

Sebastian

by
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Also by Rigby Taylor

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Dancing Bare
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Chapter One

Sebastian tore open the package, gazed in delight at the tiny yellow pouch, studied the strings, worked out which one went between his legs and which around his waist, tucked his penis over his scrotum and placed the flimsy bit of material on top. It was slightly elastic so with judicious pulling and manoeuvring he managed to cover the essentials and tighten the strings to hold it in place before gazing in awe at himself in the full-length mirror.

'Cool', he whispered, sharing a complicit grin with his reflection. The only thing he didn't like were the tufts of black hair sticking out round the edges like a fungal growth, so he shaved his pubes, running the razor over armpits as well. If he was going to be smooth he might as well do it properly. The mirror reflected an image that looked exactly as he'd hoped. Tall, slim and sleek; the pale gold pouch complementing his olive skin.

Sebastian had given up wondering why he hated wearing clothes. He'd always run around naked at home, encouraged by his mother because it saved having dirty clothes to wash and she thought it

was healthy. Until the age of ten or eleven nudity had been an innocent and unconscious pleasure. Since puberty, however, being naked among other people had become a source of confusion.

After a restless night filled with sexy dreams, followed by a never-ending day at school, he cycled to a public swimming pool on the other side of the city to avoid running into kids he knew.

There were few swimmers but the grassed area, stretching about fifty metres towards a diamond-wire fence, was jammed with half naked, mostly overweight bodies sunbathing, picnicking under the trees, or standing around hoping to be admired. Females were scantily clad; males wore bulky shorts from navel to knee. He was going to look like a hummingbird among toads.

The thought buoyed him, but to be on the safe side Sebastian asked the pool guard if it was OK to wear backless togs. The fellow shrugged and pointed out three bare bummed women in thongs, sunbathing while their toddlers played.

‘You couldn’t look worse than those great fat arses,’ he sneered. ‘If anyone complains I’ll tell them to bugger off.’ He looked Sebastian up and down and asked, ‘You on your own?’

‘Yes.’

‘We’ve had a bit of stealing so put your gear behind the door of my office.’ He indicated a blue door to the right of the changing rooms.

‘Thanks! I owe you! It’s a nuisance having to watch stuff all the time.’

‘No worries.’ The guard moved on.

To prevent chaos, those who wanted to swim lengths were only allowed to use the four lanes in the centre, in one direction, from the diving boards to the changing rooms. They then had to get out and walk back to dive or jump in again. Sebastian bravely wandered along the side of the pool, pulses thumping wildly, senses acutely aware of wolf-whistles from a gaggle of girls, stares of incomprehension from teen-aged boys, and the spotlight gaze of dozens of older men and women.

Despite a very audible, ‘Fucking exhibitionist!’ from somewhere near the middle of the sunbathers, he felt more alive than ever before in his life. Proud yet wary. Posture perfect. Determinedly nonchalant. Apparently unaware that he was wearing anything unusual.

With disarming modesty he walked to the end of the diving board, bounced a couple of times then dived neatly in, swimming to the other end and hauling himself out; giving his audience a view of the best buttocks ever to grace the place.

The pool guard was standing in front of the office and beckoned Sebastian over.

‘Have you stuffed your pouch?’ he asked with a grin.’

Sebastian shook his head nervously, staring at his reflection in the mirror-glass window behind the guard. ‘No. Is it rude?’

‘Of course not. There’s nothing more pathetic than a guy in a pouch with nothing to fill it. You’re making me jealous.’

Sebastian took a quick look at the guard’s well-muscled body and grinned. ‘I’m jealous of your physique.’

The guard laughed, flexed his biceps, winked and wandered away.

Against the boundary fence under a gaudy umbrella, a large woman of indeterminate age fixed her eyes on Sebastian as he sauntered to the diving board and did a perfect pike. The next time he walked past she sat up and waved.

“Sebastian! Sebastian!” she screeched, making a hundred heads turn first to her and then to the almost naked young man who suddenly wished he was wearing a wet-suit. He recognised her immediately. Massive Martha. Until this year Sebastian had delivered evening papers for her News agency. She screeched again. She’d been his boss for four years so ignoring her wasn’t an option and he realised he didn’t want to; this was his excuse to get right in among the crowd. Picking his way between dozens of curious men, mothers, children and sunbathing teenagers, stepping carefully over bags and towels, he occasionally looked down and winked at eyes glued to his groin.

