

IT WAS a Saturday night, and The Male Box, Harry's favorite gay bar, was packed. A dance version of "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" bombarded the patrons from all angles. There were men everywhere—lined up for drinks, dancing, waiting to dance, waiting for something more—but none of them was the man Harry Fielding was looking for.

"I don't believe you dragged me here again," said Cody, his best friend.

"I hardly twisted your arm," Harry said. He was sure this was the night. It *was* the Saturday before Christmas.

"I hate it when we come here," Cody said. "None of these men know we're alive. That song from *Chicago* is about us."

"Which song?" Harry asked, barely paying attention. The charity stand should've been big. Why couldn't he see it?

"'Mister Cellophane'," Cody answered. "They look right through us, walk right by us...."

"I don't give a shit," Harry said. "Tonight, Javier is going to *have* to pay attention to me."

"Yeah, right," said Cody with a theatrical roll of his eyes. With anyone else it would have looked silly, but Cody somehow always carried it off. It was just one of the things Harry loved about his friend. "Why will he have to pay attention to you?"

"Because, Butthole," Harry snapped, "he won't have a choice. I'll be sitting right in his damned lap. He won't be able to ignore me." Cody shook his head.

Harry smiled wistfully. "I'll finally be able to say something to him, Cody."

"And he'll be totally enthralled with your personality and turn away from his hunk friends?"

"Why are you being this way?" Harry shouted, and then he closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He wasn't going to get mad. He'd been looking forward to this night all week. Javier was playing "Santa," and ten bucks for a picture for charity meant he would be sitting smack-dab in the lap of his fantasy man. He'd be able to touch him. And if Javier looked anything like the Santas in years past, Harry's fantasy wouldn't be wearing much. Harry would get to touch quite a lot.

"I'm sorry," Cody said. "I just know these guys, Harry. I don't know why you obsess with their kind."

"Their kind?" Harry asked, still searching for the Christmas display. The Male Box was a big bar, but not *that* big. "What 'kind' is that?"

"Clones," Cody said.

"Says the hairdresser!" Harry laughed.

"Hair*stylist*," Cody corrected with a wiggle of his hips. "At least *we're* friendly. We're *real*. Guys like Javier just don't have anything to do with guys like us, Harry. They have a reputation to uphold. They can't be seen—"

"With guys like us? Right! Average. I'm so fucking average I could scream."

"I don't think you're average," Cody said.

"There!" Harry cried, having finally spotted what he was looking for. He pointed to a large arch in the far corner of the room. It had "Mr. Santa" painted across it in red and green glitter. "How the hell did we miss it?" Harry darted through an opening in the crowd, and there he was.

Javier Torres.

Looking like a leather god.

"Fuck," Harry gasped.

Javier was sitting in a large chair, dressed all in leather, just like the picture in the ad. He was smiling, his eyes twinkling in a way Harry had never seen. It made his heart pound. The image was hardly that of any Santa from Harry's childhood. Not the kind he'd waited for to bring him his toys on Christmas morning.

But now that he was an adult? Javier was a Santa Harry would be more than happy to find coming down his chimney. If he had one.

Javier had let his beard grow for the event and was scruffier than Harry had ever seen him. He liked the effect. Javier's broad, lightly hairy chest was framed by a small bar vest and crisscrossing harness. He appeared to be wearing chaps, and Harry could only hope they were assless. Maybe he'd actually see Javier's butt? The only real concession the leatherman had made to being Santa Claus was a Santastyle hat, but of course it was black leather instead of red wool or flannel.

The sight took Harry's breath away and caused a stirring in his jeans. *How could any man be that gorgeous?* Harry wondered. Two, combined maybe, three for sure. But one?

Javier was teasing the twink in his lap, whispering to him (which caused an explosion of girl-like giggles) and then reached up and unerringly found the young man's nipple through his shirt and gave it a pinch just as they were both bathed in a flash of light as the photographer took their picture.

"Oh my gawd," said Harry. "If he does that to me, I'll cum in my pants."

"That he'll notice," Cody said.

Harry ignored him and dashed to the decorated card table where a chubby little bear was selling tickets. "Can I get two pictures?" he asked.

The young man gave him a knowing grin and said, "You sure can, you sexy thing. You Kansas City men are so hot!"

Harry didn't even hear the compliment as he handed over his money and snatched up his tickets. He ran to get in line. Luckily, there were fewer than a dozen men in front of him. Men? To his surprise, he saw there was a little old woman in front of him. She was all dressed in red and even had little round glasses. Why not? he thought. He could be generous with his fantasy. It was Christmas, after all, and why shouldn't she have a little holiday cheer?

Harry got more and more excited the closer he got to the front of the line. He finally realized the outfit he'd chosen, tight jeans and a red and green polo shirt, was not going to hide his arousal. Fuck it. It would just make a hotter picture. Pictures.

Harry had lusted after Javier for a year. Ever since the night when he'd been leaning against a post at the Male Box, all morose that another online "date" had apparently ditched him, when he realized there was a huge hunk of a man looming over him. Like Harry, the man was resting against the post, but with an arm over his head. The position and the fact that he was shirtless meant that incredibly muscled man's left pectoral was mere inches from Harry's face.

The man's scent was strong, without deodorant, but not offensive in the least. It shocked Harry how sexy it was, and he found himself leaning closer into Javier, trying to draw in more of the man's smell. When he realized the man was looking down at him, Harry found himself horrifyingly embarrassed. The man sneered and, reaching out with his other hand, took the back of Harry's head and shoved his face against his nipple. "Suck it," the man growled a command. "Do it. Suck it!"

Harry had tensed up, but in those strong arms, something happened. He felt his resistance go away, and he melted against the god and did as ordered. He sucked on the nipple, along with some of the man's silky chest hair.

"Harder!"

Again Harry did as he was told and found his senses rocked by the man whose name he would discover later was Javier. Harry's head swam in Javier's essence, and his cock stiffened in his pants.

"Bite it," came the next order.

To Harry's surprise, he did just as he was told. It was hot! Not nasty or gross or revolting. It was just clean, slightly tangy, all man. Harry, who rarely precame, felt himself getting wet. Never had anything like that happened to him. To be so totally possessed by another man.... No wonder there were men into the submission. He'd watched the leathermen from afar, and while he'd liked their bodies, some of their play seemed ridiculous or even silly.

After that night, Harry never felt that way again.

A moment later, Javier shoved him away and sauntered off into the crowd with a laugh. Harry had run home, first to masturbate—ejaculating as if he were eighteen—and then (even though he was exhausted) to phone Cody to tell him everything.

Harry always told Cody about everything. His buddy gave new definition to the idea of best friends.

The incident with the leatherman had caused a profound change in Harry. He sought out and found Javier's name and started looking for him and his crowd from that day forward.

Cody hadn't really understood, but he'd gone with it. That was one of the things that Harry found so special about his friend. While they didn't have one hundred percent matching opinions, they allowed each other to be just who they were.

Cody had even sympathized with Harry about what happened next.

Harry had hardly been able to wait to see Javier again, to see what naughty thing Javier would do to him next. Surely something wild.

But when Harry had finally seen Javier, the man hadn't recognized him or even given him notice. Harry had jerked off a dozen times waiting for their second meeting and what it might entail, only to be dismissed as if he didn't exist. For some reason, it had been devastating. Only after reflection did Harry realize he was acting like a love-struck teenager, but the knowledge didn't relieve him of his feelings. They seemed to have gone bone deep, and he couldn't shake how much he was drawn to the larger-than-life leatherman.

Well, Javier would know he existed after tonight.

Cody appeared at Harry's side. "You're next."

"I sure am," Harry said, heart pounding.

Except that the old woman ahead of him (who had been whispering in Javier's ear) had no sooner gotten her picture taken when Javier stood up, a strange expression on his face, and announced that he was done for the night.

"What?" Harry cried out.

"Sorry, man, I'm wiped. Don't worry, there's someone taking my place. You'll get your picture taken."

Before Harry could even take in that his chance was gone—he was almost too stunned to see that Javier was indeed wearing assless chaps, and Harry was viewing that perfect butt for the first time—a new Santa had taken the man's place, and Harry had been shoved into his lap. Except *this* Santa was no leather god. He was a big bear of a man, looking much more authentic. Except authentic was not what Harry had wanted. If he'd wanted a real-looking Santa, he would have gone to Walmart.

"No!" he cried, just as the first of his ten-dollar pictures was taken.

This can't be happening, Harry thought, nearly bursting into tears just in time for his second picture.

The Santa Claus gave him a cheery "ho-ho-ho" and said in a deep rumbling voice, "And have you been a good boy this year?" "What?" Harry said, incredulous.

"I want to know if you were a good boy!" The man laughed, voice as jolly as could be. "And what you want for Christmas."

"Him!" Harry all but shouted, pointing at the place where Javier had vanished. "I want *him*!"

The Santa laughed again. "I can hardly do that, can I, my boy? Santa can't give people for Christmas. Anything else?"

"I want to *be* him! No, I want to look like him!" Harry really was all but crying now. He had pinned so much on this moment.

"Well, why would you want that?" the Santa asked with a deep, dimpled smile.

"How can you ask that?" Harry said. "Look at me!"

"I've been watching you your whole life, son. What's wrong with you?"

"Fuck!"

"Oh! You're a bad boy, I see!" the Santa said, eyes twinkling.

"I'm *fat*!" Harry all but shouted.

"Fat?" The Santa laughed in his deep ho-ho-ing way. "You are hardly fat! Look at me for fat! Why, Mrs. Claus had to let out my clothes again this year. Wants me to go on a diet. *Me*! A diet!" He ho-hoed again.

"And my boring dishwater eyes," Harry said, ignoring the man.

"Now, *that* I can do something about! You want contacts then...?"

"And this hair," Harry said, fisting his tight brown curls.

"*You* can do something about that, although I don't know why you would."

"I'm ugly! I'm gross! I want to look like them," Harry bawled, pointing at a cluster of leathermen, a tear slipping down his cheek.

"That's pretty superficial, isn't it?"

"Well, that's what I want! Why am I even talking to you? What the hell are *you* going to do about it?"

"Why, I'm Santa Claus," said the man merrily, "and I can do quite a lot."

"Oh, give it up, *fatso*! I wanted to sit on Javier's lap. He doesn't know who I am because I don't look like him."

"But you are a nice-looking man," said the Santa.

"I am not!"

The Santa shrugged. "Are you sure that's what you want? Out of all the things you could have for Christmas?"

"Yes," Harry said, jumping from the man's lap.

The man nodded, and then, laying his finger on the side of his nose, said, "Granted."

Harry just shook his head. "Screw you," he said, and dove into the crowd.

"Harry! Wait," shouted Cody.

But Harry never heard him. He was gone.

A NICE thing about The Male Box was just how close it was to Harry's apartment. With it being only a few blocks away and on a major street, Harry didn't need to drive on a bar night; he walked. Never had to find a parking spot. Didn't have to worry about driving home drunk.

Drunk is what Harry was going to get tonight. Someone had been so thoughtful as to open a liquor store just a block over from The Male Box, and Harry grabbed a fifth of vodka on his flight home.

No sooner had Harry gotten home that he poured it over ice, added some orange Fanta as an afterthought, and took his first gulp.

Harry didn't want to think about his evening. He had come so close to having his fantasies fulfilled, and now they were smashed. By a little old lady! How he hated her now, his Christmas spirit forgotten.

