and came back normal, there would be no more teasing and flirting between us. So be good now. I'm serious, Cory. The last thing you want is your mother and father coming in here and finding you with a big old hard-on. If you understand me, wink with your right eye: once for yes, twice for no."

Cory winked once.

Luis smiled. "I knew you'd be okay. You have to rest now."

Cory winked again.

"Excellent. And from now on, no more flirting between us."

This time Cory winked twice—fast, stubborn winks.

Luis frowned. "Well, not unless you really, really want me to."

Cory winked once, a long wink.

Before Luis could respond, the doctor stepped into the room and smiled at Luis. "I hear from his nurse he's opened his eyes and moved his leg, ahem, among other things."

Luis smiled and said, “Is this a good sign, doctor?” He needed reassurance from a professional.

The doctor laughed. “If this guy can do what the nurse told me she saw in here a minute ago, I have a feeling he’s going to be fine.”

## Chapter Twelve

After they brought Cory out of the induced coma, he started to improve with each passing day. But they didn't remove the breathing tube right away. The doctors said they wanted to wean him off slowly, in his own time, to keep him stable. He'd suffered multiple internal injuries, serious head trauma, and a few broken bones. Though remaining on the ventilator seemed to infuriate Cory because he couldn't speak—with two broken arms he couldn't write—he remained in good spirits and responded to yes and no questions with his eyelids. Cory had been extremely lucky. The doctors said he wouldn't have any permanent disabilities and he'd be back to normal with a little physical therapy and some time. But still, it wasn't easy to watch him lying there so helpless and fragile.

Thomas von Klingensmith brought him something new each day he visited. It was as though Cory had become the long-lost son he'd never had. Thomas seemed so thrilled Cory would survive and make a full recovery without any disabilities he even bought him a new iPad so he could read and do whatever he wanted to do on the Internet. It was premature; Cory couldn't even lift his broken arms to scratch his balls, let alone use a computer or reading device. But Luis knew Thomas meant well, and Luis had seen Cory's eyes light up when Thomas presented the gift to him.

On certain days, Jasper and Cory's parents drove to the hospital together. The parents would pick Jasper up at the diner on their way. On the way home, they'd often stop at the diner Jasper's parents owned for a bite to eat. Jase worked out all the financial arrangements with the hospital. Whatever Thomas's insurance company wouldn't cover, he promised he'd take care of himself. He even signed forms to validate it, making certain Cory would receive the best care the hospital could offer.

In the days that followed, everything seemed to be going to so well. The doctors were starting to discuss removing the breathing tube completely and they were hoping

to get Cory discharged before the end of August. But then one afternoon there was an unexpected, unexplainable setback. It happened right after Darius had paid a quick visit to Cory. Jase and Luis were downstairs in the hospital cafeteria with Hunter having lunch. Darius had asked Luis if he could go up to see Cory for a minute before they all went back to Cider Mill Farm. The new swimming pool had just been completed and Jase and Hunter wanted to take advantage of the warm weather. Though Luis and Jase refused to do any landscaping or finishing touches around the pool, preferring to wait until Cory was released so he could handle all that, the pool was ready for swimming and Hunter couldn't wait to jump in and splash around with Camp. As it turned out, Camp loved the water as much as Hunter.

A half hour later, Luis left Jase and Hunter in the cafeteria so he could retrieve Darius and tell Cory he'd see him tomorrow. But when he walked into the ICU, he saw Darius at the end of the hall standing outside Cory's room, biting his fist.

"What happened?" Luis asked, with a stunned voice. "Is he okay?"

Darius shrugged. "I have no idea. When I left the room, he seemed fine. I think he even smiled at me. He seemed so happy to see me. But on my way out I saw everyone running into his room, so I waited to see what was wrong. They said he stopped breathing. His face turned blue and I think the machines he's hooked up to weren't working properly. If it hadn't been for some nurse passing by his room, no one would have known until they returned to the desk."

"Jase is downstairs with Hunter," Luis said. "You can go down now. I'll find out what happened with Cory."

Darius sent Luis one of his warm, sincere smiles. "Are you sure? I don't mind waiting here with you in case something bad happens."

"I'm fine alone," Luis said, with a curt tone. "You can leave now." He knew his voice sounded harsh and blunt. He tried hard to be polite, but for some reason, everything about Darius had started to annoy him, and the last thing he needed

was Darius standing by while Cory might be going through another crisis.

"If you need me, I'll be with Jase and Hunter," Darius said.

Luis didn't reply. He turned his back and stepped into Cory's room to find out what had happened. The doctor was resetting the noisy machines, checking buttons and fiddling around with cords and wires and tubes. It was times like this when Luis wished he knew more about things of this nature. The nurse had placed a wet cloth on Cory's forehead. "What's wrong?" Luis asked.

The nurse shrugged and looked over at the doctor. The doctor stopped working with a cluster of wires and said, "We're not sure. We think something happened with the breathing tube and the ventilator, but I can't seem to find anything wrong. I honestly don't know. One minute he was fine, the next his face was blue and he couldn't breathe."

Luis moved closer. When he looked down, he noticed Cory's eyes were wide open, bulging, as if he was trying to tell them all something important. "Is he going to be okay?" Luis's heart was beating faster and there was a lump in his throat.

"He's fine now," the doctor said. "We gave him a strong sedative to calm him down. His heart rate went up to one hundred and sixty. It looked as if he was trying to get out of bed. He probably panicked about something. There's phenomenon called ICU psychosis, where people who have been in the ICU for a long time start to imagine things. Tomorrow we're going to start weaning him aggressively, then we'll start working on getting him back on his feet. There's nothing to worry about now."

"Are you sure?" Luis asked. He'd never heard of ICU psychosis. And Cory had never been the high-strung type. He was still gaping into Cory's wide eyes, wishing he could read Cory's mind. Something was wrong; he felt it in his bones. He could tell by the way Cory was glaring at him.

"I'm sure," the doctor said. "If there were anything to worry about, I'd let you know."

Luis glanced down at the bed and reached for Cory's hand. "You're going to be okay, Cory." The sedative must have been kicking in because his eyelids started to droop. "I'm coming tomorrow with Jasper and your parents. We're all going to be here when they start weaning you off the ventilator."

Cory blinked and nodded his head up and down. Then he closed his eyes and drifted to sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Later that night, Darius took Hunter to the movies so Luis and Jase could have an evening alone. Jase had insisted, giving Darius permission to stop for ice cream after the movie. Luis and Jase had been so busy with Cory for the past few weeks they hadn't had five minutes to spare for anything more intimate than a quick hug and a peck on the lips. So when they were finally alone in the house, Jase surprised Luis by walking into the kitchen naked and asking him if he wanted to go for a late-night swim. Luis had been working on a new blog post all evening. He looked up and smiled. Then he closed the laptop, stood from the kitchen table, and reached between Jase's legs.

Luis pushed the door open with one hand and guided Jase to the pool with the hand wrapped around his dick. He held the shaft with a tight but gentle grip, stroking and milking until he reached the edge of the pool. By then Jase was fully erect and there was pre-come showing. Before Luis removed his clothes, he bent down, stuck out his tongue, and licked the wet tip. Then he ran his tongue across his upper lip and smiled.

Jase's face turned red and he grabbed Luis by the waist. He pulled Luis up against his body and shoved his tongue into Luis's mouth. A moment after that, Jase released Luis and said, "You taste good tonight, like dick."

It was a warm night, with all the noisy creaks and chirps and cracks of summertime in the country sounding in the background. Luis pulled off his shirt and removed his shoes and socks. Being naked outside made his scrotum tighten. "I taste like *your* dick, is what you mean." He opened

his shorts and pulled them down to his ankles. He hadn't been wearing underwear and his own erection stood out in the darkness.

Jase smiled, gazing down at Luis's naked legs. "This is the first time we're going to fuck in the new swimming pool."

Luis stepped out of his shorts and kicked them aside. He rested his palm on Jase's chest and pushed him back. "If you want to fuck me, you have to catch me first." Then he jumped into the pool and swam to the other side, making sure he kept his ass high so Jase could see it slick and wet.

Jase jumped in after him. He was bigger than Luis and he swam faster. Before Luis had a chance to reach for the Pennsylvania Blue Stone coping on the other side of the pool, Jase dove into the water, grabbed Luis's legs, and buried his face in Luis's ass. How Jase managed to hold his breath that long Luis couldn't begin to imagine. He spread Luis's ass apart, licking and chewing and munching without coming up for air for a long time. When he finally did come up for air, he only took a few deep breaths and went under again. The second time Jase went down he shoved his tongue so far into Luis's body Luis clenched the coping and threw his head back. Jase didn't rim him often, but when he did, it brought Luis to a point of such complete submission the only thing he could concentrate on was spreading his legs wider.

When Jase came up for air a fifth time, Luis grabbed his dick and went underwater. He sucked Jase off for as long as he could and came up for air at brief intervals. He did this so long he lost track; becoming slightly lightheaded. He would have continued if Jase hadn't grabbed him by the top of the head and dragged him to the surface with more force than Luis had expected.

Jase kissed him hard and said, "Put your arms around my shoulders and hold on to my neck, then jump up and wrap your legs around my waist."

Luis closed his eyes and obeyed Jase's orders. When his legs were around Jase's waist and his own erection was pressed against Jase's abdomen, Jase reached down and



rubbed the head of his dick against the lips of Luis's anus. Jase had rimmed him for so long and opened him up so well, lube would have been a waste of time. With one quick push, Jase entered his body and slipped all the way to the bottom. It stung for a moment, then Luis's body relaxed and his eyelids began to flutter. Jase stepped forward, bracing Luis's back against the cold pool tiles, slowly moving his hips up and down. Jase's large hands clutched both sides of Luis's ass, guiding Luis up and down. Luis held Jase's shoulders and crossed his ankles behind Jase's back, slowly moving his body up and down as Jase fucked.