Martha, solid and squat in a black bikini that made no attempt to cover everything bikinis were supposed to, was ensconced on an enormous towel, propping her bulk against the wire of the boundary fence. A profusion of solid flesh, straight grey hair hacked off at the level of her earlobes,

aggressive mouth and determined jaw gave no inkling of the heart of gold she insisted lay beating in the depths of her beefy bosom. She turned to the elderly hippie beside her.

‘Lysander, this fine specimen of manhood is Sebastian—he was my best paperboy.’

Lysander stood and held out a limp hand. As skeletal and feeble as Martha was robust, his grey hippie ponytail and ridiculous earring made him seem much older than he was, while sagging faded Speedos exaggerated the scrawniness of thighs and buttocks. A warm voice and smile compensated for the wrinkles, so Sebastian took the proffered hand and waggled it about.

‘Sit!’ Martha ordered, patting the towel between her and Lysander.

Sebastian sat, wondering what would be their reaction if the cord round his waist or between his legs broke and his cods burst forth.

‘Lysander is an anthropologist,’ Martha announced proudly.

‘How nice,’ Sebastian replied, having not the faintest notion what an anthropologist was.

Both adults were staring silently at his pouch.

Obedying an urge to display his charms he leaned back on his elbows.

‘I want to congratulate you,’ Lysander said in a husky voice, his gaze never wavering from the apparently swelling yellow pouch.

Sebastian frowned at the older man. ‘What for?’ He asked sharply, hoping the fellow was only a voyeur and not expecting to touch the display.

‘One of my fields of study is expressions of male sexuality in different cultures. It’s an extension of Margaret Meade’s work in the Pacific Islands.’

Sebastian nodded in incomprehension, relieved that his penis had changed its mind.

‘Did you know that more than half of all Australian men are more or less impotent, and eighty-two percent feel insecure about their bodies and sexuality?’

Sebastian shook his head.

‘This insecurity and inability to achieve an erection translates into anger and depression. Most people don’t realise how this, and female reactions to the problem makes men feel so frustrated and angry it can lead to wife-beating and rape.’

‘Gosh.’ Sebastian wondered what this had to do with the present situation. Was the old bugger referring to the fact that his erection had failed to develop?

‘Did you know that boys do much better in single-sex schools than in co-educational schools because of this sense of inferiority?’ Lysander looked up owlshly.

‘No,’ Sebastian replied, awed that someone had studied such things, still wondering what it had to do with him. ‘I go to a single sex school.’

Ignoring the interruption Lysander ploughed on. ‘The recent origins of male self-image problems appeared in the late nineteen seventies, early eighties, when an upsurge of U.S.A. fundamentalist Protestant Puritanism decreed that men should hide their thighs with Bermuda shorts. After that they had to hide their chests with T-shirts. Then they had to hide the shape of their genitals even when swimming with the dreadful board shorts. Lethal things that fill with water, prevent boys from learning to swim properly, and cause several drownings a year.’ He paused for a much needed breath. Tar-filled lungs are no use to an orator.

‘Fortunately, my generation was not like that,’ he continued loudly, looking round to include the dozen or so people nearby who were staring with undisguised curiosity. ‘We wore brief shorts, went bare-chested all summer, swam in bikinis, and were proud of the bulges in our groins! We are the last emotionally healthy generation of Australian males and I had despaired for the future until I saw you! You are magnificent! You walk confidently, unashamed, proudly exposing the muscles that lifted humans above the other apes.’

He paused as if for applause.

Sebastian was too embarrassed to speak or listen properly and there were titters from the spectators. If Lysander epitomised sexy manhood in middle age, then Sebastian hoped he’d die young!

‘Thanks, I think. But not everyone agrees with you. Someone over there yelled that I was an exhibitionist.’

‘Ridiculous!’ Lysander snorted causing several more heads to turn. ‘An exhibitionist wants to shock. You are the opposite; you celebrate your youth and manhood. Perverts are people who think men’s sexuality should be concealed.’ He turned and glowered at everyone around him. ‘Repression of natural desires is the reason so many men post naked pictures of themselves on the Internet. They daren’t do it in public—they aren’t brave like you. The moral retards who denounce nudity are too stupid to realise it is their censorship that is creating demand for pornography. Humans are pathetic!’ he snapped in disgust, then paused and glared at a repulsively fat young fellow in long orange board-shorts, biting into a hamburger.

‘I sometimes wonder,’ he continued after a prolonged coughing spree, ‘if this modern modesty signals the end of civilisation. Two thousand years ago nudity was normal. Most indigenous peoples were naked if it was warm enough. The Greeks did all sport naked!’ He coughed again while ostentatiously scratching his groin. ‘Which school do you go to?’