Harry sat down, and a sob escaped him like a large burp. God. All he wanted to do was sit in Javier's lap. Well, he wanted a lot more than that, but that would have been enough. It would have been the fuel for a lot more fantasies. To practically be in his god's arms, lying up against him, touching him—touching that chest!—smelling him, hearing his voice, maybe getting his nipple tweaked like so many of the others who'd sat in Javier's lap.... Heaven.

But not now!

Because Cody was right: Javier didn't know he existed.

Harry took another huge swallow of his drink and nearly choked. He looked at his glass and saw he really had added only a splash of Fanta. Maybe he should add a little more? Fuck it. He'd add vodka, was what he'd do, and he did just that. He just held his breath before he took the next slug.

Harry had built up such a fantasy in his months of daydreams (and night dreams) about Javier. They would meet, and Harry would use his rather awesome conversational skills to listen carefully for a clue as to something Javier was interested in and then engage him in a nice little chat. In his fantasies it was usually travel. They would talk for hours about the places they'd been and wanted to go, and Javier would start buying him drinks. Javier would admit that he remembered meeting Harry and that he'd been too shy to talk to him. "I was afraid to talk to you. My friends are so shallow, and there has always been something about you. I've watched you, and you seem to be so much more than them. Why would you possibly want anything to do with someone like me? You're so sweet and funny and intelligent."

That was how it would go. Finally Javier would take him home, and Harry would make love to the man, use every sexual skill he knew, and make sure it was the best sex Javier had ever had. Sucking, rimming, fucking—he'd be dazzling.

As the stories in his head evolved, they had become quite the soap opera. Javier would fall madly in love with him, introduce him to his friends, and tell them they could love Harry or fuck off. Javier would take Harry to the gym and train him, and soon he would have a great body as well and wear leather and assless chaps just like Javier. They would be the dream couple of Kansas City. The stories Harry dreamed up became a central part of his life. They got him through the nights and, of course, the days at his boring, meaningless job.

Tonight had been the night that he would have gotten the fantasies to become reality. He'd played the meeting over and over and over in his head; he'd been ready for any possibility. Harry would have forced his dream to become reality.

Now?

Now it was done forever.

Harry stepped out onto the small balcony where he and Cody had spent so many nights. He didn't even bother to put on a jacket. It was unseasonably warm that December evening, and he just wanted to feel the slight chill of the night. Anything to feel real.

Damnit! He sobbed again. Why couldn't he have had just that moment?

He sat down in one of the two chairs (his and Cody's), avoiding the ledge. He loved the balcony but had a fear of falling. All he needed to do was get drunk and fall off. But then if that happened, at least it would all be over.

He snorted, almost laughing.

Shit! How melodramatic could he get? He had it bad, didn't he?

Harry finished his glass, went inside and hastily made a second drink, and headed back out onto the balcony.

Funny that Cody wasn't here. Cody would listen.

Funny that a friendship so deep could have sprung from a one-night stand.

They'd met in that last few minutes that was a bar closing. Both of them were drunk and sexually frustrated and somehow latched onto each other the way people had done at the end of evenings in bars since time immemorial.

They'd had sex, although Harry didn't remember much about the night. He did remember how surprised he'd been to wake up with the stranger curled up beside him. Not at all his usual type. Thin, almost skinny except for his pecs. Pale and a little gangly. His face was strange. It was like he had all these nice features—nose, eyes, mouth—but they were all put together on the wrong face. The combination worked in some weird way—Cody wasn't ugly by any means. He was just sort of awkward-looking.

When Cody woke, Harry was embarrassed. He didn't even know the guy's name. When had been the last time he'd woken up with a trick? A thousand years ago? Not that he didn't like waking up with someone; it just seemed to be an anathema to the gay community. The days of the trick bag seemed to be done. Over the years, he'd fallen into the cultural habit of sex followed by heading their separate ways. It was easier.

He hadn't even had anything to make them for breakfast that morning but a few pieces of bread and two eggs. Cody had just laughed, climbed unselfconsciously naked from the bed, and somehow made the small amount of food enough. "I could run downstairs and get some bacon if you want. I don't have much but...."

"Downstairs?" Harry asked.

"Yeah," Cody called back. "This *is* the gayest building in Kansas City, don'tcha know?"

That's all he needed, Harry thought at the time. Now I'll run into him constantly, and won't that be awkward? "No, don't bother," Harry answered. "Bacon makes me burp all day."

"Good," Cody said. "I didn't want to get dressed anyway."

Harry had marveled at how the stranger hadn't made one move to cover himself. He really was slim, except for those pecs and mild biceps and, well, a really cute, dimpled little ass. The last thing he had was the body of a gym rat, but he sure walked about with the confidence of a man who had a body to rival anyone.

Harry knew he never could feel like that. Not with his gut and large butt. In fact, he'd slipped carefully from the bed and pulled on boxers and an extra, extra-large T-shirt.

"Aw, why'd you get dressed?" Cody had asked when Harry had joined him in the kitchen.

Harry had just shrugged, touched his belly, and blushed. It had been a perfect example of why he didn't spend the night with tricks. All kinds of body flaws could be hidden in the dark. Not so in the cruel bright light of the morning.

Cody had just laughed and told him how much he loved bears, and then they'd eaten; Harry in his underwear and Cody naked and unabashed as a child.

Cody had insisted they exchange numbers, although Harry had no intention of ever calling the man. It was only Cody's persistence that made Harry agree to go see a movie with him. He'd told Cody right away he didn't want to have sex again, and he'd wondered at the time if seeing him at all had been a mistake. He thought maybe he'd hurt the man, but Cody had just rolled his eyes in that way of his and asked if they could be friends.

And then to Harry's surprise, the evening had gone surprisingly well. They had a wonderful time and discovered they had quite a bit in common. Harry knew that he'd have no trouble at all being friends with Cody.

Today, Cody was the only thing in Harry's life he really cared about. He hated his job, his apartment, his life, his... self. He hated the image that looked back at him in the mirror every morning. He hated being Harcourt Fielding. He wanted to be Javier Torres. Or François Sagat. God, to be *that* hunk! Why, oh why, wasn't he a hunk like François Sagat? That face! That body! That cock! And all the fantastic sex the porn star had! He had certainly jerked off many times to François's videos. Harry wanted to look like a porn star, and instead he looked like Seth Rogen!

Why had God done this to him? Had He been up there in heaven in all His glory, Harry's soul in His palm, and thought, *Dumpy little body or François Sagat body? Dumpy little body or François Sagat body? I know! He would want a dumpy little body! Yes! Why would Harry want a strapping, gorgeous body when he could be chunky and goofy-looking?*

I hate you, God! Harry cursed and didn't even have the grace to take it back.

He took his free hand and slammed it down hard on his thigh. "Oww." Good. It hurt, and he hated his body. He slammed his hand down again, this time curled into a fist, and then repeated it again and again, punishing his body for not being the kind he wanted. The tears began unabated now, pouring down his cheeks. He might have done worse things to himself had there not been a loud knock at his door.

Harry stopped, fist halfway down.

There was another knock.

Who the hell?

He walked to the door and opened it, and who should be there but Cody.

"You okay?" his friend asked. He was carrying a small sack at his side.

Harry shrugged. "I'm fine. Fantastic, actually. Couldn't be better."

"It looks like you've been crying."

"Why the hell would I be crying?" Harry asked.

Cody sighed dramatically. That was Cody. "You going to let me in?"

"Mi casa es tu casa," Harry said, stepping aside.

Cody headed to the kitchen, such as it was, and placed his bag on the small beat-up table. "I see you're already drinking."

"Yeah," Harry said.

"What are you having?" Cody asked.

"Vodka and orange Fanta," Harry answered.

Cody shuddered. "God, didn't you have anything else? Sit down. Let Mamma take over. I'll use your bottle since it's already open."

"Whatever," Harry said and headed back out to the balcony.

Cody joined him a few minutes later. "I couldn't find your pink sugar, so white will have to do," he said, handing Harry a martini glass, its rim frosted with sugar.

"Cosmos?" Harry asked.

"Why of course, *mon-shur*," Cody said in his perfectly horrid French accent.

Harry did manage a smile this time. How often had he and Cody gotten drunk on cosmos on this very balcony? They didn't have to worry about driving home either, as Cody lived two floors down on the second floor. They'd long since agreed that Harry's fourth floor balcony was better, though, for street watching and for the breeze on hot summer days.

Cody raised his glass, and Harry clinked with him. "To friends," Cody said.

"To the people of Bolivia," Harry said, an old joke, and Cody shouted a laugh in return.

They drank their cocktails in silence, and Harry was glad of it. Cody could talk the leg off a chair. He liked listening to his friend, but tonight he just needed to sit and be depressed.

Cody rose and was back a minute later with his gargantuan cocktail mixer; the one Harry had given him as a joke a few Christmases before. It had turned out to be a very worthwhile present.

Cody didn't say a word until the third cosmo, and by then, Harry was getting quite buzzed. "I'm sorry you didn't get your time with Javier."

Shit, Harry thought. Cody had to bring it up. But then he'd known Cody would. Talking was what Cody was about, and surely what Harry *most* loved about his friend. "So close...." was all Harry managed to say.

"You were."

"My only chance, gone."

There was a long silence before Cody said, "Maybe you should let it go now?"

"Let it go ...?" asked Harry. "Let it go?"

"Yes, Harry," Cody said, turning to him. "Stop thinking about him and his crowd all the time."

"His crowd?"

Cody shook his head. "Those people he hangs out with. The 'body guys'."

"Body guys? What the hell does that mean?"

"Those guys that are nothing *but* their bodies. Harry, that's all they are, is their bodies. Hanging out at the gym twenty-four-seven, working out all the time. Living to make sure they don't have a body fat of more than two percent or something. Making sure their clothes are just perfect to show off their perfect bodies. And what about their leather? They must spend thousands on their leather. Can't be seen in the same thing two times in a row! They probably call each other ahead of time and tell each other what they're wearing so they don't wear the same thing. Like two women not wearing the same cocktail dress. Every single hair in place. Staring at every mirror they pass."

"Javier doesn't do that!" Harry exclaimed.

Except that Harry had seen Javier do that many times but hey! He was just being conscious of making sure he looked good, and what was wrong with that? Didn't he and Cody look into a mirror to make sure they looked presentable before going out? It was just good hygiene.

"He *does* do that, Harry. Don't you see how shallow he is? How shallow they all are?"

Harry stood up, anger blazing, and he wasn't sure why. "And how the hell do you know that? How do you know that Javier is like that? You know him? You hang out with him, and he's told you this?"

"Javier wouldn't hang out with me if I won the lottery," Cody said.

"And you know this how?"

"He has an image to uphold," Cody said. "I'm not cool enough, or good-looking enough. His whole image would be ruined if he were friends with someone normal like us."

To his surprise, Harry was getting angrier. Why was Cody saying shit like this? "Like you never in your life avoided someone? How about in high school? You never ignored someone because they weren't cool?"

"Harry! That was *high* school. And you know what? No. I didn't. I liked who I liked, and damn the consequences. I paid for it too. I hardly had any friends in high school. But I had the ones I wanted. Same as now. I love my friends, and I don't care what other people think of them. I love *you*."

"I...!" Harry stopped, the next sentence forgotten. That last declaration had made him forget where he was going. "I love you, too, Cody. You're the best friend I've ever had. It's just...."

"It's just what?"

"I hate being me, goddamnit! I'm boring and I'm ugly "

"You are not ugly," Cody said, jumping up to stand before Harry. "Don't say that."