Between the way Jase guided Luis's hips, and the way Luis was grinding his hips, they found the perfect rhythm, which set them on course for what Luis knew would be an outrageous climax. He continued to bounce up and down on Jase's shaft, splashing in the water, feeling as if his body were suspended and lighter than it had ever been before. Jase continued to plunge into his ass, going deep each time Luis's body splashed into the water. The speed increased and they gained momentum, and it wasn't long before Luis started to dig his fingertips in the back of Jase's neck.

When Luis realized he'd lost all track of time, Jase squeezed both sides of his ass and said, "I'm gonna come."

Luis released his right hand from Jase's neck and lowered his hand into the water. He grabbed his own dick and said, "Me, too. I'm on the edge."

This time they came while they kissed. When their tongues met, their bodies exploded simultaneously. They continued to kiss until Jase filled Luis with every last drop he had left. When Luis finally brought his head back, he looked into Jase's eyes and smiled. "I love you," He said. "And I honestly can't imagine anything better than what just happened."

"I love you, too," Jase said. "I like fucking in the water, too. It keeps you suspended higher and longer. As a matter of fact, I think I'm going to tap your ass in the pool all the time from now on."

“That sounds vulgar,” Luis said, caressing Jase’s face in his hands. But he didn’t mean it. One of the things that turned him on most about Jase was the natural, vulgar way he spoke during sex. Oh, there was nothing prissy about Jase.

Jase started moving forward in the water. Luis’s arms were still around his shoulders and Luis’s legs were still wrapped around his waist. “What are you doing now?” Luis asked. “You should pull out and let me get dressed. Suppose Darius and Hunter pull up.”

“I don’t want to pull out yet,” Jase said. “I want to see how long I can stay inside. They’ll be gone for at least another hour.”

Luis wasn’t going to object to this. When Jase’s cock was up his ass, he was never more calm and serene. So he allowed Jase to walk him to the other side of the pool. When they reached the pool steps, Jase climbed up to the top step and set Luis down on his back so he’d be resting partially in shallow water. Luis closed his eyes and released his legs from Jase’s waist. He lifted his legs high and pressed his soles against Jase’s chest. When Jase started to fuck him again, he opened his eyes and looked up at the sky, gazing at stars and counting all his blessings.

When Jase finally did pull out, he kissed Luis on the forehead and helped him to his feet. Luis had to concentrate for a second to maintain his balance. He’d been on his back with his legs up for so long everything started to spin. But Jase picked up Luis’s clothes and put his arm around Luis’s waist. Then Luis wrapped his arms around Jase’s waist and they walked back to the house this way.

“Darius said something so cute and adorable the other day while you were with Cory and we were waiting in the hospital cafeteria,” Jase said. They were approaching the back door. Jase’s hand went lower and he slid two fingers down Luis’s ass crack.

Luis was so used to Jase playing with his ass by then he didn’t even flinch. “What did he say?” He was curious about anything Darius said to Jase, especially since the night

he'd seen Darius walking around in front of Jase with no pants.

Jase squeezed Luis's ass, lifting him up so he'd have to walk on his tip toes. "He asked if we ever did three-ways with other guys."

Luis stopped walking. He sent Jase a blank stare. "What did you say?"

"I told him we weren't into that sort of thing. Then, get this, he asked me if he could sit in our room and watch us in action. He thinks were both hot and he'd love to watch. He couldn't even look me in the eye. He was so cute and embarrassed about it. You should have been there."

Luis noticed Jase's tone rise with an unplanned lilt. He almost sounded giddy. "What did you say?" He couldn't wait to hear *this* answer, especially knowing how much Jase loved a little harmless exhibitionism once in a while.

"I said I'd have to talk to you first."

"We've never done anything like that with anyone we know," Luis said. They had, in fact, had sex in front of strangers on occasion, in dark corners and out-of-the-way places. But they'd never done it with an employee or a close friend, and there was a reason. Luis thought it was crossing a line he wasn't interested in crossing. He had a feeling something like this could lead to a three-way, and Jase was all the man Luis needed.

"That's why I told him I'd talk to you first," Jase said. "I'd never make a decision like that without you."

Luis reached up and rested his palm on Jase's shoulder. He rubbed the muscle a few times, then kissed Jase's bicep. "I don't think it's a good idea. I don't mind having sex in front of harmless strangers once in a while. But I don't feel comfortable about doing it in front of someone I know, especially an employee who lives in the same house."

Jase kissed his forehead. "I'm fine with that. If the subject ever comes up again, I'll tell Darius it's not going to happen."

Luis smiled and reached for the doorknob. When they entered the house he reached down, grabbed Jase's dick, and

said he wanted to take a shower with Jase before Darius and Hunter came home. As he led Jase upstairs, he didn't bother to notice Camp didn't come running to greet them at the door. He figured he was sleeping in the living room, waiting for Hunter to return.

## Chapter Thirteen

They didn't notice Camp was gone until Darius and Hunter returned from the movies. The first thing Hunter did was call Camp's name so he could take him outside one last time before they went to bed. When Hunter couldn't find him anywhere in the house, he grabbed Jase by the arm and begged to look outside.

"Calm down, buddy," Jase said. "I'm sure he's around here somewhere." He looked at Luis. "When did you last see him?"

Luis thought for a moment and said, "Right after dinner. I fed him and let him outside. I waited for him at the door and he came back in less than five minutes." It wasn't unusual for Camp to curl up somewhere in the living room and sleep for hours, and now that he was getting older, it wasn't unusual for him to ignore them all when he was being summoned.

Jase looked at Darius. "When did you see him last?"

Darius shrugged. "I haven't seen him since dinner. Luis fed him and let him out while I was doing the dishes, then I went into my room to get ready to take Hunter to the movies. But I do remember seeing the back door wide open when I came out of my room. I thought it was odd and I closed it. Right after that, Hunter and I went to the movies."

Hunter's expression fell. "Dad, did you think Camp ran outside and got lost?"

"Darius, are you sure the door was wide open?" Jase asked, with a bemused expression.

"I'm certain. I'd never be mistaken about something like that," Darius said. "That's why I made a point of closing it."

Jase turned to Luis. "Did you close the door when you let Camp back in the house?"

"Of course I closed the door," Luis said. "I was on the phone with Roland. He wanted me to come over there about something and I was trying to put it off until tomorrow

morning. I didn't feel like going anywhere. I was tired from being at the hospital all day." Roland had called him after dinner about something important. He said he didn't want to discuss it on the phone, but he thought it was important enough to discuss sooner rather than later. Luis had a strong sinking feeling in his stomach about Camp. It had been so hectic earlier. He'd been more worried about getting Hunter ready to go to the movies than he'd been about Camp. Though he was almost certain he'd closed the back door, he wasn't one hundred percent sure.

"Are you positive you shut the door, Luis?" Jase asked.

He sighed and shrugged. "Almost positive."

Then Hunter did something that caused a sharp pain in Luis's stomach. Instead of running to Luis or Jase, he ran to Darius and said, "We have to find him, Darius. We have to go outside and look for him." His face was red and there were tears running down his cheeks.

Darius reached forward and hugged him.

"He can't be far, buddy," Jase said. "We'll start looking for him right now."

Luis didn't say a word. He knew Camp wasn't the type of dog that would wander off the property line when he was outside with them. But if Luis had left the door open by mistake, which he doubted, and Camp had wandered off on his own, it could be trouble. If Camp saw a deer or another wild animal, even a squirrel, he was off to battle and always ready to protect his territory. There was a strong chance he could have chased a deer into the woods and lost his way.

"I want to go out and look for him, too," Hunter said, sobbing through the words, wiping his eyes on his sleeve. "I'm not going to bed until he's home."

"You stay here with Darius," Jase said. "Daddy and I will go out right now and look everywhere. It's gonna be okay, buddy. We'll get him back."

To see Hunter's face and to hear the fear in his voice broke Luis's heart. He took his car keys off the counter, pulled two flashlights out of a drawer, and followed Jase out

the back door. When they were outside and far enough away from the house for Darius to hear them, Luis pulled Jase by the arm and said, "I know I shut that door, Jase. I'd never leave a door wide open."

"Calm down, baby," Jase said. "It was crazy here earlier tonight. You were on the phone talking to Roland, and Hunter was upstairs shouting about something. You might have done it by accident. Even I could have done it by accident. We all do things like that sometimes without meaning any harm. Let's focus on finding Camp now, because if we don't, we're going to have huge problems with Hunter."

Jase was right. The only important thing now was finding Camp. So they split up in different directions and searched the entire property for the next hour. Luis looked behind rocks and trees, in gullies and ravines. He called the dog's name so many times his voice started to waver. When he met up with Jase in the driveway and he saw Jase had returned without Camp, he felt the sharp pain return to his stomach and wondered how he was going to break the news to Hunter.

As Luis was about to suggest they drive around in the car, headlights flashed in the easement road and Thomas's black Cadillac slowly crept toward them. Luis shrugged and Jase sent Luis a confused glance. Thomas never came to visit after seven unless he was invited to something specific. It was almost eleven o'clock by then and Luis couldn't imagine why he was pulling into the driveway.

Thomas pulled up to where Luis and Jase stood. He lowered the window and smiled. "I think I have something that belongs to you," he said in a deep, hearty tone. "I found this in my rose garden about ten minutes ago." Then he lifted Camp from his lap and held him up in the window.

Jase closed his eyes and shook his head back and forth.