Sebastian stared in horror. The old bugger had an erection! ‘What?’ he asked, then remembered the question. ‘Mt Hurmese Boy’s Grammar, why?’ He had to escape these two nutters!

‘Are you a sportsman?’

‘I do Graeco-Roman wrestling.’ Sebastian offered.

‘Naked?’ Lysander demanded.

‘Of course not.’

‘But you’d like to.’

‘No. It’s only me and the teacher. The other guys prefer karate.’

Several people who were listening to Lysander’s nonsense giggled audibly. Sebastian wanted to dissolve. This was not the sort of attention he was seeking!

‘I’m jealous of you,’ Martha interrupted. ‘I’d love to wander round bare chested, but haven’t your courage.’

As she was already exposing at least three times as much flesh as Sebastian, he thought she was being somewhat greedy.

‘Be a dear and fix my cushion,’ she demanded, leaning forward.

Sebastian got to his knees and adjusted the cushion to better to protect her back from the wires. As Martha lay back he slipped a loose strap of her bra over a hook-shaped wire protruding from the fence.

Too polite to just get up and go, Sebastian gazed towards the pool in desperation and saw a young man in white Speedos beside the diving board. ‘I’ve just seen a friend over there I promised to meet. I’ve got to go.’

‘I feel like a swim too’, Martha announced. ‘Pull me up.’ She extended her hand.

Sebastian grabbed it and heaved violently. She careered forward, tumbling onto a young couple immediately in front. Her bra remained on the fence.

Pretending not to notice, Sebastian leapt agilely over recumbent bodies to the diving board and confronted the young man.

‘Please pretend you know me and we’re friends,’ he pleaded. ‘I have to escape those people.’

The young man, who had been wondering how to approach the scantily clad Adonis racing towards him, placed an arm round his shoulders and said, ‘Only if you kiss me.’

‘What! Here?’

‘No, underwater. Come on,’ and he dived in.

Sebastian followed and the kiss was brief, but sufficiently crazy to excite him.

They surfaced, breathless.

‘I’m Rodney.’

‘Sebastian.’

They swam and lay on the warm concrete as far from Martha as possible, where Sebastian’s usual manic desire to communicate soon had Rodney laughing.

‘Well, she said she wanted to go topless,’ he laughed.

He was a little surprised when Rodney asked about his school and showed interest in the athletic sports the following week. Pleasure turned to nervous fear when asked if he had a girlfriend.

‘No,’

‘A boyfriend?’

Sebastian’s heart pumped. The world stood still. His throat constricted. Was Rodney a gay basher? They were everywhere.

‘No.’

‘You’re too good looking to be het, are you gay?’

‘Are you?’

Rodney just laughed and gathered up his things. ‘Look for me at the Sports Day, I’ll come and cheer you on.’

Sebastian stared after him. Mind a blank. What had that been about?

Gay. The word was meaningless to him. Sebastian wasn’t ignorant, he’d read magazines, surfed the Internet for sexy pictures of guys, knew what the word meant, but it didn’t describe him. No single word described him! He was a son and student who loved reading, dancing, singing, acting, sprinting, sunbathing wrestling and swimming. He hated team sports and individual competitions unless he was sure of winning. He was a bit of a loner and didn’t seem to have much in common with most other students. He liked wrestling, but just for the exercise. He enjoyed exams and looking after the few plants in their garden—flowers as well as vegetables. He’d enjoyed woodwork and flower arranging. He’d also made himself a pair of shorts on his mother’s sewing machine.

He didn’t object to girls, just never thought about them. He wasn’t sexually attracted to any of the boys at school. Well, one, but he’d never told him and they’d done nothing in the four years. Sometimes he wanked when thinking about Mr. Achilles in his Lycra wrestling gear. He shook his head to remove the nonsense. Gay didn’t describe him! He was just a normal seventeen year-old who found a few men sexy.

The other kids used gay as an insult, but they also used Boong, Wog, Nig, egghead and four-eyes as insults. So as Sebastian’s neighbours were Indians and he liked them; his best friend was an asocial, super-intelligent eco freak; and the school principal wore glasses to read, he’d always imagined there was no logic in any of the insults. The only girls he saw were usually giggling and whispering on street corners, and none of the girls at the pool today had interested him in the least. Rodney though, he was sexy, and Sebastian wouldn’t mind kissing him again. And the guard. He was sort of tough and rough with broad shoulders and a tattoo on his biceps. He was sexier than Rodney.

Sebastian entered the office feeling somehow deflated. The guard was standing staring out the window and Sebastian realised he must have been looking at him.

‘Is that guy your boyfriend?’

‘No, we’ve just met.’