"I'm fat—"

"You are *not* fat! Stop it!"

"I'm boring, boring, boring!"

"You are not boring. You are the most fascinating guy I know! Why else would I hang out with you on this balcony till the sun rises talking about life and our dreams and God and all the other stuff we talk about? And stop saying you're ugly. *I* think you're handsome."

"You're just saying that because you have to," Harry growled. He sat back down and began to cry. He had no idea where the tears came from, but there they were. In a flood.

Cody put his hand on Harry's shoulder. "Harry, you're my best friend. You are wonderful and smart and funny and sweet. But this obsession you've gotten with that crowd, it's tearing you up. You aren't the same guy anymore. We used to talk about Pangea and gay marriage. About metaphysics and New Thought. About whether it was a good idea for Julia Roberts to play Elizabeth Gilbert in *Eat Pray Love*. Or who was hotter, Angel or Spike on *Buffy the* fucking *Vampire Slayer*! Now all you talk about is Javier and how you wish you knew him and that you looked like him and that you got sex all the time. You could have all the sex you want. Lots of men think you're sexy."

"I just don't like the kinds of men who think I'm sexy!" Harry shouted for the whole city to hear.

There was silence then.

Finally Cody said, "Thanks a lot, Harry. *I* think you're sexy. Why do you think I went home with you that night? Just to get laid?"

Harry flushed, looked down, looked up, turned away. That was exactly why he'd taken Cody home with him. Not that Cody was ugly, but Harry had been horny and hadn't been laid in months, and there was a warm body who wanted to go home with him. They'd talked about this. Hadn't they? That's why they'd become friends. They weren't attracted enough to each other to be sexual or, more, to be lovers. They were friends.

"Fuck it," said Cody. "The batch of cosmos are gone. You want some more?"

Harry nodded, afraid to say anything else. He sat down and looked up at the sky. Not that he could see much. The lights of the city prevented him from seeing all but the brightest stars.

Why was Cody being like this? Cody was a person who "got him" more than anyone he'd ever met. Why was he so suddenly *not* understanding? Why didn't he know this? Why was he being so Oprah and Mister Rogers rolled into one? Why couldn't Cody understand that he was tired of his life? He was tired of being Harry. He wanted something more.

"Here, *mon-shur*," said Cody, slipping quietly back. "Your cosmo."

They sat. They drank. And they didn't say much else that night.

HARRY awoke the next morning, still devastated. Shocked, as well. How had he placed so much in the idea of sitting in Javier's lap? It was stupid. Stupid! What did he think was going to happen? Cody had said it. Did he think that Javier was suddenly going to overwhelmed by his sparkling personality and decide he liked pudgy little men over gym gods?

Harry laughed an ugly little laugh and was surprised at the depth of his voice. He must have cried himself hoarse. Or drunk even more than he'd realized. How much had he had? A near-full bottle of vodka for sure. He couldn't remember after that.

Why, oh why, had he put so much into the hope of getting to know Javier? Surely he hadn't fallen that deep into fantasy. It was childish. Ridiculous. Javier wasn't going to want someone like him. Not ever.

Harry reached up to crush his hands against his head and...

...found his hands sliding through smooth silk.

What in the world?

He checked more carefully, and sure enough, his hair wasn't tightly curled. It was straight and silky soft and felt weirdly long. Had he gotten far, far drunker than he remembered? Had Cody done his hair or something?

He sat up and swung his long, muscular legs out of bed and....

What the fuck?

Harry's eyes widened, and he felt a wave of dizziness sweep over him. He looked down at... long... muscular... legs! Hairier than his had ever been. Large, masculine feet. A flat stomach, engraved with a deep six-pack of abs. He pushed the sheet that had bunched in his lap away as he stood. Six-pack? Eight-pack!

And that was when he saw his cock for the first time.

And how had he missed it?

Reared up with morning wood, it must have been ten inches long, the head just peeking out of a lovely and perfect foreskin.

For a minute, Harry thought he was going to faint.

Dreaming. I must be dreaming. Yeah, sure.

Except it felt real, especially when his cock gave a little flex.

Harry took a deep breath and knew there was only one way to really know. He took a step, almost fell (it felt different!), righted himself, and walked carefully to the bathroom.

What he saw in the bathroom made him scream.

For one second he thought there was a stranger in the room looking over his shoulder. But that made no sense, did it? Because where was *his* reflection?

Harry began to shake and reached out with large, masculine hands to steady himself against the small, ancient sink. He tore his eyes from the impossible image in the mirror and looked down at his hands. Gorgeous! Big. Carefully manicured. Man hands.

After a moment, logic began to assert itself.

Yes, it was impossible.

But on the other hand....

What was that line that Cody loved so much that Sherlock Holmes said?

Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever it is that remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.

Or something close to that?

He took a breath and looked up.

At another man's reflection.

Another man's stunningly beautiful reflection.

Harry was looking at an extraordinarily beautiful man with olive skin and long, dark brown hair that fell nearly to wide, muscular shoulders. Eyes so dark brown they seemed bottomless looked back at him from beneath dark, thick brows and through impossibly long lashes. The nose was large but not awkward. The mouth was wide, incredibly sexy, and when he smiled at the sight, that mouth smiled back with perfect, white teeth. He raised his brows and those sexy brows raised as well. Several days' worth of beard was growing on a strong jaw. He opened his mouth and stuck out his tongue, and the image followed suit.

How the hell could this be?

Harry turned from the sink and closed the bathroom door to be greeted by the image of a god in the full-length mirror.

He just couldn't believe what he was seeing.

As silly as it seemed, he pinched himself to see if he'd awaken. He didn't, but the mirror man did pinch himself as well.

Impossible! How could it be? The man in the mirror was luminously handsome. Stunning. The chest was huge, the pectorals massive and smooth of any hair at all (my chest hair is gone!), the nipples large and dark, and yes, there was an eight-pack, deep and beautiful.

Below that, the cock that had been so high and hard had lost its rigidity, but even hanging low, it was still huge. Eight inches at least, the foreskin now in a pucker that looked like a flower. Harry had never been sure if he liked uncut men or not; it depended on the skin. This cock was flawless. Like everything else about him.

"Fuck me," Harry said, and jumped at the deep voice. It was almost his. Almost. But there was a slight rumble that was as sexy as everything else he was seeing.

"Are you sure that's what you want? Out of all the things you could have for Christmas?"

"Yes."

"Granted."

It was impossible!

Then who was that in the mirror?

Improbable as it may be, it was the truth.

The unfeasible truth was making him hard again.

Him!

Him, hard again!

The penis rose up in sexy jumps, the perfect foreskin peeling back to reveal a perfect head, long slit offering a large, crystal drop of precum.

He reached down and took his length in his hand. Near half his cock stuck out from his fist, and he wasn't holding himself at the base! He pushed his hand back into the luxurious, soft curls of his dark pubic hair, took the rest of his length in the other hand, and still a small amount of his cock was visible. That cock felt good as well; it felt good to hold such a thing, and his cock (his cock!) felt so good being touched.

"God!" he cried out.

He fisted "his" cock and raised the other hand to run it across that amazing, smooth, hard chest. It was like finally, finally touching one of those perfect men, and somehow it was him!

Granted.

How?

Was it that fat old man last night?

He touched himself all over, explored his body, turned around and looked at an ass that belonged on a statue of a Greek god, probed his hole and found it staggeringly tight.

It's never been played with before, came some inner voice. You got your cherry back in a wonderfully unfeasible way! Physical, not mental, of course. He'd been fucked before. But not in this body!

Harry laughed and nearly cried at the same time.

Please, please have this not be a dream!

He ran his hands all over his unbelievably hard body, luxuriated in the feelings. Not only to touch such a body, but to *feel* that perfectly healthy body being touched!

He let his head fall back in ecstasy, but only for a moment.

He didn't want to miss a moment of this.

He stroked his length, and again, it was like playing with another man's cock, a cock bigger than any he'd ever had a chance to even see, let alone hold, and yet he was experiencing the feelings of having that cock touched.

It was all suddenly way more than he could take, and he came.

Hard.

His ejaculate launched from his body, as flawless as everything else about him, in long multiple jets that nearly coated a large section of the mirror. It seemed like it would never end; neither the supply of semen nor the ecstasy of the orgasm itself.

He fell back against the tub and nearly into it, more deeply pleasured than he'd ever been in his life. And that was just a *quick* jerk-off! What would full-on sex feel like?

He was going to find out, by God.

And tonight!

Javier loved going to the Liddle Awful Annie Show on Sunday nights.

Let's just see him ignore me now! thought Harry. I will show up and blow them away! My God. I will have my choice of any man I want. I bet straight men will want me.

But first I have to tell Cody, of course. Who else?

WHEN he looked through the peephole, it was indeed Cody waiting outside. But Harry still had no idea how this was

going to go. It was like some chick flick starring Gerard Butler and Kate Hudson. Except he was not Kate Hudson. No, with *this* body he was Gerard! So a gay version then? Gerard Butler and James Franco maybe? And wouldn't that be a hot romance movie?

"Cody," he called through the door.

"Yes, it's me," came the muffled answer. "Let me in. What did you do to your voice?"

Harry took a deep breath, unlatched the door, and opened it, but only slightly.

"Cody, I have something to show you, and you're not going to believe it."

"You said that on the phone, now open the door."

It was only then that Harry realized he was still naked. He spun around, saw only the small comforter he'd gotten at a charity auction, and covered his crotch. He opened the door about halfway and peered out at his friend—who was now shorter than him instead of taller!

"Who are you?" his friend understandably asked. "My God, Harry!" Cody said, trying to look around him and into the apartment. "Did you finally do it?"

"Do what?" Harry asked.

Cody raised an eyebrow. "You better not have charged him!"

"Charged who?" Harry asked.

"You better not be an escort," Cody said and then looked past him. "Harry! Where are you?"

"It's me," Harry said, his voice now barely a whisper.

"Who?" Cody asked.

"Cody... it's me. I'm Harry."

Cody let out a laugh and did that roll of his eyes. "Yeah, and I'm Lady Gaga. Now where is Harry?"

Harry opened the door further. "Cody, I know you aren't going to believe this...."

"Believe what?"

"...but it's me," Harry said, spreading the fingers of his right hand over his (awesome) chest.

"Who the hell *are* you?" asked Cody, obviously getting pissed off. He raised his cocktail mixer, which Harry was just now seeing, wielding it like a weapon. "Harry," he shouted. "Fun's fun, now where are you and who's the meathead?" Cody pushed him aside, which was amusing considering their difference in size. Cody was a lot stronger than he looked.

Cody moved through the apartment like only one who was totally familiar with the place could. He checked the kitchen first, then the single bedroom, and the bathroom last. Only then did he check the balcony. He even went back into the bedroom and looked in the single small closet and under the bed. The entire time he kept calling out to Harry, having no logical reason to believe the truth. How could he? It was impossible.

No. Improbable.

But true.

"All right," said Cody, returning to confront Harry. "Funny. But the game is over. What's going on?" Harry noticed he was still carrying the cocktail mixer.

"What's that?" Harry asked.

"What's what?" Cody asked, and then he noticed the mixer himself. He looked at it a moment like he had no idea how it had gotten there. Then he shook his head and looked (way) up. "Bloody Marys. I figured Harry would have a hangover. *I* do!"

Harry started. He didn't have a hangover! And he told Cody so. "How weird. We drank a lot of cosmos last night."