Luis pressed his palm to his stomach and exhaled. He reached into the car and took Camp from Thomas. He looked him up and down. The mop of shaggy blond hair on the poor little dog's head was tangled and matted with thistles and

thorns. But his tail was wagging and he licked Luis's face. "Oh Camp, you've been a bad boy. But I'm too damn happy to see you to get mad." He turned to Thomas and said, "You have no idea how you've saved the day, Thomas. We've been looking for him for the past hour. He got out somehow and we were terrified something had happened to him." He refused to admit he'd left the door open. The more he thought about it, the more he knew he hadn't left it open.

Jase thanked Thomas and said, "Can you come inside for coffee or an after-dinner drink so we can thank you properly?"

"You have no idea how grateful we are," Luis said. "If anything happened to Camp, Hunter would be devastated. And I'm not sure how I'd be able to deal with it myself. He's been a big part of my life for a long time." He pulled Camp closer and kissed his snout. "Please come in for one drink."

Thomas smiled and waved his arm. "You've already thanked me properly. I'll see you later. I have to go home now and go to bed. I want to be at the hospital early in the morning to see how Cory is doing." Then he turned the wheel and slowly crept back to his house, with the gravel creaking beneath his tires so gently Luis felt a yawn coming on.

As they walked back to the house, Jase put his arm around Luis and said, "As soon as Cory is up and around, the first thing I want him to do is install one of those invisible dog fences. I don't want anything like this to happen again."

"I didn't leave the door open, Jase," Luis said.

"It doesn't matter who left it open," Jase said. "Next time Hunter might leave it open by mistake. I think an electric fence will give us peace of mind."

Luis decided not to disagree with him this time. He noticed Jase didn't mention Darius might also leave the door open by mistake someday, as if this was something that would never occur to Jase, and something that could only happen to Luis or a small child. And Luis wasn't smiling at the prospect of Camp getting an electric jolt from one of those doggie fences he'd read about. But maybe Jase had a point this time. They didn't have to get an electric fence. They could fence in



the entire property with one of those tall deer fences and an electric gate. So he nodded and said, “I guess Cory will have plenty to do around here when he gets out of the hospital.”

When they reached the house, Camp barked and almost jumped out of Luis’s arms. Luis put him down with care and he ran to Hunter. Luis had never seen his son this happy before; it was Christmas morning, Easter Sunday, and his birthday combined. Hunter clutched the dog and held him tightly while Luis and Jase stood there gaping with huge smiles. The only one who didn’t seem as thrilled to see Camp was Darius. Oh, he smiled and nodded, but he didn’t hug Camp or pet the top of his head. All Darius said was, “Wow, I had a feeling he was gone for good” in a deadpan tone.

## Chapter Fourteen

The next morning Roland called again as they were finishing breakfast. Darius was cleaning out the coffee maker and Jase had gone into his office. Roland told Luis to come over as soon as Hunter left for baseball camp. He didn't ask. He said he had something important to show Luis and it couldn't wait any longer. Luis had been planning to go to the hospital after he put Hunter on the school bus, and Jase was planning to work at home all day in his office off the living room. So Luis promised he'd stop by in an hour. He'd see what Roland wanted and he'd go to the hospital from there.

They drove down to meet the bus that morning in Luis's car. It was one of those unusually breezy, sunny mornings in Bucks County, without a hint of humidity. In fact it was so cool Luis had insisted Hunter wear a light jacket. Hunter had resisted, and Luis wouldn't take no for an answer, but when the bus pulled up and Luis saw the other boys weren't wearing jackets, he smiled at his son and said, "Get rid of the jacket."

Hunter smiled and pulled the jacket off in a tangle mess. "Thanks, Daddy."

"Have a good day, sweetie."

Hunter reached for the door and sent Luis an exasperated look. "Daddy," he said. "We talked about this."

"I'm sorry," Luis said, throwing his arms in the air. "I forgot." Hunter was talking about when Luis called him sweetie. Evidently, Hunter didn't like to be called sweetie, especially when all his baseball camp friends were only yards away waiting for him to get out of the car. "I'll call you buddy, like Dad does. Okay?"

Hunter smiled and opened the door. He patted Luis on the hand. "Just stick to plain old Hunter," he said. "Buddy doesn't sound right coming from you."

Luis blinked. "Maybe I should keep my mouth shut and not call you anything. After all, I'm just your father, one of two people in this world who loves you more than anything.

I'm the one who worries about you, makes sure you eat the right foods, makes sure your homework is done, and makes sure everything in your life is perfect. I'm the one who sits up with you all night when you're sick. And I'm only one of two people who would lie down and die for you if I had to." His voice trailed off melodramatically.

Hunter frowned, as if stunned by what Luis had said. "If it makes you feel better, you can call me sweetie at home when no one else is around." Then he opened the door and hopped out. Before he closed it, he gazed into the car and said, "See you later. Love you, Daddy."

"Love you too," Luis said, feeling vindicated, smiling so wide his eyes slanted. He'd have to remember *this* conversation. The guilt thing was highly underrated.

When Luis arrived at Roland's and Josh's place, he was still smiling. But the smile didn't last long. Roland and Josh frowned and they spoke very softly. They escorted Luis through a long main hallway filled with gimcrack, then into their vapid media room off the kitchen. They sat him down in a chair without bothering to offer him anything, not even coffee. Luis followed their leads, confused as to what they were doing, without asking questions. He noticed they were both fully dressed, so this wasn't anything of a sexual nature—you never knew with these two.

While Josh hit a few switches on a complicated-looking remote control gadget, Roland said, "We think you should see this. We don't want to start anything. But we have to show you."

They had one of those extra-large—obscene and vulgar, in Luis's opinion—flat-screen televisions fixed to the wall opposite the seating area. Josh seemed to be having trouble with the remote and Luis was tempted to offer his assistance. Josh held the remote out at arm's length and tried pushing a few buttons but nothing happened. Then he pushed another button and the bathroom in their pool house appeared on the screen. Although the clarity of the picture wasn't perfect, it was clearly visible Darius had entered the pool house bathroom and walked into a private stall. Then Josh

pushed another button and the scene changed, skipping a scene and switching to a different angle shot by another camera. Now Darius was inside the stall, with an overheard camera looking down at him, holding something under his arm.

“What is this?” Luis asked. He knew they were kinky, but he hadn’t expected them to show him a video of Darius peeing in their bathroom. He didn’t want to appear rude, but sometimes these two floored him beyond words.

Roland frowned. “We have security cameras all over the house and grounds. There is one in each stall of the pool house bathroom, and three in the main section of the bathroom so we can see everything that goes on in there.”

Luis’s head turned. He sent Roland a stunned glance. “You have hidden cameras in the bathrooms?” Well. Luis was glad he’d never had to use *their* pool house bathroom. But he and Jase had stayed in their guest house and Jase had fucked Luis from one end of the guest house to the other.

“It’s private property,” Roland said. “We can do whatever we want.”

“Do you have little hidden cameras in the guest house?” He had to ask.

Josh laughed. “No. There are no cameras in there, just outside the front door for security reasons.”

Luis folded his arms across his chest, feeling somewhat relieved. Though having hidden cameras in the bathroom would have surprised him with anyone else, knowing Josh’s and Roland’s kinky behavior he sat back and looked up at the screen waiting for something to happen. He’d always pegged them both as types who liked sleazy bathroom sex. Luis felt a chill when he thought about them being into those golden shower things. “Why am I watching Darius go to the bathroom? If I want to see Darius take a pee, I’ll ask him if I can watch.” His face started to tighten.

Roland pointed to the screen. “Take a closer look, Luis. See what’s in his hands.”

Luis leaned forward. Instead of pulling down his zipper first, Darius pulled an envelope out from under his arm.

Then he started ripping the envelope to shreds, tearing it into tiny little pieces and dropping the pieces into the toilet. After that, Darius punched the wall and kicked the toilet. From this overhead angle Luis couldn't see the expression on Darius's face but he could see by the sudden jerks of his arms and legs his mood suggested serious anger. When he finished punching the wall and kicking the toilet, he pulled down his zipper, peed all over the papers he'd ripped to shreds, and flushed.

Luis rubbed his jaw. "I don't understand. What's he doing?"

Roland frowned. "This was taken the day of our Fourth of July party. We just viewed it ourselves yesterday for the first time. This is why I wanted you to see it last night."

Luis tipped his head sideways. He still didn't understand.

"Luis," Josh said, "the envelope Darius ripped up was the proposal Roland gave to Jase. The same proposal Jase gave to you to hold that afternoon."

Luis's lips parted but he didn't speak.

"He must have taken it without you knowing," Roland said. "Then, for whatever reason, he took it into the bathroom and flushed it down the toilet."

"Are you sure that's the same envelope?" Luis asked. "I can't imagine why he'd do something like that. It makes no sense."

Josh hit a button and replayed the scene. He even froze it at one point to prove, without a doubt, it was the same envelope containing Roland's proposal. Luis's eyes grew wide and he leaned forward. Then he stood up and walked over to the screen and stared for a minute. There was no mistake about it: the envelope was the proposal Jase had asked Luis to hold for him. The title was clearly written in large bold print.

"He must have taken it from the table when I went inside with Hillary," Luis said, still staring at the screen. "But I can't imagine why he'd do such a thing." Suddenly he started thinking about all the other weird things that had

happened since Darius had come into their lives: the bag on the stove catching fire, the missing proposal, the emergency brake on the car, and the door left wide open last night.

Roland sighed. "I'm sorry we had to show it to you. But we thought you'd like to see it. We don't want to get the guy in trouble. But it is what it is."

Luis crossed back to the chair and sat down. "I'm glad you showed me. I'll get to the bottom of this, I promise. And I'm so sorry. I can't apologize enough for what he did to your proposal. I know how hard you worked on it. At least now I know I wasn't the one who lost it. I've been thinking about it ever since the party."