‘He’s sexy.’

‘Not as sexy as you,’ Sebastian blurted, breaking into a nervous sweat. The guy would probably thump him. One day he’d make a mistake and say something stupid like that to a nutcase with a flick knife, who’d bury it in his chest after hacking off his balls. ‘Just joking,’ he added hastily. ‘Great tat.’ He added, indicating the seahorse tattoo on the guard’s biceps.

‘My name’s Ari.’

‘Sebastian’

‘There’s a butterfly on my bum if you wanna see it?’ The grin was cheeky.

A swarm of butterflies were flapping in Sebastian’s throat and chest.

‘OK.’

Ari kicked the door shut, then instead of just pulling down the top of his togs, he pulled them off, tossed them into the corner and twisted to show the tiny butterfly. Sebastian touched it lightly, grinning as another wank fantasy came true. Within seconds his pouch was off and with lips locked in a gentle kiss that Sebastian hoped would never end, they lay on the cool tiled floor and brought each other to orgasm.

‘Gee, Ari, that was my first time and...and it was just so great I...I...thanks.’

‘My pleasure. Come again.’

Chapter Two

Sebastian was late and Desolé worried. It was stupid but she couldn't help herself. She knew the only way to keep her son was to leave him free to be his own man. She was well aware that possessiveness was poison, unsought advice anathema, and negative criticism counter productive. But when irritated by his increasingly callous insouciance, she found it hard to keep her mouth shut. Recently she'd been feeling as if she was walking among eggs—the slightest false step and disaster would strike and all her plans would come to nought. Sometimes she felt as if she hardly knew her son. She hardly knew herself!

Her parents had heaped hellfire and damnation on her for having a child out of wedlock, so they deserved their timely demise. Brakes failed and they sailed off the motorway exit into a quarry. Too old to be driving at seventy-six, the coroner said. No one checked for sleeping pills as it was around midday. The insurance had been very useful, although not as great a windfall as the rent-free, up-market townhouse with a large and very private courtyard, near the centre of the city. It was just the place to bring up a boy who threw off all his clothes when he came through the door.

Desolé worried about everything. When she wasn't worried she worried that she should be worrying. Sebastian never seemed to worry. As he told her on numerous occasions, he had a sixth sense and always knew exactly how people wanted him to behave, so he was always the person everyone wished their own son would be and there were no problems. Simple.

Desolé had not argued because it was true. Her son was a different person with everyone he met. She knew immediately who he was speaking to on the phone simply by the way he spoke. He could be noisy and tough, soft and gentle, bored and dull, interested and chatty, and everyone imagined this was the real Sebastian. All his teachers in primary school had adored him and said he was popular, and in the four years since he started high school his reports had been consistently excellent and his behaviour exemplary. So why did she have no motherly feelings for him? Why did she sometimes hope he'd fall on his face?

Her few friends with teenage boys said how lucky she was to have such a thoughtful and well-behaved lad; they were at their wits end. Some had even been attacked by their own sons! Sebastian was seventeen and, according to the books, testosterone was raging through his veins turning him into a sex-crazed, aggressive monster. He was physically an adult male. Did he need a male role model apart from Jack? Tough luck if he did. Desolé had no need of a strange male giving her son ideas of premature independence; she had her own plans for him. Jack already had too much of a hold over him.

It had taken only two years for her to realise she should never have had a child. They were like kittens—adorable when young and dependent, profoundly irritating when they started thinking for themselves, and in Sebastian's case that seemed to happen as soon as he was out of nappies. He'd let loose with ear-splitting tantrums whenever asked to wear clothes. Since deciding on her plan for Sebastian's future, Desolé had read every book she could lay her hands on about bringing up children. Her son would have no guilt feelings or embarrassment about sex. She'd read terrible tales about the harm guilt can do. One told of a deeply religious mother who, when she caught her son masturbating, had forced him to put his penis on the table then stabbed a fork through it. Later in life the young man had become a psychopath and murdered seven women.

Following the most enlightened ideas on child rearing Desolé had rewarded 'good' behaviour and ignored bad. All humans desire praise and recognition. There's no point in being a little shit if it's ignored. Much better to be a well-behaved, quiet kid who looks before crossing the road if that gets you a hug and an ice-cream. It was seldom cool in this tropical metropolis, and she saw no harm in his running around the house naked. Even to school he never wore more than a skimpy pair of shorts. Teachers gave up trying to keep a shirt on him; all agreed he was a beautiful boy and no

one complained. As he matured she'd thought he'd become shy, but he didn't, and was ready to tell any visitors who objected that they had the problem, not him. So far no one had objected.