"I don't know about you, but Harry and I did! But I guess this weird and mean game is more important to him than anything else. Just let Harry know what he missed out on," Cody said and turned to leave.

Harry reached out and placed a (large!) hand on Cody's shoulder, stopping him. "Cody, I know this is impossible to believe. *I* can hardly believe it. But it is me."

Cody shrugged out from under Harry's new hand. "You know, Harry has done some fucked up things lately, but this? I don't even get it. It's not funny. What are you two trying to do? Convince me that 'Santa' really granted Harry's wish last night?"

Wow. Cody had said it. Had said just what Harry had wondered himself.

"Cody, do you think he really could have been Santa Claus?"

"Jesus! Enough already! Drop it!" Cody spun around, went back to the kitchen, and grabbed a clean glass from the sink drainer. He pulled the top off the cocktail mixer and filled the small glass with the deep red Bloody Mary. He gave Harry a look from over his shoulder, shook his head, poured a second glass, and offered it to Harry.

"L'Chayim," Cody said, raising his glass.

"To the people of Bolivia," Harry said without even thinking and took a swallow. Delicious. No one could make a Bloody Mary like Cody and....

Cody was looking up at him, frozen. He didn't move for what seemed forever, and then he laughed. "Oh! *That* was good! Too good. I don't know how Harry coached you on that one, but *that* was good."

Harry shook his head. He had to figure out a way to convince Cody. Tell him things that only the two of them would know. "I met you one night at The Male Box right at closing, and we came back here and had sex."

"We didn't. Harry and I did. He told you that."

Okay, Harry thought. Something else. "Your favorite color is blue."

"So what?" Cody laughed again. "You are not going to convince me that you're Harry. Not happening."

Something else, Harry thought. Oh! "We had a huge argument about whether Joss Whedon should have made Buffy and Spike get into a relationship—"

"It *wasn't* a 'relationship'," Cody said, rolling his eyes. "Fuck buddies at best, and—" He stopped midsentence. "You *aren't* going to convince me, whoever you are."

"Cody, test me in any way you want. Because in the end, it's like that line you like so much. I was trying to remember how it goes.... 'After you eliminate the impossible theories, whatever is left, no matter how crazy, that must be the truth.""

"It's 'Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth," Cody corrected him, and then his eyes grew wide again. "Har...? No!"

Harry reached out. "Cody. You're my best friend in the whole world. I love you. I promise you, it's real. I don't know how. Maybe that guy last night really was Santa, and he worked some kind of magic. Some kind of Christmas miracle. But I am Harry. I *really* am. And I will help us figure out how to convince you. No matter what."

Cody stood there, not saying a word, and this time it really was at least a minute before he said anything. Finally, he said, "What's the thing that really did it? What's the thing you did that made me know that you, that *Harry*, would always be my best friend?"

Harry smiled. It was a small one. Before he could even answer, a tear suddenly appeared in his eye. He took a deep breath. "It was when Chuckie died."

Cody staggered back a step.

"You called me, and you were crying, and I just ran down to your apartment without even hanging up. You were surprised when I knocked on the door. You thought I was still on the phone. And when you opened the door you said, 'My Chuckie is dead.' And I just took you in my arms and I started crying with you. And later you told me that that was when you knew. Because you called your Mom, and she said it was about time 'the old bag of bones died'. And when you called your fucking sister, she said she might come visit you now and you needed to stop crying like a faggot and act like a man. That Chuckie was only a dog, and you could get a new one." Cody's eyes had grown big and wet. "You were the only person who understood. Or at least understood it was a big deal to *me*. Harry... it is you...."

Harry nodded.

"You might tell someone some of my stories "

"...but not *that* one," Harry finished.

"Oh my God." Cody staggered again.

"Maybe you should sit down?" Harry offered.

Cody took Harry's advice and plopped down on the apartment's ugly and horribly uncomfortable couch. "My God," he said again.

"I know," said Harry. "Improbable, but true."

IT WAS a good night to "meet" Javier. Sunday! The bar was full again, and it always surprised Harry that the place could be busy on a Sunday night. Didn't any of these people have to work on Monday morning? He was lucky; the following week was his late shift. Noon to nine. He could go to the bar after work and get plenty of sleep before he had to get up and go to work the next day.

The big new event that had been taking The Male Box by storm was The Liddle Awful Annie Show, and Harry knew there was a good chance Javier would be there. It was also highly unlikely Harry's dream man would be wearing his leather. Harry didn't own one piece of leather, except for a belt and a pair of dress shoes. So he wouldn't have to wear a leather outfit to try and catch Javier's attention. Even if he'd had the money, one just didn't run out and buy a full leather outfit. There weren't even that many places that sold it, especially in Kansas City. Plus, it had to be fit. To look good, a leatherman couldn't just buy something "off the rack."

Of course there was still the problem that Harry's old clothing didn't fit anymore. The waist of his pants was far too big and the legs not long enough. They looked like culottes on him. His shirts still fit; his new chest filled out all but the largest of them, but they just hung like a lampshade over his midsection from his pecs.

He had to have clothes, and he wanted something that would show off his new body. Since he didn't make a ton of money, he had to go to the secondhand store.

It sort of stunned Harry how well Cody was adapting to something that rocked him every time he had the slightest glimpse of himself in a reflective surface or nearly lost his balance figuring out his new center of gravity. He'd already struck his forehead twice on low doorways.

"We are going to have to get you a *new* pair of shoes, though," Cody had told him earlier that afternoon while going through a rack of shirts. "You won't find shoes you can wear here. It's kind of gross to wear some stranger's shoes anyway, don't you think? You know they didn't get washed. How could they? What if the previous owner had athlete's foot or some kind of fungus?"

Cody pulled out a shirt that looked like something Captain America might wear, all stripes and a big white star. "What do you think of this? Tight enough for you?"

Harry looked it over. The band of stripes around the lower half would accentuate his new torso, and the huge white star would draw the eye to his chest. "I can try it on." Cody handed him the shirt. "I bet we could even find you something at Wal-fart until you get paid. Like those boots that look like something a lumberjack would wear? They would go with anything. You could wear them to work." Cody continued through the rack, sometimes stopping and looking and either shuddering, going on, or pulling something out. "What are you going to do about work, anyway? You can't show up like that."

Harry froze. "Shit."

"Yeah, that's what I thought."

"Well... damn."

"You'll have to go to a different temp agency where they don't know what you look like. Your ID is going to be a big problem."

"Shit!"

Cody pulled out a bright pink shirt with a huge fuchsia daisy over the chest. "Oh! *This* could be fun! I bet it's a woman's shirt some lazy person stuck here instead of putting it back where it belongs. How fabulous for us! It's probably meant to show off the titties, and you certainly have titties!"

"I don't think so," Harry mumbled. What was he going to do about his ID? He was going to have to work. Move to another city? He didn't even have the same color eyes.

"Harry," Cody said.

Harry looked down at this friend.

"We will figure it out. Right now just look for jeans."

Harry nodded and turned and started back through the rack of jeans. It was nigh on impossible to figure out what to wear. He didn't know his new waist size or inseam, and most of that information had long since washed away on the secondhand jeans anyway. He had to just keep grabbing something that looked close and trying it on. He wanted something that put his ass and especially his basket on prominent display.

An hour later, they'd left the store with several nice things he could wear, and Cody wound up buying him boots at JCPenney (insisted, actually). Then they ran to a fast food place to put something cheap in their stomachs until it was time to go out for the evening. It was there that Harry got one more shock.

"Cody! Look." He had pulled out his debit card to swipe their meal and gotten a look at his ID at the same time. His new face stared up at him.

"Well, Christ on a crystal crucifix," Cody said. "That *is* something." He looked up at Harry. "Whoa. If your new body wasn't proof of some kind of magic, this is! Maybe *I* should have wished for the new body."

Harry laughed. "It really is some kind of miracle."

So Harry had his ID and an outfit to show himself off, and with Cody at his side, he made his way through The Male Box crowd and toward the stage. "There! Cody. Oh my God." He pointed. "There he is. It's him. Right there in the fourth row."

"Okay," said Cody. He gave Harry a funny little smile. "Into the breach," he said, and led the way.

They moved fast as the last few seats in front of the small stage were filling in. They grabbed the pair right in front of Javier seconds before a couple of lesbians. "Damnit," said the one with spiked blue hair.

"Sorry," Cody said and plopped down in the first chair, leaving the one closest to Javier for Harry.

Harry found himself frozen in place. He so wanted to look at Javier, but he didn't dare. But he knew he had to look stupid just standing there, so he willed himself into the last seat, catching a glimpse of his fantasy out of the corner of his eye. And oh! Javier was staring, a lascivious grin on his face.

"Oh my God," Harry whispered to Cody. "He's looking."

Cody chuckled. "You sound like a thirteen-year-old girl."

Harry blushed. "Why wouldn't I? Hell, I feel like Jennifer Garner from that movie *13 Going on 30*."

"It *is* like that, sorta," Cody said. "I always thought movies like that were crazy. Funny, but crazy. Who knows, though, maybe this stuff happens to people all the time, and no one believes them. Or there are a whole lot of people in insane asylums that shouldn't be. Or they just keep their mouths shut...."

"Is he looking?" Harry asked, dying to peek behind him.

"For goodness sake," Cody hushed him. "Don't act like a doofus, or hot body or not, you'll blow your chance with him. You got to act cool. Nonchalant. Part of 'that' crowd." He gave Harry a weak smile. "Chances like this *are* miracles, buddy. Don't mess it up."

"Thanks, Cody," Harry smiled back.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen!" came a loud voice, silencing them. "It's time for the Liddle Awful Annie Show!" The ballad "Tomorrow" filled the world. "Starring Liddle Awful Annie!"

The crowd exploded into cheers.

"Also starring Dixie Wrecked, Gena Talia, and Billy the Bear!"

More cheers poured out from the audience.

"And now that filthy filly, that sleazy slut, that temptuous tramp, Liddle... Awful... Annie!"

The curtain parted, and The Male Box's favorite hostess exploded onto the stage. There was no mistaking her for a man. She was no drag queen. She was a tall, bodacious lesbian, and she loved it. As usual, she was singing actually singing!—and not lip-synching her nastily rewritten version of the famous song from the musical *Annie*.

"The queers will throw up, tomorrow! 'Cause they drank themselves silly at the bars! All night long.... Just dreaming about cock-sucking got them horned up oh so bad, they drank like fools!"

She was wearing a huge, preposterous, red afro wig and a bright red velvet dress with a bustier that pushed her considerable breasts up and out for all to see. Her eye shadow was bright white, and when she closed her eyes, they looked like those of the character from the famous comic strip. She had a spilling cocktail in one hand, a microphone in the other, and a stuffed dog tucked under her arm. And she could move. By the time her opening number was done, her glass was nearly empty and a young man wearing nothing but a thong and a green elf hat rushed out to mop up around her and take her empty glass before vanishing backstage. Then, in one of Liddle Awful Annie's typical shocking openings, she pulled out the toy dog, which appeared to have an erection. She grabbed it, yanked it off, and with screams from the audience, began to apply what everyone could now see was lipstick.

Before anyone could recover, the music boomed out again, this time to Bob Rivers's "classic" Christmas song, "Walkin' 'Round in Women's Underwear." While Annie led them, her entire cast came out onstage in their undergarments, clearly showing they weren't really women. Bill sent out shrieks when he appeared, all three hundred plus pounds of him, in silky purple panties and bra fit for Victoria's Secret. It was all a part of why The Liddle Awful Annie Show was so popular. It never treated itself too seriously and poked fun at drag and the gay life without being hurtful. The cast had the crowd in stitches, especially when Billy left the stage only to return with traffic cones on his chest in a spoof of Madonna.