"You don't have to apologize," Roland said, placing his palm on Luis's shoulder. "It obviously wasn't your fault and I've already written up another proposal. We thought it was peculiar Darius would act that way. There didn't seem to be a reason."

Peculiar wasn't the word. Then, when Luis looked up at the screen and saw the next shot, he pressed his palm to his chest and gasped. The video had jumped from the stall to the sinks. Darius was now in the main part of the bathroom, sitting on the sink counter with his pants off and his legs in the air. Josh was fucking Darius's brains out, pounding him into the mirror, splitting him wide open without pausing for a breath. And Darius was holding Josh's shoulders taking all he could get, with a great big smile on his face.

Josh pressed the remote button hard twice and nothing happened. Then he hit it a third time with two fingers and the screen went blank. "I didn't want you to see that. I'm sorry. I tried to stop it but this remote isn't working right. That only happened once with Darius, a quickie." He turned to Roland and frowned. "I told you we needed new batteries in this remote. It doesn't stop when I want it to stop if the batteries are weak."

Luis stood up and took a quick breath. "Don't be sorry. I'm glad I saw *everything*. I can't thank you both enough." He considered it ironic the two people who had always made him feel uncomfortable with their kinky open sex lives, with their

three-ways and multiple partners and bathroom sex, had enlightened him about Darius thanks to their hidden bathroom cameras. After all, who else did Luis know who had creepy hidden cameras in their bathrooms? Evidently, though, Darius wasn't the innocent young guy Luis and Jase had thought he was, especially in the scene where Josh had been nailing him to the bathroom counter. But more than that, Darius had allowed Josh to fuck him so casually, as if nothing had happened, after he'd destroyed Roland's important proposal. This part bothered Luis more than anything. There wasn't an ounce of remorse on Darius's face, just a great big smile.

"Can I get you anything?" Roland asked.

Luis smiled and started walking toward the front door. "No, I'm fine. I was on my way to the hospital to see Cory. They are weaning him off the ventilator today. If he responds well, they might even remove it."

Josh remained in the media room, fooling with the remote. Roland followed him to the door. "Well, that's good news. How is Cory otherwise?"

Luis kissed Roland on the cheek and said, "He's doing very well. I'll talk to you soon. And thanks for showing me the video. I can't apologize enough."

Luis jogged to his car without looking back. His trip to the hospital would have to wait until later. He knew Darius had gone out grocery shopping and he wanted to go back home and talk to Jase before Darius returned. But when he arrived at the house and overheard Jase talking on the telephone to one of his plant managers in Alaska, it sounded too important to interrupt. So Luis quietly walked to the back of the house and opened Darius's bedroom door. He opened the drawers first and found nothing but clothing. He searched the closet and found nothing unusual there either. But in the nightstand beside the bed, he found a drawer filled with dildos in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Darius had hidden them beneath a pile of *Architectural Digest* magazines and a tube of lubricant. In the drawer below, he found cock rings, anal beads, a pair of pink feather earrings, nipple clamps, and a Fleshlight jacking device.

Luis started to feel a little guilty. He couldn't blame the guy for owning sex toys. Maybe wearing feather earrings and nipple clamps got him off. Before Luis had married Jase, when he'd been living alone in New York in a rented apartment and escorting older men, he'd often resorted to harmless sex toys to satisfy his intense need for a man on cold lonely nights. But then Luis looked under the bed and he found three pairs of Jase's boxer briefs, unwashed. He knew they belonged to Jase by glancing at them, and Jase had mentioned he'd been missing a few pairs of briefs. Luis placed the dirty briefs back under the bed and lifted the mattress. He gaped at a small photo in a gold frame and pulled it out from between the mattress and box spring. He looked down and held his breath.

It was a photo of Leck Schneider.

Luis kept the photo of Leck and put the bed back the way he'd found it. Then he went upstairs to his bedroom and opened his laptop. He did a few searches on the Internet for the name Darius Denby and found nothing. But when he did a search for older all male porn films by Leck Schneider he came up with a sample trailer for a porn film made ten years earlier by Leck's company. Luis played it over and over, and there was no mistake. The young guy in the film with long blond hair, though no older than sixteen, was Darius Denby, going by the German stage name Jack Meinoff.

Luis did a few more searches with Leck's name and found photos of Leck and Darius at various public events in Los Angeles. There was a photo of them outside a movie theater standing on a red carpet, a photo of them standing at an award ceremony for some kind of porn industry event, and another photo of them driving away in a very expensive red sports car. But the photo that truly made Luis sit back and glare wasn't a social event. It was a recent photo of Darius Denby wearing a black suit with his head bowed down. Though his blond hair was still long in this photo, Luis knew it was him. He was walking beside a small group of people, all dressed in black. The caption beneath the photo read: "The



longtime partner of alleged teen pornographer Leck Schneider pays his last respects.”

\* \* \* \*

First, Luis called Roland and Josh and asked them to keep Hunter at their house for the rest of the afternoon. He knew the school bus would drop Justin off first, and he didn't want Hunter at Cider Mill Farm or anywhere near Darius Denby ever again. He spoke to Roland on the phone quickly and promised he'd go into detail later. Roland said they'd be more than happy to take care of Hunter for as long as Luis needed.

Then Luis closed his laptop and reached for the framed photo of Leck he'd set facedown on the desk in his bedroom. He forced Camp to remain in the bedroom and closed the door against Camp's wishes, so he wouldn't get in the way. He went down the back stairs to show Jase what he'd found under Darius's mattress and what he seen on the Internet, hoping Jase was finally off the phone with the plant manager. If Jase wasn't off the phone, Luis would interrupt him this time. He'd bang his head against the wall if he had to. Evidently, Darius Denby, the ex-lover of Leck Schneider, was a very sick individual and he'd been playing them like fools all along.

But when Luis entered the kitchen, Jase was leaning against the counter near the sink drinking a cup of coffee and Darius was emptying grocery bags on the kitchen table. Jase smiled and said, “Darius made me this new coffee he found at the store. It's the best coffee I've ever had. Can I get you a cup?”

Luis watched closely as Darius passed by Jase and gently ran his fingertips across Jase's arm. Darius looked into Jase's eyes and smiled. “Oh, it's nothing. I thought you'd like something different for a change instead of the same old coffee we always have. You work so hard, Jase. A big strong man like you should be treated like a king. I only want to make your life easier.”

Jase smiled. “I can't believe how lucky we are to have you around, Darius. You truly are a godsend.”

Luis almost gagged.

Darius turned to Luis. "Where's Hunter? He should be home by now. I promised I'd take him out shopping for new shoes this afternoon. He wants those sneakers that light up."

Luis clenched his fists. "You dirty, slimy piece of shit. You stay as far away from my kid as you can get."

Jase blinked and sprayed coffee all over his shirt.

Darius dropped a roll of paper towels he'd been carrying to the sink. He turned and gaped at Luis. His jaw fell and his eyebrows arched.

Luis held up the photo of Leck Schneider and said, "I want you out of this house. Stop everything you're doing and get the fuck out before I call the police." Then he threw the photo across the room, missing Darius's head by inches.

The photo landed on the white subway tiled backsplash above the counter, and the glass shattered into tiny little shards. Both Darius and Jase reached for it at the same time. Jase picked it up first and gazed down at the image. He looked at Luis and asked, "What's going on here? I've never seen you like this, Luis." Luis knew Jase had never met Leck in person, only in a few newspaper photos. He obviously didn't recognize him at a glance.

Luis's fists were still clenched. He reached for a heavy iron poker beside the fireplace and held it with both hands. "Ask Darius what's wrong, Jase." He turned to Darius. "Why don't you tell us everything, you fucking sneak?"

Darius stepped back. "I have no idea what you're talking about. Luis, please calm down. This is insane." He turned to Jase. "Do something. He looks violent."

Luis took a swing with the poker. He whacked the back of a kitchen chair and broke the top rung. "I *am* violent. And if you don't get the fuck out of my house I'm going to bust your fucking head like I busted that chair."

"*Luis!*" Jase said. "What on Earth are you babbling about?"

"The man in the photo is Leck Schneider, Jase," Luis said. His face felt warm and his hands were on the verge of shaking. "The German publisher I almost posed nude for. The

Leck Schneider who did porn films with minors. The same Leck Schneider who shot himself in the head before I had a chance to testify and they had a chance to lock him up for good.” He sent Darius a seething glare. “Tell him all about it, Darius. I’m curious myself.”

“Jase, I swear I don’t know what he’s talking about,” Darius said. “He’s crazy.”

“What does this have to do with poor Darius?” Jase asked, reaching out to put his arm around Darius’s shoulders. “The poor boy is terrified.”

Darius rested his head against Jase’s chest. “Don’t let him hurt me, please, Jase.”

“Calm down, Luis. This is getting out of hand.” Jase held Darius closer. “This poor kid is shaking now.”

Luis set his jaw and took a step forward. He smacked the iron poker against his left palm and said, “I found that photo of Leck under Darius’s bed this morning. It was wedged between his mattress and box spring. I also found several pairs of your missing underwear under his bed.”

Jase released his arms from Darius’s body and stepped away from him. “Why would you have a photo of Leck Schneider under your mattress?” He refrained from mentioning the underwear.

Luis said, “Tell him, Darius.”

“I don’t know what he’s talking about, Jase,” Darius said, pointing at Luis. “Please believe me. He probably planted the photo and the underwear there. He’s never liked me. I think he’s jealous of the way you look at me.”

Jase scratched his head. “How do I look at you? What are you talking about?”

Luis frowned. “Ask dear sweet Darius where Roland’s proposal went, Jase. I’m curious to hear what he has to say.”