In all the hilarity, Harry dared another look back at Javier. The man was laughing so hard he was wiping at his eyes. Harry's heart renewed its pounding. *God*, thought Harry, *he really is gorgeous*. Just Javier's smile damned near made him cum in his pants.

Javier caught him looking, and Harry spun back around. "Shit!" he whispered to Cody. "He looked at me!"

"Of course he did," Cody said with a single nod. "It's your Christmas dream come true, Harry."

Harry grinned like a schoolboy. "I'm so hard my dick hurts."

"Be careful," Cody said. "You might pass out as big as it is now."

And Cody had seen it, after all, because Harry had had to show it off. As soon as he had gotten Cody to believe that he was indeed Harry, as soon as their hugs had run their course, Harry had stepped back. "Just look at me!" he had bragged and turned, dropping his blanket. He'd clenched the cheeks of his bare ass and flexed his arms and back before turning back around. "Just look at *this*," he'd beamed, and lifted his cock and heavy balls. "Couldn't you just die?"

"Geeze, Harry!" Cody said, eyes wide. "I'd die if you put that in me! It's gigantic!"

"I know!" Harry bounced on the balls of his feet in excitement, dick swinging wildly.

"What are you going to do with that thing?" Cody said.

"Whatever and with *who*ever I want! Hopefully Javier!"

"Harry, that could be considered assault with a deadly weapon. I wouldn't know what to do with it except maybe throw it over my shoulder and try to burp it."

Harry boomed with laughter. "Throw it over your shoulder," he said and laughed again. "Like a Continental soldier? I just love you, Cody. Burp it! Oh my God!"

"You don't think ol' St. Nick gave you just a *tad* too much down there?"

"Hey, man! Don't rain on my parade," Harry said. "How would I look with this bulk and my old dick? It would look like a stem on an apple."

"Not hardly," said Cody. "Remember, I've had your dick inside me, and a stem on an apple it wasn't." Harry reddened shamefully, because in truth, he couldn't really remember much at all about that night. Yes, he did seem to remember fucking Cody but not how it happened or how long it went on or even if he'd been able to cum.

"Sorry, Harry. I didn't mean to piss on your miracle. It's just, I liked the old Harry. But I am happy you're happy. So let's see what we can do. You can't go out like that!"

That had led to their little shopping expedition, and thankfully an open secondhand store on a Sunday, and finally to The Male Box on a crowded Sunday night.

Where it looked like Javier just might be flirting with him. Harry dared another look, and sure enough, Javier was looking right at him, open and daring, not looking away. Their eyes locked, and Harry felt his cock try to shift in his ultra-tight jeans.

"Who wants shots?" came a shout from the stage, and Harry turned to see that Awful Annie had called out two gogo boys with trays of shots. The crowd went wild, and the two barely dressed pretty-boys slipped into the crowd and passed out red and green shots to the happy throng. Annie was with them, bopping to the silly music the DJ was playing and suddenly stopping in front of Harry.

"My, oh my," she said into the mic. "Look what the elves dragged in! What's *your* name, big boy?" she asked, and shoved the mic in Harry's face.

He tensed, eyes wide in surprise. Cody nudged him hard. "Umpfh! Harry!"

"Umpfh Harry?" Annie asked.

"Harry," he repeated. "I'm Harry." He blushed. God. Javier really was going to think he was a doofus!

"And are you hairy, Harry?" Annie asked, and reached out and took his hand. "Come with me, big boy," she said and led him to the stage.

Harry, not used to attention, allowed himself to be pulled up in front of everyone. They were shouting their approval, and it took him a moment to realize that they were excited to see him. *Him*! A thrill passed though him as he was once again hit with the knowledge that this was real. All of it. The new body, the attention he was getting, the attention *Javier* was giving him! This was what life was going to be from now on, the life he had wanted for so long, and he better get used to it. Cody was right. He had to act like he'd always looked like this and not the pudgy bear he'd been only the day before.

So when he got up on the stage, he grinned out at his admirers and gave them a big wave.

"So, what's the answer, Harry? You hairy?" Annie asked.

"Only above the neck?" Harry growled (the best he could).

"Oh!" Annie gave an exaggerated wink to her fans. "Why don't you show us?"

Flash of panic, and then Harry saw his best friend. Cody nodded. *Do it*, he seemed to be saying. It was only then that Harry saw Javier, who was clapping his hands above his head and shouting. Yes! Harry thought. So with a grind of his hips and as sensuous a shake of his shoulders as he could manage, he slowly pulled off his tight shirt, leisurely revealing his chest to the screaming mob. Me! They're calling to me!

He pulled off the shirt with a flare and began to flex his outrageous biceps and pecs. The screams only doubled.

So this is what it's like. I am going to love getting used to this, he thought.

"Wow! You almost make me wish I was born a gay boy," said Annie, and then mimed sticking her finger down her throat. "Not really! Your tits are bigger than mine, though. And those nipples! How come they're not pierced?"

Ah.... thought Harry, and then he forced himself into persona. He knitted his big brows together and leaned into the mic. "Because I can't decide which one to pierce."

Catcalls filled the air as Annie nodded her head in approval. "He's versatile! That means he likes boys *and* men!"

Harry flashed his smile. He was on! *Oh, how amazing*. If this felt good, what would it feel like when the "in crowd" took him in?

"So is that boy you were sitting with your husband or your wife?" Annie asked.

"Neither," he said with a wink. "I'm single and lookin'."

More cheering.

"So maybe I can help? Is there anyone out there you'd like to meet?" she asked.

"Fuck yeah," he said, and he pointed straight at Javier.

There was a roar of approval, and to Harry's excitement, he saw Javier grin widely.

"Well, then! Where are my Christmas elves? Ah! There's one of them," she said, pointing. "Paulie? Why don't you bring that other big handsome man up here?"

The young man zipped forward and grabbed Javier's hand, which disappeared in the bigger man's, and led him right past the bar's patrons and up onto the stage. It was like a dream. Harry had to be careful not to faint. How would that look? It was like time had slowed down. The music went weird and wobbly. The lights seemed too bright—as if dozens of spotlights were trained on the man of his dreams. In slow motion, he watched as Javier loomed up out of the crowd and closer and closer until he was standing at his side. It was only Annie's loud voice that brought time back into sync.

"Hey there, big boy! What's your name?"

"Javier," he said, and Harry could hear the accent, like melting butter.

"Oh! Ja-vee-air!" she said with exaggerated sexiness. "So, are *you* hairy?" she asked.

"Why, yes I am," he almost crooned.

She turned to Harry. "You like your men hairy, Harry?"

"I don't give a fuck one way or the other," he rasped. "As long as they look like him!" God, did he sound like a girl? Did he sound stupid? From Javier's smiling reaction and that of the audience, he thought that maybe he didn't.

Annie turned back to Javier, "I think you need to prove you're hairy," Annie said. "And I think you should let Harry help."

"All right, Annie," he said and stepped up to Harry and raised his huge arms over his head. And for just a moment, Harry thought he saw spots before his eyes.

A day before, he'd wanted this, he'd wanted it for a year. Only the night before he'd seen his dreams crushed. And now they were coming true.

Fainting was not an option.

He slowly reached out and placed his hands on those impossibly narrow hips. Fire launched up his arms and exploded into his chest. Trying not to shake, he managed to grab at the skintight T-shirt (Hollister, it read) and finally pulled it from the confines of Javier's equally tight jeans. When Harry's fingers touched flesh, his cock—which was already aching—flexed in his jeans. Annie didn't miss it. She pointed appreciatively, and the fever of the room notched up another few degrees.

Fuck, Harry thought, and for a second worried that he was going to cry. Slowly he pushed up, his fingers grazing Javier's tightly muscled body. Inch by inch, the man's massive hairy chest was revealed, and when the nipples popped into view, it was all he could do not to surge forward and take one into his mouth. The same ones that had so ensnared him a year before. Now he was pulling the shirt over Javier's throat and trim-bearded chin and oh, that smile and oh, those eyes and oh oh oh!

Javier gave him a look of pure lust, almost knocking Harry back a step. Instead, Harry stepped forward and, damn the consequences, he ran his hand up from that flat belly and through a pelt that felt like velvet, letting his fingers tangle between the massive pecs where it grew the thickest. With an obscene smirk, Javier reached out and roughly grabbed Harry's pec in return and crushed his crotch against Harry's. With a jolt and a shock, Harry felt Javier's hard cock alongside his own. *Fuck me*, Harry thought.

It was then the world started to intrude, and Harry realized that Annie was trying to calm down her fans. They were screaming as if the bar was on fire, and hell, Harry thought. As far as Harry was concerned, it was.

He tore his eyes away from Javier's and out into the audience for his best friend, to grin at him and say, *Look! Look! It's happening!* But to his surprise, Cody wasn't there.

"Okay, okay, boys!" Annie said, inserting herself between the men. "Ewww!" she cried as their erections bumped against her hips. "Enough, enough already. Why don't you let my elves take you to the bar for a shot?"

Javier reached out and grabbed Harry's hand. "Fuck the shot." He leaned into Harry. "I want you to fuck *me*. Let's get out of here," Javier said and yanked Harry off the stage.

Oh my God, thought Harry. His hand was in Javier's, pulling him through the crowd. How could this be? It was happening! He was going to have sex with Javier! It had happened so fast. So fast. He gave one last look to the crowd, looking for Cody, but to no avail. And then he let Javier lead him out of the bar.

THEY went to Harry's place. Javier had pounced on the idea when he'd found out how close Harry lived, and they climbed into his little sports car and were at the apartment in seconds. They started kissing in the car. He was amazed at just how aggressive Javier was, and they continued to kiss at the door to the building while Harry fumbled for his keys. They kissed waiting for the elevator and kissed more on the journey upward. Harry got his chance to bury his face in the curls of Javier's chest and reveled in having those nipples in his mouth.

At the ping of their arrival on the fourth floor, Harry led Javier down the hall and into his apartment.

They were no sooner through the doorway when Javier shoved him roughly against the closed door and dropped to his knees, practically tearing Harry's jeans open. Harry hadn't bought any new underwear, and he would have been swimming in the few pairs he owned. So his new rigid member sprang out from his pants like a spear and actually struck Javier's cheek with a wet sound.

"Oh my fucking God," said Javier. "So damned hot! Uncut!" And Harry's cock was in Javier's mouth before Harry could register what was happening.

"Oh!" Harry shouted, at the feeling or the sight, he was never sure. Both seemed the likely answer. To look down at that huge cock (*my cock!*) being sucked by that man, that mouth. It was almost too much, and for a blinding second, Harry thought he would cum on the spot. Instead, with great reluctance, he pushed Javier back, dropped to his knees, and shoved the man back onto his ass. He climbed over him, pressing him to the floor, and kissed him for all he was worth.

God! He was kissing Javier. *The* Javier. How many times had he thought about this, kissing his fist and pretending his fingers were Javier's lips, shoving his tongue between

them as he masturbated? But this was real. He was kissing Javier.

He ground his body against Javier's, their chests locking together like puzzle pieces, opened his mouth, and used his tongue to gain entrance to the man's mouth, teeth clashing. Harry grabbed his fantasy's short hair, mashed his mouth against Javier's, and then bit at his lips.

And if Javier wasn't as good a kisser as he'd hoped, so what?

Harry's cock battled against Javier's jeans, and he knew he had to see what the denim hid. Harry wanted to prolong this, but he didn't think he could. Not this first time. He so wanted to see Javier's cock. Had dreamed of it. Would it be big? It had to be. It felt big. Would it be cut? Uncut?

He pulled his face from Javier's and ran his wet tongue down the man's muscled neck, over his Adam's Apple, and into the hollow of his throat. He continued down, rubbing his face in that wonderfully soft hair that covered the man's chest, found a nipple, and sucked it in.

"Harder," Javier said.

That garnered some lust from the man, and Harry sucked harder on the dark nipple.

"Bite me!" Javier ordered and Harry did, excited to remember just how hard Javier liked it. Who would have thought something like that could be so sexy? He gave the other nipple the same attention to Javier's cries of approval. Then he kept going down, desperate to get to his prize, ran his tongue down that wonderful six-pack (that wasn't quite as sculpted as he'd thought) and then was at the snap of those jeans. He popped it with his teeth, pulled, and the other buttons opened pop pop pop pop to reveal a jockstrap. Fuck, he loved a jockstrap! He'd always thought he looked ridiculous in them, so he didn't have one. But they sure looked good on Javier, at least from what he could see. He reached down and yanked the jeans open wide and saw the hard cock that strained the fabric of the jock, and basked in the scent of Javier and the wet patch of cloth. He dug his tongue into that wetness, loving it. It was Javier's precum. And what would it be like when he actually shot?

"Lift your ass," Harry said, and when Javier complied, he yanked the man's pants down to their tangled knees. The pouch strained mightily at the cock trapped inside, and it was big. Not the monster he'd imagined, but oh so sexy anyway. Harry sucked at the wet patch, mouthed the head, and thought he'd swoon. He had Javier's cockhead in his mouth. In his mouth? No, not quite! He pulled the jock aside, and Javier's cock jumped out to greet him. It was lovely and wild, throbbing, and nearly red in need. Harry took the slick, cut head in his mouth, and the flavors exploded across his taste buds. He'd been worried Javier would be too thick, but no, the thickness was average and so fit well into his mouth and then, yes, into his throat. No gag, thank God. How bad would that have been?

He had to give this man the best sex he'd ever had. Javier had to come back for seconds and thirds and forevers. He bobbed up and down, and Javier screamed in pleasure and then begged him to stop.

"You sure?" Harry asked, giving him the nastiest look he could.

"Yes! I want you to *fuck* me. I want you to fuck me hard!"

Harry laughed in delight. Oh, this was too rich! This was too marvelous, too amazing, too wonderful! He untangled himself from Javier and stood.

"Where you going? Fuck me right here!" Javier shoved his jeans further down and rolled onto his hands and knees, that astounding ass spreading, the hairy crack revealing the man's most private place. Just like a porn novel, the pucker winked at him, and Javier laughed. "Take it," Javier commanded.

"We, we need condoms," Harry said.

"You don't have to use one if you don't want," Javier said. "I was just tested, and I haven't been barebacked in a long time. I want you *in* me."

Javier flexed his muscular back and did that trick again with his asshole, and with a cry, Harry was on his knees, burying his face in that sexy trench. Oh, the scent of him! Clean and sweaty and smelling like man, like nothing else on Earth. He licked up and down the crevice and then dug his tongue against that wrinkled pucker. Kissed it, licked it, sucked on it, pushed at it with his tongue.

Javier laughed again and did something, and the hole opened to Harry like magic. Harry shoved his tongue in deep, marveling at the wet velvet feel and the clean funk of the man's insides. He fucked Javier with his mouth and wondered that he didn't cum without touching himself.

Oh, he wanted to fuck that hole bare, to know what it was like to feel Javier's glorious flesh surrounding his cock, but knew he couldn't. Harry was pretty damned sure he himself was negative, but not one hundred percent. How would he feel if he infected the man? So as he ate Javier's hole, he discreetly opened the condom he remembered Cody shoving in his pocket. He rolled it down his length, all the time ignoring the voice that filled his head: *And what about him?* You believe he just tested negative? How do you know he doesn't take a man home every night and tell him the same thing?

No! Not Javier. He wouldn't do that!

Harry kneeled on the tangle of Javier's jeans and, still mostly wrapped in his own jeans, pushed against Javier's gorgeous asshole. He'd never seen anything more beautiful in his life, and suddenly he was as deep as he could go. Javier had just swallowed him with a scream and then clenched down tight.

"God!" Harry shouted and began a motion as old as time.

It was exquisite despite the condom. Harry wanted to cry in joy as he looked over Javier's incredibly muscular back, at the stunning ass spread for him, watched as the folds of Javier's asshole clung to his cock as he pulled out. As he fucked the man, he blessed that condom because it was the only thing keeping him from cumming in seconds.

But as hot as Javier's beautiful back was, Harry wanted to see Javier's face, to kiss him. To show the man that this was more than a fuck, despite how quickly it had happened. Show the man love with his kisses so that romance would be planted and could grow. He wanted forever with this man, not just a few frantic moments.

Harry pulled out, and Javier shouted out his protests. Ignoring them, Harry clambered off and pulled the man's boots off and then his jeans. He rolled him onto his back. "You sure you don't want the bed?" he said.

"I need you," Javier said. "I can't wait!" Harry felt his heart soar.

Harry pushed those wonderful legs apart and back and entered Javier again in one supreme motion, bending the man in half as he began to slowly fuck him.

"Faster! Harder!" Javier shouted, and Harry fought the command. He had dreamed of this too long. He bent over Javier and took his mouth in his own, kissed him as he fucked, loving every minute. Memorizing it for their fiftieth anniversary.

Only when he was ready, despite the fact that Javier was begging, did he speed up. He was getting closer and knew he was going to have to pound the man to get the sensation he needed through the latex. He used muscles he never dreamed he would ever have, hammered at Javier, pummeled his ass, and finally, bellowed as he came from his soul, from his bones.

Javier grabbed his own cock, and before Harry could come down enough to help, the man was cumming across his belly, filling his navel. Harry managed to clear his head enough to dive down and lap up that cum while he was still in the amazing throes of his own orgasm, and it went down clean, despite the bitter aftertaste.

Finally, he collapsed over the man, and it was all he could do not to sob in joy.

It had happened.

His every wish and fantasy were coming true.

And this was only the beginning!

"Wow," said Javier. "That was amazing. We'll have to do this again."

Harry laughed out his happiness. "Give me a little time to recover and we can do it in bed."

Javier gave a loud laugh of his own and pushed at Harry. "Save it, big guy. I got to get out of here!"

What?

It was like someone had jumped out and shouted "Boo!" it was so unexpected.

"Go? You don't have to go," Harry said, surprised. "Spend the night. Let's fuck until the sun comes up. I still want you in me. I'll make breakfast. I have eggs and English muffins and jam and bacon and...."

"No, man. Seriously." Javier shoved harder, and Harry popped from Javier's amazing velvet depths.

"Why?" Harry asked. "You got to work in the morning? I can set the alarm early. I make the best coffee you've ever—"

"Look, man," Javier said, his accent taking a decidedly ugly tone. "I got to go. My lover will be expecting me."

"Lover?" Harry asked. Lover?

"Yeah, man," said Javier, disentangling himself. "I told him I'd be home early."

"Lover," Harry repeated, confused. He had to have heard wrong. *Lover*?

"Yeah. I wasn't expecting to meet a hottie like you." Javier rolled over and sat up and looked around him. "If I get out of here now, I'll get home when I said I would. I was only going out for the show tonight." He grabbed his jeans and stood up, his dick still half-hard, a drop of cum hanging from its tip. Somehow it wasn't as sexy as it should have been.

"You have a lover?" Harry said. That had never ever been a part of the fantasy.

"Yeah, man. Sorry, I forgot your name." He stuck his other foot into his jeans and pulled them up.

"Harry," Harry said.

Javier laughed. "Oh, yeah! And you aren't and I am. That's right!" He pulled the jeans up and began buttoning them.

"Does your lover know you're here?"

Javier rolled his eyes, and it somehow wasn't as effective as it was with Cody. "Not here. But he knows I fuck around. He's not into the scene, you know? And he works early on Monday, so he won't go out on Sunday night."

"So this is okay with him?" Harry asked.

Javier shrugged. "We worked it out. He doesn't have my drive, you know? And I bring men home to him once in a while. Say! You want to do a three-way some time?"

Harry didn't even know how to answer that one, despite the fact that he knew the answer. No, he most decidedly did not want to do a three-way with Javier's lover.

Javier bent and, grabbing his boots, quickly pulled them on. Then he reached down and yanked Harry to his feet. "Here. Give me a kiss," Javier said and gave him one of those disappointing kisses. "See you around?"

Harry nodded. It was all he could do.

And Javier was gone.

Harry was alone.

Stunned and alone.

A moment later he was rushing down the stairs, not waiting for the elevator. Cody! He needed Cody.

He reached his friend's floor and dashed to the door, pounded on it.

There was no answer. Asleep?

He pounded again.

"Hey," came a shout, and he turned to see a woman standing in another doorway. It was the lesbian with the blue spiked hair from the bar. Perfect! "Think you can lay off?" she said. "It's late."

"Fuck you," he said.

"No, *fuck* you," she snarled.

"Harry?"

Harry turned to see Cody coming from the elevator. He was not alone.

"Cody?"

"Where's Javier?" Cody asked.

"He left!" Harry said.

"You didn't...."

"Yes, we did. And he left already."

"Bummer," said the lesbian. "Guess you aren't as hot as you look," and she slammed her door before Harry could respond.

"Um, Harry, this is Troy," he said, indicating the chubby bear standing beside him. Harry only stared. It was the same guy who had sold him his ticket to get his pictures taken the previous evening. It was only one more impossibility in this long night.

"Cody, I need to talk to you."

Cody was unlocking his door. "Can it wait?" Cody asked.

"I can leave," said the bear.

"No, don't you dare," Cody said, turning to the man and giving him his big, sweet smile. "You go on in. I'll be right there."

The man hesitated a second, and then, nodding, disappeared into Cody's apartment.

"Harry, can this wait until morning?"

"Cody! Javier left. He's got a fucking lover!"

Cody's shoulders slumped for a minute. "Damn, baby. I'm sorry."

Oh, thank God he had Cody! Tears welled up in his eyes. "Cody, can we talk?"

Cody gave him a funny look. "Harry. I've got a guest."

"I...." What did you say to that?

Cody reached out and gave Harry's cheek a pat. "Harry, I'm sorry."

"I can't believe this," Harry said.

"Can't believe what?" Cody asked.

Harry nodded his head toward Cody's door.

Cody paused, and then his face grew red. "What? That I took a man home?"

Harry shrugged. "You don't do that."

"I went home with you," Cody said.

"But—"

"So *you* can take someone home. But *I* can't do the same thing?"

Harry felt like he'd been slapped.

Cody shook his head. "Damn you, Harry. I love you, but damn you. I'm sorry that Javier didn't work out like you planned. But you aren't the only one who wants someone to hold. We can talk about this in the morning." He turned and started into his apartment then hesitated in the doorway. "Go home, Harry. Sleep. We'll talk in the morning. I'll make breakfast."

The door closed softly, and Harry was left standing in the hallway.

Alone.

HARRY didn't see Cody the next morning. He found that for some reason, he couldn't. He hadn't slept well. But that, he'd come to realize, was what happened when dreams were almost fulfilled and then shattered all in one thirty-minute encounter.