“Why would Darius have anything to do with Roland’s proposal?” Jase asked.

Luis took another step forward. “When you handed me the proposal at the Fourth of July party, I left it on the table and went into the house with Hillary. Darius picked it up,

took it into the pool house bathroom, tore it into a million little pieces, and flushed it down the toilet.”

Darius stepped back. “You’re insane. You’re jealous of me because Jase would rather be with me than with you. You see the way Jase looks at me and you’re sick with jealousy.”

Jase’s head jerked back, as if this was news to him. “That’s not true.” He turned to Luis. “I never said anything like that to him, Luis. I don’t know what he’s talking about.”

Luis said, “I know, Jase. I’ve never been jealous of him. I went to Roland’s and Josh’s house this morning and they showed me a videotape of Darius destroying the proposal.” Luis tipped his head toward Darius. “Roland and Josh have hidden cameras all over the house, including the bathrooms, and they recently viewed this particular video from the day of the party and thought I’d like to see it. That was why Roland wanted me to come over there last night. That’s why he insisted he had to talk to us, Jase. And that wasn’t all Darius did in the bathroom. After he viciously destroyed Roland’s proposal for no apparent reason, he dropped his pants, lifted his pretty blond legs, and let Josh fuck him like nothing had ever happened.”

Jase’s face turned a pale shade of gray. He walked over to where Luis was standing and took the iron poker out of Luis’s hands. Then he turned and faced Darius. “Is all this true?”

Darius squared his shoulders and lowered his tone. He squinted and said, “Josh is a good fuck, Luis. You should try him out sometime. I know how much you like big dick. Remember, I’ve seen you in action. You’re nothing but a little slut.”

“Why would you destroy the proposal?” Jase asked. “And why on Earth would you have a photo of Leck Schneider under your bed?”

“Because Darius Denby was Leck’s partner for ten years,” Luis said. “After I found the photo under his mattress, I did a few online searches and I found photos of him doing porn films at sixteen years old, photos of him with Leck, and

even a photo of him at Leck's funeral. It's all there. You just have to know what you're looking for. There's no use pretending anymore, Darius. It's time to leave."

Jase stood there gaping at Darius. "We trusted you and treated you like family. Why would you do this?"

Darius's lost control. His arm went across the counter, knocking the coffee pot and canisters across the room with a loud crash. He leaned forward and clenched his fists. "I wanted revenge." He pointed to Luis. "*He* killed Leck. *He* shot him dead as if he'd pulled the trigger himself. The slut ruined my life, took everything I had, and left me in the streets. I wanted to get even. I wanted him to know what it was like to lose everything he'd ever loved in a matter of minutes, to have his life come crashing down around him."

"I can't believe we trusted you with our son," Luis said.

Darius smiled. "I was going to take him for a very long ride this afternoon."

"Get out of this house," Jase said. His face tightened and the veins in his neck started to bulge. "Get out of here before I kill you with my bare hands."

Darius relaxed his shoulders. "I'll pack my things."

"No," Luis said. "Get out *now*. We'll pack your things and send them to you." He pointed to the door. "I'm not fucking around. Just get into your truck and go."

"You filthy little slut," Darius said. "You've ruined my life twice now. I'll slit your throat."

Then Darius lunged across the room, landed on top of Luis, and pushed him down to the floor. While he grabbed the top of Luis's head with one hand and Luis's neck with the other, Camp barked and growled upstairs in the master bedroom. He squeezed Luis's throat so hard Luis lost his breath and he almost blacked out. Darius was much stronger than Luis had imagined. He tried pushing him off but he wouldn't budge.

Jase dropped the iron poker and grabbed the back of Darius's neck. He lifted him off Luis's body, dragged him away from the fireplace, and with one quick swing his fist met

Darius's jaw. Darius went sailing to the other side of the room. He landed on his back. He seemed to be out cold, so Jase reached for Luis's hand and he helped him to his feet. He put his arms around Luis and held him tightly. "Are you okay?"

Luis struggled for a breath. His neck burned and his heart pounded so fast he felt lightheaded. "I'm fine. Just get him out of here. Call the police now. There's no use trying to be nice to him." Then he looked over and saw Darius wasn't on the floor anymore.

By the time Jase turned, Darius appeared in the doorway, with blood dripping down his chin, between the kitchen and the hall that led to his bedroom. He was holding a gun, pointing it in Luis's direction. He must have had the gun hidden somewhere in his room and Luis had missed it.

Luis felt his knees go weak. He'd been in dangerous situations before but no one had ever pointed a gun at him. His life didn't pass by, but his chest caved in and a calm, serene feeling entered his body. He couldn't speak; he couldn't move.

Jase reached out with both hands and shouted, "*No.*"

"I want him to pay for what he did to Leck," Darius said, aiming the pistol at Luis's head. "I want him dead."

Jase shouted again. This time it sounded more as if he was pleading. "Please. *No.*"

At the exact moment Darius pulled the trigger, Jase lunged at him. The gun went off with a loud bang and Jase pummeled him to the floor. "You want to see *revenge*, you fucking lunatic?" Jase shoved his knee into Darius's stomach hard and he looked back to check on Luis. Luis was on the floor by then. Jase turned and said, "I'll show you what real revenge is now for what you've done."

Then Jase pushed Darius's arms back over his head, pinning him to the floor with his knee wedged in his groin. Jase ripped the gun from his hand and held both wrists at the same time. With the back of the gun, Jase knocked him in the jaw and split his lip. Then Jase shoved the gun into his mouth and said, "You could have left quietly. You didn't have to shoot him."

But as Jase was about to pull the trigger, Luis spoke in a weak voice. "I'm okay, Jase. He didn't shoot me. He missed. My legs buckled and he shot the wall behind me. Don't do it, Jase."

Luis knew Jase was defending him. He knew Darius deserved anything Jase did to him. But he didn't want Jase to live with something like this for the rest of his life.

Jase didn't move. He held the gun in Darius's mouth and said, "But he could have killed you. This bastard has no respect for life. And now I want to teach him all about revenge." He looked into Darius's bulging eyes. "You screwed around with the wrong people this time, Darius."

"Jase, don't," Luis said. "I'll call the police and they'll take him away. They'll lock him up for years and we'll never have to worry about him again." Luis knew there was still time to keep his wonderful life at Cider Mill Farm in tact. He didn't want to lose that because of one sick individual. But if Jase shot Darius and killed him on the kitchen floor, Luis knew nothing would ever be the same again. "Don't do it, Jase. You're not a vengeful man. You know the difference between right and wrong. He doesn't. He's sick and rotten to the core and he thrives on revenge. Don't stoop to his level. Please don't shoot him."

Jase turned back and gazed into Luis's eyes. He continued to hold Darius down. He hesitated for a minute, then removed the gun from Darius's mouth and exhaled. Jase nodded at Luis; his face softened and he took a quick breath. But the second Jase let his guard down, Darius must have sensed it. With one quick rush of adrenaline, Darius swung his arms forward and Jase fell back into cabinets. The gun slipped out of Jase's hand and slid across the kitchen floor. When Luis saw the gun coming toward him, he reached out and grabbed it to keep Darius from getting it. Though he'd never used a gun in his life, he was prepared to learn fast.

But Darius didn't even try for the gun. By the time Luis and Jase were up on their feet, Darius kicked the back screen door off its hinges and ran outside. Jase snatched the gun out of Luis's hand and they followed him. Luis suspected

they were both thinking the same thing: if they didn't catch this guy and have him locked up, they'd never rest peacefully again. Darius would always be out there stalking and lurking in the shadows, ready to pounce on them when they least expected it, seeking revenge.

When they were outside, Jase pointed the gun at the front tire of Darius's pickup truck. Before Darius even had a chance to slam the truck door shut and start the motor, Jase shot the front tire and it went flat in seconds. Jase knew his way around a gun. Growing up in Alaska, Jase told Luis he had been trained to shoot years ago. His skills were sharp; he rarely missed his mark. "Get out of the truck and put your hands behind your back, Darius," Jase said. "I don't want to shoot you, but I will if I have to." His voice went lower. "And I promise I never miss."

Darius slowly unfolded from the truck. But he didn't put his hands behind his back. He turned and started running down the easement road, as if daring Jase to shoot him in the back.

"Stop, Darius," Jase yelled. "I'll shoot if I have to." He stood braced to kill, with his feet apart and his arms stretched out.

Luis ran up to Jase and said, "Let him go. I want him out of here." Luis didn't want bloodshed on his property or Jase's hands.

But there was a wild look in Jase's eyes. He didn't seem to care. He repeated, "I'll shoot, Darius. Don't test me."

Darius kept running. He even looked back and said, "You don't have the guts and you know it."

But as Darius glanced back, something unexpected happened. The Reverend Thomas von Klingensmith's Cadillac rounded the bend and came barreling toward the house. Everything happened so fast there was no time to think. Thomas didn't—or couldn't—stop and Darius didn't jump fast enough to get out of his way. Luis gasped and pressed both palms to his mouth. Jase dropped the gun and put his arms around Luis. When the front of the speeding car slammed into Darius, his body went up in the air, sailed in an



arc, and landed upside down in a section of ground Luis was planning to use for a pumpkin patch.

The car came to a halt not far from where Luis and Jase were standing. Luis knew there was nothing to fear from Darius anymore so he ran to Thomas's car to see if Thomas was okay. He had a feeling the poor old guy would be devastated now. He'd run over two people in less than a month, and Luis wanted to ease his mind and tell him he'd stopped Darius from running away.

But when Thomas climbed out of the car he reached for Luis's hand with both hands, he tried to catch his breath as if he's been running instead of driving. "I'm so glad I got here in time," he said. "I found out the most disturbing news at the hospital. You'll never believe it."