Thirty minutes!

Harry kept replaying Javier's visit over and over in his mind; how fast it all happened, from Javier's first sexy smile to him leaving with the bomb dropped about a lover. And Javier had actually wanted bareback sex. Insane! Then there was the fact that once Harry was out of his sexual heat, he realized that the sex hadn't been all that good. Certainly not what he'd built it up to be. The man couldn't even kiss, all sloppy and slack with no real energy, no passion. Quick as could be, it was over, with no human connection, and that was what Harry had really wanted. Cody had even helped him by buying breakfast fixings so that the morning after would be perfect.

"I don't want your first morning after with Javier to be like ours," Cody had said.

And thinking about Cody had only exacerbated the whirlwind in Harry's mind. He just couldn't get the image of Cody with that man, that *fat* man, out of his mind. Strange that the sight had inspired such feelings in him; surprise, anger, and... what?

It wasn't like Cody didn't date. He'd had a boyfriend for nearly three months just last year. A loser, to be sure, but that hadn't bothered Harry. Had it? Why did seeing Cody with that bear last night bother him? He'd taken Javier home; didn't his best friend have the right to take someone back to his place as well?

But Harry had still been totally unable to go down to see Cody the morning after his disastrous session with Javier. What if the bear was still there? Would Cody be unashamedly naked like he'd been with Harry? Would the bear, unlike him, be proud of his body and be nude as well? Had the man fucked Cody's pretty little butt? The very idea threatened to make Harry crazy, and he didn't know why.

So he didn't go down to Cody's apartment, and when Cody knocked later (and who else could it be but Cody?) Harry hadn't answered. Hadn't moved from his hideously uncomfortable couch for fear Cody would hear one of the apartment's ancient floorboards creak. Next he'd called his temp agency and gotten all mysterious with his facilitator, telling her that he didn't want to go back to his present assignment.

"Harry," she'd said, concern in her voice. "What's wrong? You were doing so well there. I wouldn't be surprised if this is the place willing to hire you!"

It would be good to finally have a permanent job, but how to explain that he was now a 6'5" muscle god? "Brenda, please don't ask me to explain. Please. I just can't go back there."

"Did someone harass you? Make fun of you? Make you...."

"Brenda, please."

There had been a near infinite pause, and then she had accepted his few words. "You're one of our best, and there has never been a problem with you in all the time you've worked for us. I'll find you something new as quick as I can. But this is the week before Christmas, and most places either have all the help they need or they're letting people go."

That had been the end of that, and he'd hidden in his apartment the rest of the day.

Not working that day had felt strange, and he'd found himself wondering what the people who worked in the cubicles around him were doing. He'd never see them again, or if he did, they wouldn't know it was him. That made him sad for some reason. And Brenda had been so trusting! She stopped asking questions and was busy finding him more work. Try as he might, he couldn't remember what he hated so much about his job. And all the thinking was only making things worse. He wanted to *not* think!

So that night, Harry answered the call of his new body. He'd headed out and barely been in the bar when a nicelooking man was buying him drinks and asking him back to his hotel room. Harry found himself taking the man's offer and was flabbergasted to discover (after sex that consisted mostly of the man just lying there) that he, too, was involved. This time with a woman; a wife of twenty years. Was every man a cheater?

"I need this," the man told him.

"Can't you just tell her you're gay?" Harry had asked.

The man had given him a horrified look. "I'm not gay," he declared, although he offered up his ass one more time. Harry hadn't taken him up on it and was surprised when he found himself right back at The Male Box, and even more so to find himself taking yet another muscleman back to his own apartment. He wanted to lose himself in sex. Orgasms could make his problems go away, and wasn't it funny that he had any problems in the first place? After all, wasn't this life just exactly what he'd wanted? To have a gorgeous body that would get him any man he wanted?

Hadn't he told that Santa Claus that the only thing he wanted was to look like one of Javier's crowd?

This second man—David or Davie, or was it Danny? actually stayed the night, although Harry found he wished the man would just leave. He was clingy and reeked of tequila. The next morning the smell rose from the man's very pores. So after the man left, Harry hid the next day as well, not answering the door or his phone, letting the answering machine monitor his callers. Brenda hadn't found anything, and Cody was worried.

Shit! He just couldn't look at Cody right then. If he did, he'd see that bear in his mind, and that would make him wonder again if Cody had let the man fuck him, and Harry didn't want to think about that.

That next evening, Harry went to a bar he'd never been to before and this time went home with a couple. If anything, they were more gorgeous than Javier. But this time he was given some of the best sex he'd ever had; they seemed like real people, and it was a joy to have them appreciating his body and letting him lose himself in theirs.

But then the hints that he should leave came soon after, gentle as they were. Harry found himself wanting to leave. Anything to keep from seeing how much the two loved each other. At least there did seem to be love out there.

So why hadn't he ever found any? Any that lasted longer than a few weeks or a lucky couple of months.

What was wrong with him? Harry wondered.

He'd thought for years that his body and looks were what had kept him from finding love and happiness. If only he looked different, were sexy instead of dumpy, had a bigger dick....

But now that he had all that, why wasn't he happy, goddamnit?

This was supposed to be fun! It was supposed to make all his dreams come true.

It was the next evening, Christmas Eve, after hiding all day, that Harry finally made his way down to Cody's apartment, afraid both that Cody would be there, and that he wouldn't. And what if the bear was there as well?

"It's about damned time," Cody said when he opened his door. "Didn't you get my messages? Come on in."

Harry paused. All Cody wore was red flannel pajama bottoms and a Santa hat. Did he have company? "Um," Harry stammered. "Is it all right? Is *he* there?"

"Who?" Cody asked.

"Your new friend," Harry said meekly.

"Friend? Who?" Cody just looked up at him, a puzzled expression on that sweet hodgepodge face of his. God, he *was* good-looking, Harry realized. Why hadn't he ever noticed that before?

"The guy from the other night. You know, from the bar," Harry said.

Cody gave out a bark of laughter. "Him? Oh, Harry, you silly shit. No, he's not here. Get inside."

Harry entered the apartment, looking around like he expected the man to be there after all. He saw that Cody had set up his Christmas tree and that was twinkling with lights. Decorating Cody's tree was something they usually did together. But then, he couldn't really blame Cody when he'd hidden for the last several days.

"Want some nog?" Cody asked, heading into his little kitchen.

"Sure," Harry mumbled.

"Leaded or unleaded," Cody asked, using another of their inside jokes.

"Leaded," Harry said, and smiled. Whiskey sounded perfect. Hopefully lots of it.

Cody was back in a second and holding out a glass filled to the top with eggnog, complete with sprinkles of nutmeg; of course. "To yet another Christmas come and near gone, thank God," Cody toasted.

"To the people of Bolivia," Harry returned and near choked on his drink. Why had he wondered if there would be plenty of whiskey?

There was an awkward pause. At least for Harry. "So, ah, you seeing this new guy?" he asked.

"Who? Oh!" Cody laughed. "Jesus, Harry. He lives in Maine. He's here to see his Mom and he goes home in a few days. You think I'm going to start a long-distance relationship with a man from Maine? The one I had with the guy from St Louis was bad enough."

Harry felt an overwhelming sense of relief and found his eyes threatened by tears. "How was I supposed to know he was from Maine?"

"Well, if you hadn't vanished for three days, you'd know, wouldn't you? Sit down. I'll put on *A Charlie Brown Christmas*."

Harry's smile broadened. Another of their Christmas traditions. "And then *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*?"

"Why of course, *mon-shur*," Cody said in his always-bad French accent.

Harry felt a surge in his chest, the first real happiness he'd felt in days. How was it that Cody could always make him feel so good? He felt an urge to kiss his friend and blushed for it.

So they sat and watched the decades-old Christmas cartoon and laughed at how close they could quote along with the dialogue. And while Schroeder played Vince Guaraldi and the Peanuts gang danced, Cody turned and said, "I'm sorry Javier didn't work out, Harry."

Harry shrugged.

They watched some more, and then Cody said, "I hear you've been pretty busy this week?"

"Huh?" Harry said, surprised.

"Reva," Cody said, the name of the manager of The Male Box his only explanation.

"Oh," Harry said, embarrassed.

"I just hope you had fun."

Harry shrugged again. Had he? No. Not really. Not as much fun as he'd had sitting here with his best friend.

"Hey, I don't blame you," said Cody, and of course he didn't. When did Cody ever? "If I had a new Ferrari, I'd take it out for a drive or two."

"Damnit, Cody. It was *supposed* to be fun. I look like a fucking god! I took *Javier Torres* home with me!"

"You took more than him home," Cody said, rolling his eyes.

"Cody, why isn't everything better now? This is more than I could have dreamed, and yet.... I wasted a Christmas miracle, Cody. I could have asked for anything." Cody shook his head. "That's life, I guess, Harry. Missed opportunities. And more, learning from our mistakes. Hopefully figuring that out and choosing to stop missing them. To make our lives better. And also to appreciate what we've got."

Yes, Harry thought. It was true. And why had he been so unhappy? He had a nice life. His job wasn't so bad. His apartment really wasn't all that bad at all. And he had the best friend in the world. "I think I'm finally getting that," Harry said.

"Then your wish wasn't wasted after all," Cody said. He reached out and placed a hand on Harry's knee. "So maybe from now on you won't need a new body to figure things out?"

Harry sighed. "I hope not. No promises."

Cody laughed and turned back to watch Charlie Brown look for a Christmas tree. Harry watched Cody instead.

God, he was lucky to have Cody in his life.

Had he thought his friend funny-looking? How had he thought that? Why, he wasn't funny-looking at all. Had he thought Cody skinny? Slim maybe, but not skinny. He watched the rise and fall of Cody's chest. Had Cody's nipples always been so pink? What would it be like to take them in his mouth, he wondered. Would Cody like them sucked gently, or hard, like Javier?

Harry looked up at Cody's profile. He was beautiful, really, in a different way. And weren't they both different? Before he knew what he'd done, he reached out and touched Cody's hair—so soft—ran his fingers down the back of that strong neck. Cody turned and gave him a funny look. "You okay, Harry?"

Suddenly, Harry felt that urge again to kiss his friend, and this time leaned in quickly and did so. His heart jumped, and he felt a twinge from his cock. *Oh God*, he thought. *Oh God*!

"Harry, what was that for?"

How did I *not* know? thought Harry. Did he really need to magically wake up with a new body to figure it out?

"Harry?" asked Cody, eyes growing wide. "What?"

Harry leaned in again, used the hand at the back of Cody's neck to pull him in, and kissed him again, longer this time. Longer and harder, and damn, if it wasn't sweet.

Cody opened his mouth to Harry's questing tongue and then, with a cry, pulled away. "Harry!"

Harry felt his eyes fill with tears. "Oh God," he said. "I... I'm...."

"Harry, what's this about?" Cody said, visibly shaken.

Harry couldn't answer. He didn't know what to say. But the feelings welling up inside him couldn't be denied. Cody, his best friend. The man who knew him like no one else. Who loved him unconditionally, was always there for him. Who believed him when a miracle happened to him and accepted it like yesterday's news.

"Oh, Cody. Fuck. I... I think I'm in love with you." And he flinched as if Cody would break character and react badly.

"Harry! Goddamnit!"

Harry tensed. Cody had reacted badly.

"Now you tell me? *Now*? Fuck, Harry! I've been in love with you forever."

"What?" Harry asked, astonished. It was as if someone had goosed him.

"Harry, I had a crush on you before we went home together. I'd watched you for months!"

"You did?" Harry asked.

"I saw you that night, and I made my move and, God! You took me home with you. I was so thrilled. And drunk or not, it was good. Sweeter than I could have dreamed, and then you got all weird and all you wanted to do was be friends."

Cody was in love with him? But... Cody had helped him have sex with Javier. Had helped him all the way. Cody had made sure he had condoms *and* the makings for breakfast! If Cody really felt that way, what must it have been like to hear about Javier all these months? To know he was having *sex* with Javier? Why, it had nearly driven Harry crazy to think of Cody with that bear, and he hadn't even figured out his feelings yet.

"But you never said anything!"

"Like it would have done any good? So you were willing to be friends, and I grabbed it. It wasn't what I wanted, but it was better than nothing."

Harry shook his head. "Cody, I don't know what to say!" What did you say to all that?

"Harry, you are so damned stupid!" Cody said, jumping to his feet, and this time it was *his* eyes that were filling with tears. "So what else is new? I'm the last one to the finish line," Harry said. "Again." He stood, reached for Cody. "But I finished."

Cody shook his head, took a step back.

"What?" Harry asked.

"Harry, I don't want to be last choice. I'm worth more than that. And if you decide that I'm not what you want either, it will ruin what we have."

"Cody," Harry said and used his new muscles to forcefully pull Cody' into his arms.

Cody struggled, albeit weakly. "Harry.... So stupid...."

"Yeah, I am. So shoot me," Harry said and kissed his friend again. His heart surged in his chest in a way that it hadn't with Javier. In a way he'd never really felt before.

"No!" Cody shouted and pushed back again, despite Harry's new strength. Cody's own strength impressed Harry again. "Not like this. Harry, this isn't what *I* want! I wanted you the way you were!"

"There's nothing I can do about that," said Harry, stung to the marrow. "This is the way I am now."

"Harry, I've never liked musclemen. I like *bears*. I like my men *real*."

Harry felt a tear run down his face. "I'm sorry, Cody. I *am* stupid. But this is the way it is now. What if I was scarred up in a car accident or something?"

Cody looked down, looked away, finally looked up into Harry's eyes. "I wouldn't care, Harry."

"I was in an accident," Harry said. "A really stupid one."

Cody sighed and smiled through his own tears. "You sure were." And he let himself be pulled back into Harry's arms.

Harry pulled off Cody's Santa hat, kissed the top of his head, and marveled at how good it felt. Just having Cody in his arms, and a sweet kiss made him feel more power than anything he had with Javier. He kissed Cody's forehead, his wet eyes, his nose, and then his mouth. Cody's mouth opened to his, and their tongues embraced; Harry felt a leap in his soul like he had never felt before.

All the worse when Cody pushed away again. "Stop. I can't...."

"Cody," Harry all but cried.

"I need time," Cody said. "I need time. Give me a day or two, okay? This is so sudden."

Harry really did want to cry. But if Cody had waited for years for him, couldn't he wait a day or two? After all, he'd just finally figured out what he'd been feeling himself. He'd been so blind. Now, in retrospect, it was there, as clear as day. Had he hated himself so much that he couldn't see the good there? Why had he hated himself? That was something he was going to have to figure out if he was going to be the man Cody needed. If they were going to have a chance, he had some things he needed to change.

Harry swallowed, took a breath, and nodded. "Okay," he said. "You can have all the time you need."

"Harry, if you had been in an accident, it might take a day or two, okay? I'm only human."

Harry smiled. "It's okay." And he knew it was. This was sudden. For him as well. "I can wait however long you need." "It's just...."

"You really did like me the way I was."

"Yes, you dumb shit," Cody laughed. "Well, except for that feeling-sorry-for-yourself stuff. *That* was getting old."

Harry chuckled and hugged Cody close again.

"You can still spend the night," Cody said. "If you want... to just sleep."

"I can do that," Harry said. "That would be nice."

They settled on the couch and they watched Charlie Brown's friends make a sorry little tree transform with love and then watched a Grinch's heart grow three times. Then they went to bed, and they held each other close, and they slept.

HARRY awoke the next morning to the sound of something hitting the window, and when the window wasn't where it was supposed to be, he realized two things.

The sound was snow hitting the window (a white Christmas!), and that the window wasn't his.

This was Cody's apartment. He was in Cody's bed.

And it looked like he was in love.

He shifted and saw Cody asleep beside him, felt his heart skip. Yes. Love.

Damn, Harry thought. Cody is beautiful. I was stupid and blind. This morning he felt so good. Better than he had in a very long time. As he looked at the man sleeping beside him, he started to realize just how blessed he was. He had thought he hated his job, but these few days away from his friends and the work he did made him wonder why. The truth was, he did like his job.

Harry looked around the room. Cody's apartment, his own two stories above, while old, were nice. Very comfortable. Most of the building's residents were gay and lesbian. It was like a little shelter from the world. Truth was, it was the best place he'd ever lived.

And his new body? It *was* a rush, that was the truth. But had it brought him any happiness? Not at all. As a matter-of-fact, it had kept him from making love to Cody last night. That was a consequence he'd never expected by having such a "gorgeous" body. And to his shock, he knew in that moment he wished that the last few days had never happened. Sometimes you just didn't know how blessed you were....

Cody stirred, and just that movement made Harry's heart surge in happiness. He reached out and touched Cody's face, leaned in and kissed it. Then he leaned back on his elbows and propped his head up in his upturned palm and...

...found his fingers caught in tight curls.

What in the world?

He checked more carefully, and sure enough, his hair wasn't long and silky, it was tightly curled.

Harry sat up.

"Oh my God," he shouted. Harry looked at his hands. How had he not seen? They were his hands! His *old* hands. His old arms. He looked down and was never so excited to see his gut, and damn, it really wasn't that bad. His chest was hairy again, his pecs the ones he'd seen in the mirror for years.

"Cody! Wake up!"

Cody mumbled and started to roll over. Harry grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back. "Cody! Oh my God! Wake up!"

Slowly Cody's eyes opened and then flew wide. (They were the most beautiful green, and how had he not noticed before?) "Harry!" Cody said, bolting upright in the bed.

Harry smiled. It was true. Cody wouldn't be acting like this if it weren't.

Both sat staring at each other, frozen. It seemed forever for the clock to start again, and when it did, Cody flew into his arms.

Harry had never been happier in his life to be a bear.

"I take it you're happy?" Harry asked.

"Oh, Harry! I can't believe it!" Cody pulled back. "Oh, no!"

"What?" Harry asked, concern welling up in him.

"You aren't.... Your wish.... It went away."

Harry smiled. "It's okay." And it was. It really was. It felt free.

"You're not upset?" Cody asked.

"How can I be if you're so happy?" Harry answered.

Cody kissed him. Hard. A rush swept through Harry as mouths opened to each other, and it made every kiss he'd ever had before seem like kissing his hand, his fingers, and *pretending* they were kisses. They made love then.

It wasn't on the floor inside the door of his apartment, it was in Cody's big soft bed. It wasn't rushed, hurried; it lasted for hours. And Cody had no lover to run home to. This was Cody's home, and Harry was with his lover. Harry wasn't drunk either, and he would remember every detail every kiss, every touch, the exquisiteness of being inside his best friend—for the rest of his life.

And after, as Harry was slipping contentedly off to sleep, Cody suddenly sat up again. "Oh my God!" he gasped.

Roused, Harry sat up. "What is it?"

"He really was Santa!"

Harry grinned and kissed his lover. His lover! "You think?"

"After you left that night, I sat on that man's lap. And when he asked me what I wanted for Christmas, I told him I wanted you."

Harry raised a brow. "He told *me* that he couldn't give people for Christmas."

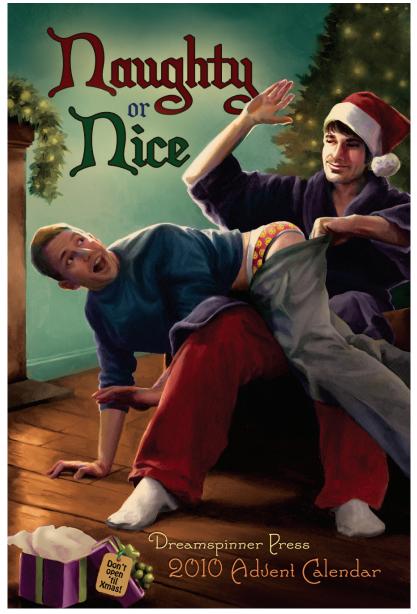
"No! Not like that," Cody said. "Don't you see? He gave me the only thing I wanted for Christmas. My Christmas wish was you. He changed you back. He brought the old you back."

"Well I'll be damned," said Harry. "Do you think?"

"I know," said Cody.

"Maybe he did it for both of us," Harry said.

And as soon as the words left his lips, Harry knew it was true.



Have you been Naughty or Nice? Get the whole package of holiday stories at http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com

B.G. THOMAS lives in Kansas City with his husband of more than a decade and their fabulous little dog. He sees his wonderful daughter just often enough to miss her when she isn't there. He has a romantic soul and is extraordinarily lucky to have many friends.

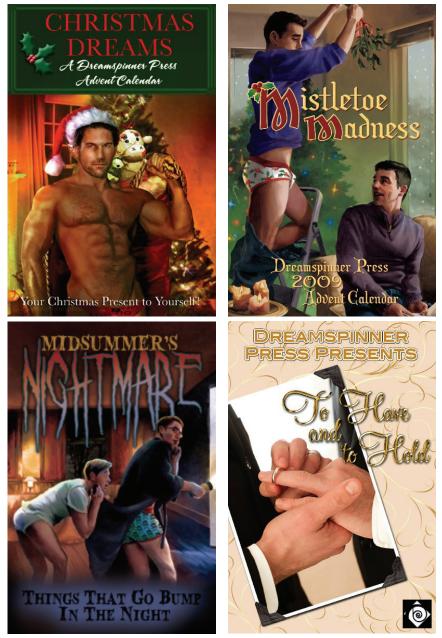
He loves science fiction and fantasy, horror, and romance, and has gone to SF&F conventions his entire adult life. He's been lucky enough to meet many of his favorite writers. He has made up stories since he was kid; it is where he finds his joy. In the nineties, he wrote for gay magazines but stopped because they wanted all porn without plot.

Excited about the growing same-sex romance market, he started writing again. He sent out a story and was thrilled when it was almost immediately accepted.

"Leap, and the net will appear," is his personal philosophy. "It is never too late," he states. "Pursue your dreams. They will come true!"

Visit his web site at http://bgthomas.t83.net or his blog at http://bg-thomas.livejournal.com.

More Daily Dose and Advent Calendar packages



http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com

Christmas Wish ©Copyright B.G. Thomas, 2010

Published by Dreamspinner Press 4760 Preston Road Suite 244-149 Frisco, TX 75034 http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover Art by Catt Ford

This book is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution via any means is illegal and a violation of International Copyright Law, subject to criminal prosecution and upon conviction, fines, and/or imprisonment. This eBook cannot be legally loaned or given to others. No part of this eBook can be shared or reproduced without the express permission of the Publisher. To request permission and all other inquiries, contact Dreamspinner Press at: 4760 Preston Road, Suite 244-149, Frisco, TX 75034 http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/

Released in the United States of America December 2010

eBook Edition eBook ISBN: 978-1-61581-751-1