Luis and Jase exchanged glances. Thomas didn't seem the least bit interested in Darius or the fact that he'd run him over.

Luis said, "Are you okay, Thomas? After what just happened, I mean. Maybe we should go over to the patio and sit down. Jase will get you a drink."

Thomas glanced at the pumpkin patch area and snorted. Darius wasn't dead. He'd already lifted his head and he was moaning about his legs. "I couldn't care less about him. They removed the breathing tube today and Cory told everyone what happened the day I ran him over. He was running down the road because Darius was trying to run him over with his truck. Poor Cory was running for his life when I accidentally hit him." Thomas pointed to the pumpkin patch. "It's *his* fault I ran over Cory."

Jase said, "This is unbelievable."

Thomas frowned. "There's even more. He tried to run Cory over because Cory caught him upstairs in your bedroom." His voice dropped and he sighed, unable to look them in the eye. "He was walking about in Luis's underwear and engaging in unbecoming acts, if you know what I mean, with Jase's photo. And doing various other dirty things, all and sundry, in broad daylight." Poor Reverend von

Klingensmith. His voice dropped to a whisper. His face turned red and he closed his eyes for a moment.

Luis frowned. "And to think we trusted him with Hunter all this time."

"It gets worse," Thomas said. "The emergency Cory had in the hospital yesterday was Darius's fault, too. When no one was looking, Darius tried to smother him with a pillow. Darius would have killed him if one of those machines hadn't malfunctioned and starting beeping so loudly."

"Poor Cory," Luis said. "Lying there helpless, unable to speak all this time. It must have been horrible for him." He closed his eyes and pressed his palm to his chest. "I can't even imagine it."

"The doctors barely got the breathing tube out of Cory's mouth," Thomas said. "The poor kid was so excited to tell us what Darius had done he could barely whisper. The doctors insisted he calm down and take it slowly. But he forced himself to speak. He was terrified something would happen to you guys or Hunter. So I rushed right over here to tell you." His voice went lower. "I'm sorry about the mailbox out front."

Jase tapped Thomas's shoulder. "You got here with perfect timing."

Luis heard the sound of sirens in the distance. He hugged Thomas and said, "I'd better call the police now." He heard Camp still barking upstairs and said, "And I'd better let Camp out. He must be going berserk with all this excitement."

Jase gestured toward the pumpkin patch where Darius was sitting up, moaning about his legs. He spoke with disdain. "You'd better tell them to bring an ambulance, too."

"Those sirens are for us," Thomas said. "I called 911 on my way over here from the hospital. I memorized the address after what happened with Cory. I figured it best to have the police around. I was never so worried in my life, and neither was Cory. We all thought Darius might do something dreadful to you, especially with Darius knowing Cory's breathing tube was going to be removed soon and he'd be able to speak. He knew his time was running out."

Jase took a deep breath. “He said he was planning to take Hunter for a long ride this afternoon. He could have kidnapped him. Or, God forbid, even worse. He’s been scheming and planning for a long time, right down to the last detail.”

“I he had killed Cory,” Thomas said, “he might have continued indefinitely.”

“I think we have enough on him to have him locked up for a very long time,” Jase said.

The sirens approached and Luis heard the sound of gravel crackling in the distance on the easement road. Luis stood back and watched as the surreal image of police cars entered the peaceful driveway and Jase and Thomas walked over to meet them. Though he was still in shock about all that had happened, he looked up at the sky and smiled. For a moment, he even wondered about what might have happened to them if Roland and Josh hadn’t shown him the video that morning and Cory had been murdered by Darius. There was no way to predict what someone as unbalanced as Darius would have done. Thomas was right: Darius must have known his time was running out. Cory was coming off the ventilator and Darius knew he’d talk. When Luis thought about Hunter and about how close they had all come to experiencing a life-altering catastrophe, he made a vow he’d never be so trusting again with anyone.

## Chapter Fifteen

On the day they discharged Cory from the hospital, Luis tossed a shoe across the bedroom and it landed on Jase's legs. Luis was sitting on a white leather club chair beside the fireplace and Jase was still in bed sleeping. It was so early the birds had just begun to chirp and the sun hadn't completely risen. Due to a cool front that had come down from Canada, the bedroom windows were open and the sheer white curtains were billowing into the room with a mild breeze. It was actually cool enough for a sweatshirt. But Luis wasn't worried about remaining warm. He was sitting in the club chair naked, with his legs open and hanging over the arms of the chair. He knew Hunter was still sleeping soundly in his room. If Luis didn't wake Jase up this morning with a nice surprise, it might be weeks before they would be able to do anything like this again.

Luis and Jase had agreed to take Cory back to Cider Mill Farm to convalesce. The doctors believed Cory had reached a point where he was well enough to be discharged, but not quite ready to be on his own. Although he would have a full recovery, it would take time. The doctors said for each day he was in the hospital it would take three days to recuperate after his discharge. He'd lost a great deal of weight, both broken arms were still on the mend, and he was working hard to regain his strength. So the doctors suggested a good rehabilitation facility, where Cory wouldn't be put in any compromising situations that might cause a setback. The main problem was Cory wouldn't have the use of his hands until his broken arms mended, which meant even simple things like making coffee would be impossible for at least another month. Cory's mother and father wanted to take him back to their home, but they were too old and disabled themselves to deal with his temporary disabilities. Jasper couldn't afford to take off from work full time to give Cory the care he needed. The only alternative meant moving him to a good rehabilitation facility.

But when Luis heard this he drove to the rehabilitation facility to check it out firsthand. He saw it was really a nursing home and he had a long talk with Jase that same night. Thomas's insurance took care of all Cory's hospital expenses and they were willing to pay for his rehabilitation expenses, too. Money wasn't a problem, because Luis and Jase had both agreed to continue paying Cory his regular salary while he'd been hospitalized. When Luis gave Jase a detailed description of the rehabilitation facility, Jase frowned and suggested the same thing Luis had been thinking. They would take Cory back to Cider Mill Farm instead, and he'd recuperate in one of the guest rooms. Thomas's insurance would cover visiting nurses, occupational therapists, and in-home physical therapy. Each guest room in Cider Mill Farm had a private bathroom, so he'd have all the privacy he needed. When the nurses and therapists weren't around, the rest of them would take turns caring for him. Between Thomas, Cory's parents, and Jasper, Luis and Jase wouldn't have much to do at all. Cory would be with people who loved him instead of total strangers.

In the beginning, Cory resisted Luis's suggestion. He didn't want to be a burden and he didn't want anyone going out of their way for him. He set his jaw, clenched his fists, and said, "I'll go to the rehab and that's that." Luis sat down on the end of his hospital bed and frowned. "You're not going to be a burden. We all agree it's the best thing. Besides, would you rather have some mean old nurse with rough, bony hands holding your dick when you have to pee, or would you rather have me holding your dick very gently?" Cory blinked and said, "I can sit on the toilet when I pee, thank you. My mind is made up. I'm not going to be a burden to Jasper, or my family, or to you and Jase." Luis shrugged and glanced up at the ceiling. He said, "Hunter will be very disappointed. When we told him you'd be living with us for a while, he started bringing a few of his favorite books into the guest room so *he* could read to *you*."

Although this mention about Hunter softened Cory more than anything else Luis said, it still took another two days to convince him going to Cider Mill Farm was the best

thing he could do. And not because of anything Luis said or did. One of his nurses had been listening to Luis try to talk him out of the rehab. When Cory refused, the nurse put her hands on her hips and frowned. She gazed down at him and said, "If I were you I'd listen to my friends and family. If anyone in my family had a choice between going to a rehab or a place where they'd be surrounded by loved ones, I kick them in the ass if they chose the rehab." She raised her eyebrows and sent him a confiding glance. "I used to work in one of those places."

Thankfully, her comment secured the deal, and Luis and Jase were picking Cory up that morning and bringing him back to the guest room. So Luis figured he'd better take advantage of this quiet summer morning with Jase while he could. When Jase didn't move after he tossed the shoe, he picked up a throw pillow he'd set beside the chair and threw it right at Jase's head.

Jase moaned and moved his long legs. He pulled the covers over his head and said, "What do you want? I thought I had another hour to sleep. Leave me alone."

Luis spread his legs wider and his feet dangled. He had his erection in one hand and an eight-inch dildo in the other. "I have a surprise for you this morning," he said. He lowered the dildo and pressed it to the opening between his legs. He'd already lubed it up and it went into his body smoothly. This was something Jase had been asking him to do for a while and he'd been putting off for the right time.

"What's the surprise?" Jase's head remained beneath the covers.

"Sit up and look," Luis said. "You're going to like it."

Jase stretched his arms and legs and groaned a few times. Then he pulled back the covers and rubbed his eyes. When he opened them and saw Luis sitting in the chair, sliding the dildo in and out of his body, he slowly untangled his legs from the covers and walked to the other side of the room without saying a word.

Luis glanced up and tilted his head sideways, inserting the dildo as far in as he could. The bait had worked well. Then

he released his own erection and reached for Jase's. He tugged a few times and said, "I thought you'd be excited about this. You've been asking me to try it for a long time."

Jase bit his bottom lip and leered at what was happening between Luis's legs. "You're going to let me double fuck you?"

Luis smiled. "Should I stay in this position? Or should I get on all fours?" Jase continued to gape; his erection pulsed in Luis's palm.

"I like this position," Jase said, freeing himself from Luis's grip and going down on his knees.

It was one of those dildos that didn't have a bulky base with fake balls. So all Jase had to do was pull Luis's hips toward him and prepare for the mount. Luis's arms went behind his head and his feet arched. Jase reached for the dildo and slipped it out of Luis's hole. He pressed the top of the dildo to the base of his own erection so the head of his penis would be aligned with the head of the dildo. Then he moved his hips forward and entered Luis's body.

Luis's head went back against the chair and he gasped. He lost his erection and his scrotum tightened. Though Jase moved slowly and entered him with precision, Luis fought the urge to scream out loud because he didn't want to wake Hunter or Camp. The magnitude of the impact jarred every nerve in Luis's body; the pain the shot from the lips of his anus to the top of his head. He clenched his back teeth and dug his fingertips into the arms of the chair, wishing he still had the throw pillow to bite. The deeper Jase went, the sharper the pain became. Luis broke out in a sweat and his heart started racing. Now that Jase and the dildo were halfway in it felt as though he were being ripped open. For a moment, the pain was so unbelievably intense he couldn't even catch his breath. He felt like kicking Jase off him with both feet and sitting in a bucket of ice cold water.

Then, as Jase went as deep as he could, keeping the dildo even with his own erection, the pain began to subside. In its place, a soothing sense of relief and pleasure made him sigh out loud.

Jase stopped and asked, "Are you okay? Should I stop now?"

Luis smiled and reached down. His own erection was returning and he began to experience the most unusual sense of well-being he'd ever had. "I'm fine, Jase. Don't stop."

Jase released the grip he had on his dick and the dildo for a moment. He rubbed the bottom of Luis's ass with the back of his hand and said, "I wish you could see how hot you look with two dicks inside you."

Luis nodded and started moving his pelvis around in half circles, losing himself in the moment. His lowered abdomen rocked; his toes curled. His eyes opened wide when he started to experience the beginnings of his own climax and Jase hadn't even started any serious fucking. He rubbed the flat fuzzy section right above Jase's dick and said, "Don't stop, Jase. I'm going to come fast this time. I can feel it everywhere. I'm sorry, but I don't think I can hold back this time." He spoke with a whisper; he rested his other hand on his chest and started tweaking his nipple.

Jase wrapped his index finger and his thumb around his cock and the dildo to hold them together securely and started moving his pelvis. When he had a good, strong grip on both, he started fucking. He didn't fuck as fast as he normally fucked this time because holding the dildo seemed to slow him down. But Luis didn't mind at all. The slower fucking was almost better with two dicks in his body. It created more suspense, as if Jase were milking his prostate with a purpose and teasing him into climax.

Luis had been right about coming fast. When he felt the orgasm rise from deep inside his body, Jase had only been fucking him for a few minutes. He started jacking his own dick and said, "I'm close, Jase. I can't hold back this time. You're hitting something right now that's making me wild." His voice trembled by then. It felt as though he couldn't spread his legs wide enough.

"Go, baby," Jase said, moving his pelvis faster to create more friction. "Don't worry about me. Just come for



me this way.” He continued to glance down between Luis’s legs with glazed eyes and an astonished expression.

A minute after that, Luis had a double orgasm. He tried hard to hold back and make it last, but he couldn’t. The first time he came he blasted all over his face. The second time was only seconds after the first. Though he came less the second time, the pleasure was as intense and it lingered. In fact, it was so intense his balls popped into his body and he had to reach down and push them back into his scrotum when it was over.

When he realized Jase hadn’t come yet, he took a quick breath and said, “Pull out now and let me finish you off up here.” His lips parted and he stuck out his tongue.

Jase responded with a laugh and said, “Do the deed.” In less than three seconds, he was kneeling on the chair and his dick was in Luis’s mouth. A minute or two after that, he held the sides of Luis’s head in his palms and his body began to tremble. Luis took every inch of him without a gag or a choke. Luis felt him swell and prepare to release. When he did, Luis closed his eyes and swallowed with such ease Jase caressed the back of his head and said, “I love you so much it’s hard for me to believe I could have been lucky enough to find you at this point in my life.”

Luis sucked until Jase went soft and there was nothing left. Then he removed Jase from his mouth and said, “I love you just as much. I thank the planet for everything about you. Not a day goes by for me without experiencing a profound sense gratitude for the journey we’ve embarked upon. Sometimes I even look up at the sky and say thank you to the universe for everything it has given me, when no one’s around.”

Jase smiled and handed him a Kleenex so he could wipe his face. “You’ve been watching Oprah this week again, haven’t you?”

Luis shrugged and set the tissue on a round table beside the chair. “It’s the farewell season.” Jase could always tell when he’d been watching Oprah by the way he spoke

about spiritual situations. In this sense, Luis knew he was a sponge, ready to absorb everything he heard.

“Ah well, in that case,” Jase said, with affectionate condescension in his tone. “I didn’t know *that*.”

Luis reached up and gently squeezed Jase’s balls with his thumb and index finger. “I can’t help it if I’m impressionable, and Oprah knows what she’s talking about. She’s been through things, Jase. They just found her long-lost sister she never knew about.”

Jase bent down and kissed him on the lips. “I’m sure she has, and I think it’s adorable when you talk that way. Let’s go back to bed now. We can lie there until Hunter wakes up and you can rest your pretty head on my chest and whisper positive things about the universe and Oprah’s long-lost sister while I feel you up.”

“I have to get up and shower,” Luis said. “I should put some ice on my lips. They’re probably all swollen and we have to go to the hospital this morning. Everyone will think I’ve either had an allergic reaction or I’ve been sucking dick.”

“Come back to bed for a few minutes. I don’t care what they think as long as they think you’ve been sucking *my* dick. I want to hold you in my arms for a little while.”

Luis reached up and cupped Jase’s balls in his hand. “That’s an offer I can’t refuse.”

\* \* \* \*

It took longer than they thought for Cory to be discharged from the hospital. The nurses had warned them ahead of time. There were prescriptions to fill, papers to be signed, bags of supplies to be packed and carried down to Jase’s truck. They arrived at the hospital at ten in the morning and didn’t actually leave until almost four in the afternoon. The majority of the time was spent waiting for carefree doctors to sign the discharge forms. While Luis waited upstairs in Cory’s room, Jase took Hunter for long walks around the hospital campus. Thomas had offered to watch Hunter while they were at the hospital. Thomas was waiting for them back at Cider Mill Farm, with Cory’s parents and Jasper, to welcome Cory home. Leaving Hunter with him

would have been a logical solution. But Luis thanked Thomas and said he'd rather he had Hunter with them.

Ever since the experience with Darius Denby, Luis wouldn't let Hunter out of his sight. He even cancelled or postponed all modeling jobs until late September when he knew Hunter would be in preschool. In the nights following Darius's arrest, Luis remained wide awake, wondering about all the things that could have happened if they hadn't found out about Darius just in time. As a result of all this, Luis and Jase had decided to enroll Hunter in preschool four full days a week that fall, from Monday to Thursday. This way Luis could work and they wouldn't have to worry about hiring another housekeeper for a while. Jase's pragmatism took over and he told Luis what had happened with Darius couldn't be considered a normal circumstance. Luis agreed with Jase and said he'd go back to looking for another housekeeper in time. He just didn't say how long it would take him to look.

Luis helped Cory get dressed that afternoon. While a nurse remained in the room organizing the medical supplies Cory would need at home, Luis slid Cory's broken arms into the cut-off sleeves of a white button-down shirt. He buttoned the shirt slowly, working his way from the bottom up, as Cory stood there helpless and frowning about being so needy. "I hate being like this," Cory said. "I can't even put on my own shirt."

Without looking up from a bag of bandages, the nurse said, "You'll be doing everything you normally did before the accident in a few months. Be patient, sweetie."

Luis reached for Cory's boxer shorts and said, "Yes, *sweetie*. Just be patient." Luis was joking about the way this particular nurse called Cory sweetie all the time. She seemed to have developed a small crush on handsome Cory and she wasn't shy about it. She knew Cory was gay and that Jasper was his lover, but for some reason this only seemed to attract her all the more. "Now lift up your legs so I can put on your underwear, *sweetie*."

"Do you need help, Luis?" the nurse asked. She gazed at Cory and smiled. "I can hold up his legs for you."

Cory slipped his feet into his boxer shorts and sent Luis a frustrated glance. He smiled at the nurse and said, "Thanks, we're fine."

Luis pulled Cory's underwear up to his waist. Before he reached for Cory's jeans on the bed, he patted Cory's dick through the boxer shorts when the nurse wasn't looking and said, "I might need some help putting on his jeans. I'm left-handed."

Cory looked down. "That makes no sense at all. What does being left-handed have to do with anything?"

Luis was teasing him again. He shrugged and said, "I'm not sure I'll be able to pull up your zipper."

The nurse stopped organizing the supplies. But before she could turn, Cory said, "I'd rather Luis put on my pants. I'd feel more comfortable." Then he looked down at Luis and said, "I'm sure you can manage this one simple task alone if you try, even though you're left-handed. From what I hear, you've never had trouble pulling anyone's zipper *down* before with your left hand."

The nurse's face turned red and she glanced down at the bag of supplies fast.

Luis smiled. Not a bad comeback at all. He suspected Cory must have been feeling better. So he turned to the nurse and said, "I'd better do it myself. I don't want our little patient here getting all upset and frustrated."

Thanks to Cory's remark, the poor woman had trouble speaking now. She smoothed out the front of her uniform—a baggy pink cotton affair with little teddy bears that reminded Luis of pajamas—and said, "I'll go check on the discharge papers."

When she was gone, Cory reached for Luis's chin. He lifted Luis's head and said, "Your lips are swollen. I guess that means Jase is in a good mood today."

Luis smiled. "I had an allergic reaction to something."

Cory laughed. "Yeah, Jase's dick."

Luis ignored him, but he continued to smile. He guided Cory's feet into his jeans and pulled them up to his waist. When he fastened the button the jeans were so loose he

could slip his entire hand down the front. “You poor thing,” Luis said. He felt guilty now because he’d been teasing him. “You’ve lost so much weight. I’m gonna have to work hard to fatten you up.” Then he zipped up his pants and reached for a pair of shoes on the floor beside the bed.

But Cory sat on the bed and placed his palm on top of Luis’s hand. He looked into his eyes and said, “Thanks for everything. I really mean it. You and Jase are as close to me as anyone in my own family.”

Luis went down on his knees so he could put on Cory’s black boots. “You don’t ever have to thank us for anything, seriously. I still feel horrible about what could have happened to you. I should have checked out Darius Denby more thoroughly before I hired him. I shouldn’t have trusted him so much.” Whenever he talked about Darius, the pain in his stomach returned.

“I’m glad we all found out in time.”

“And at least he’s locked up now and won’t be able to hurt anyone else,” Luis said. In addition to the list of charges Luis and Jase pressed against Darius, Cory also pressed his own list charges and Darius had no choice but to plead guilty in order to receive a lesser sentence. He had two broken legs and he’d been sent to a special medical facility for criminals. Though he hadn’t been formally sentenced yet, Luis was hoping Jase could pull a few strings and get the judge to give Darius the maximum amount of time in prison. Of course all this was news because Jase was the Virgin Billionaire and the media picked it up fast. But there was a crisis going on in the Middle East and what had happened at Cider Mill Farm paled in comparison.

When Cory was dressed and ready to go, his stood up and squared his shoulders. The nurse entered with a wheelchair and told Cory to sit down. He refused at first, arguing he was capable of walking on his own, but the nurse insisted it was a hospital rule.

Luis smiled and winked at the nurse. He knew how to get Cory to do anything. Luis placed his palm gently on Cory’s stomach and said, “We all know you’re big and strong

and can walk out of here on your own. But the nurse will get in trouble and you don't want that to happen. "I'll push you downstairs myself. Jase and Hunter are waiting in the lobby and the truck is parked right up front." He rubbed Cory's stomach and smiled. "Okay?"

Cory grumbled something beneath his breath about being an invalid and sat down in the wheelchair. The nurse and Luis exchanged glances and Luis winked at her one last time. Then Luis piled a few bags on to Cory's lap and wheeled him down to the lobby.

When they pulled into the driveway at Cider Mill Farm, Thomas, Cory's parents, and Jasper were waiting for them on the patio. Camp jumped off Thomas's lap and ran toward them. He ran alongside the truck, barking and yelping as if he hadn't seen them in years instead of hours. Hunter looked out the back window and waved. Jase pulled up beside a shiny new white Jeep Wrangler and switched off the engine.

Cory noticed the unfamiliar Jeep at once. His parents, Thomas, and Jasper were walking down to the truck. "Who else is here today?" he asked.

Luis and Jase exchanged smiles. "Only who you see right now," Jase said.

"What is that new Jeep doing here then?" Cory asked.

Hunter unbuckled his seatbelt and leaned forward.

"Can I tell him now?"

Jase smiled. "Yes, you can tell him now."

"It's yours, Cory. It's a present from my Dads."

Cory gaped at the brand-new Jeep. "Oh, guys," He said. "Thank you, but I can't accept that. It's way too much."

"I told you he'd react this way," Luis said, glancing at Jase.

Jase turned around in his seat and said, "Look, Jasper found out the old Jeep was shot. Your mechanic said the engine was gone. There wasn't a drop of oil left and it seized."

"I don't understand," Cory said. "I checked the oil twice a day. I even carried oil in the backseat in a box just in case."

“Hunter,” Luis said. “Why don’t you go out and play with Camp? He’s going crazy out there.” The little dog hadn’t stopped barking since they’d pulled up. And Luis didn’t want Hunter hearing what he was about to say.

When Hunter was gone, Luis frowned and said, “The mechanic said the oil was purposely drained. He said the oil cap had been removed, and it hadn’t been an accident.”

Cory looked confused for a moment, then he sighed and said, “Darius.”

Jase nodded. “I’m afraid so, Cory. And we feel responsible. Besides, we need you around here. The pool area has to be landscaped. We want something bigger and better than Jase and Roland have. We’re getting a new fence and you’ll be in charge of that as well. We need you to have dependable transportation. So we wanted to give you a new Jeep for our own selfish reasons.”

Cory smiled. “Good try, guys,” he said. “But my Jeep was old and ready to die. If Darius hadn’t drained the oil, it would have died sooner or later. Thanks, but I’d feel awkward taking a gift like that. I’ll just start looking for something used.”

Luis sat up. The others were approaching and he didn’t want them to hear this. “I have an idea. Why don’t you and Jase work out a payment plan? This way it won’t be a gift.”

Jasper knocked on the window and said, “What’s going on in there?”

“We’ll be right out,” Luis said. “We’re having trouble with the Jeep.”

“I told you that would happen,” Jasper said, and he turned and told the others what was going on.

Cory looked down at his lap for a minute and thought. When he lifted his head again, he nodded and said, “I guess if you let me pay you something each month, it will be okay.”

“Good,” Luis said. “Now that we’ve settled this, let’s get you upstairs to bed. You don’t want to exhaust yourself too much today.”

When Jase and Luis opened their doors to get out, Thomas and Jasper walked to the back door to help Cory get out. Hunter walked back to the house with Cory's mother and father ahead of everyone, telling them all about the ice pops in hospital cafeteria. Thomas walked alongside Jasper and Cory, promising to bring over healing crystals that would help Cory's broken arms mend faster.

Jase and Luis remained at the truck, watching them all walk slowly to the house. Hunter pointed to the back door and said he'd walk them up to the guest room. Hunter said he didn't want them putting Cory in the wrong room because he'd already set a few things up for Cory in one particular room, the guest room closest to his bedroom.

Jase put his arm around Luis's waist and took a deep breath. He smiled and said, "It's not Alaska, and it's certainly not a typical family. But I think we've built a nice little family of our own here at Cider Mill Farm."

Luis watched as Hunter opened the back door for Cory. Thomas continued talking, making exaggerated gestures with his arms all the way into the house. Cory's mother had one palm on her bosom and the other on her hip as she entered. Cory's father, the last to enter, held the door open for Camp. Luis leaned against Jase and rested his head on Jase's shoulder. "I agree. And it's going to get even bigger next month." He'd been planning something for Jase and he figured he'd tell him now.

"What are you talking about?"

"When I told your mother we were taking care of Cory and we wouldn't be coming out to Alaska for Labor Day, she decided they would come here instead. You're grandmother might even stay a few extra months this time. After she heard about what happened with Darius, she decided we might need her more than she thought."

Jase reached down and patted Luis on the ass. He smiled and said, "With all those people in the house for a long weekend, I have a feeling we'll be sneaking down to the barn a lot."



Luis arched his back and inhaled Jase's aroma. "I was hoping you'd say that."

"I'm going to see how things are going upstairs," Jase said. He patted Luis on the ass one more time and kissed him on the mouth. It wasn't a long kiss. But he used his tongue and Luis felt his pants getting tighter.

As Jase turned to leave, Luis said, "In case I forgot to tell you today, I love you."

Jase turned and smiled. "You didn't forget. You told me with that kiss. But it's nice to hear the words. I love you too." Then he shoved his hands into his pockets and continued walking.

Luis leaned against the truck and lifted his right leg. He rested his foot on the bumper and watched Jase lope toward the house. He had to start preparing dinner; he had to make sure Cory's things were unpacked and organized. But he didn't feel like moving yet. He inhaled and closed his eyes, taking in the familiar aroma of a weed beyond the pool area that always reminded him of chlorine bleach. He remembered he had to call Josh and Roland to invite them over to a small family dinner the following weekend. He'd invite Hillary and Justin too. Hillary and Luis were working on a costume ball for the Angel Association in late October and there were tons of plans to be made. And Luis still had to write another post for Elena's blog. This particular post revolved around gay couples raising children while maintaining their full-time jobs and their relationships.

With all this to do, Luis remained there in silence a minute longer. He'd come a long way from Tennessee, where his own family still remained. He wondered if they ever thought about him now. He didn't know whether or not they'd read about him in the newspapers or seen how his life had turned out so far. He hadn't seen or spoken to them since the day they'd kicked him out of their house.

Hunter called from the back door. He wanted Luis's permission to have an ice pop before dinner. This time Luis smiled and told Hunter he could have one. Then he lowered his foot and started toward the house. On the way, he glanced

at the pumpkin patch and decided to turn it into a pachysandra patch instead. This way the snakes would have a nice quiet place to slither around in the warmer months. He didn't want any reminders of Darius Denby this close to the house. He'd buy his pumpkins again this year and he'd plant another pumpkin patch somewhere else next summer. Maybe down near the barn, where there was more space.

He'd been meaning to talk to Jase about an idea he'd had that summer. He knew he wouldn't be able to model forever and he wanted a career that would last. He'd been seriously thinking of turning Cider Mill Farm into a working farm again, where he'd grow exotic pumpkins in different varieties on a large scale. Though he wasn't sure whether or not it could be done, maybe Jase could invent a new soft drink that was pumpkin-based and call it Pumpkin Cider.

Racing through images of the future while Hunter waited at the door for him, Luis had a fleeting image of his life as an unending linear stream. It just kept moving forward and expanding, stopping every now and then for unexpected events that had no serious bearing on his life.

Hunter called again. He said he couldn't get the ice pop open on his own. Luis started jogging toward the house, bending his arms and making loose fists. He told Hunter not to touch the knives, that he'd be right there and to get another ice pop out for him too. It occurred to Luis he hadn't eaten a thing all day, and he hadn't had an ice pop in so many years he'd forgotten how they tasted. He might even have one. Or two or three. He felt like celebrating. And he couldn't think of a better way to do it.

THE END

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