Men had always been a mystery to Desolé, a mystery she had no interest in solving. She'd hated her father and grandfather and all her male teachers. The boys at school had teased and tormented her beyond bearing. She had tried to love women, but they turned out to be just as incomprehensible. After two years of acrimony, Marion had left her when she refused to have an abortion. Didn't want to live with snotty nosed kids—especially a male child! Desolé's anger at this betrayal was only mollified when her ex lover fell from her balcony and snapped her neck. Drunk, according to the coroner.

Sebastian's eleventh birthday had been a triumph, proving her success at raising a child without inhibitions. She'd offered to throw a party but he said he saw the other boys every day at school and didn't want to see them at home as well. In seven years he had never brought a friend home. He said he had friends, but if so they were kept in a separate compartment of his life. Not that he was secretive or sly. Quite the opposite. Sometimes she wished he were a little more reserved.

"Your son is attractive, but maniacally garrulous," one unkind visitor had decreed after Sebastian had bent her ears about tadpoles for half an hour.

Desolé had made a special eleventh birthday cake, and he put on a concert. He was a great little actor. Requiring no costumes, of course, and using only his 'wand', a polished stick in which he had carved symbols, he played every role in a tale about a handsome young prince who battled dragons, wizards, trolls and other weird things, then rescued another young prince and they ruled as joint monarchs. She could still recall the tingle of surprise at how regal her young son looked on his throne. It was indeed magic.

He sang two songs of his own composition, recited a poem, performed a dance he'd made up based on the ballet they'd recently watched on TV, then made her laugh by popping his penis head in and out of his foreskin. She had been delighted with his innocence, especially when he got an erection and demonstrated how he could use it like a catapult, bending it down, placing a little paper ball on it and letting go. The missiles flew several metres.

It embarrassed her to admit it, but her son's penis was the only real one she had seen in her life. Plenty of photographs, of course, but never a real one. Her rapist didn't undress, merely opened his flies and shoved it in. She'd been too shocked to do anything except close her eyes and blank the experience out.

The final act of Sebastian's concert had been a gymnastics display. He stood on his head, did cartwheels and handstands, then lay on his back and held his hips high with his hands, his weight on his shoulders. While straining to maintain the pose he explained that when he did this it felt extra good between his legs. Suddenly he groaned loudly and little spurts of semen sprayed over his chest and onto his face. He collapsed, sat up and looked at his penis in concern.

'Mummy, Willy's got a cold. Look at all the snot!'

Desolé had felt privileged to witness her son's first ejaculation. She had read that Japanese mothers teach their sons to masturbate, but had not dared herself, having no experience. But of course her clever son had worked it out for himself.

After absorbing her lavish congratulations and a detailed explanation of what had happened and why, he asked in innocent curiosity. 'Is that how I was made? A man pushed his Willy into you and squirted?'

'Yes, dear.'

'Who was it?'

'I don't know. It was dark and he hid his face.'

'Did you love him?'

'No. I hated him! It hurt and... ' a determination to be brave dissolved. Desolé burst into tears and, as he had been trained to do, Sebastian consoled her.

It was later while burning the video of Sebastian's performance onto a disc that an idea fluttered into her brain, took root and began to grow.

Desolé dragged her thoughts to the present and Sebastian's lateness. The previous afternoon he had seemed excited when she arrived home. He'd finished his homework, mowed the tiny lawn, taken a shower then helped her prepare supper, chatting constantly. Later, when he was sprawled in his chair in front of television she noticed he had shaved his pubic hair. She said it looked very neat and clean—which it did.

'Do you want to know why?' he asked, lazily stroking his groin.

'Only if you want to tell me.' She knew he was going to; he was in that sort of exasperating mood. She was wary, however. There was something about this careless insouciance that was different; a shift in the power balance. Instead of her setting the pace and itinerary, Sebastian was in control. Normally he would have asked before shaving his armpits and groin. She had to re-establish her authority. Another guest was due soon and a self-willed Sebastian might be a problem.

Sebastian went and fetched a tiny yellow pouch, hung it by its strings on his erection, and dangled it in front of her. 'So I can wear this at the public pool.'

Desolé fingered the soft, shiny fabric and shook her head. 'It'll never fit.'

'Not when I'm like this, but when I'm normal.' He eyed her cheekily. 'Wanna see it on? I'll have to release the pressure on Willy first.'

It had been two years since Sebastian had masturbated in front of her. She never mentioned it in case he thought she wanted him to—which she certainly didn't! She was privy to all his sexual experiments thanks to several tiny video cameras Jack had cleverly concealed in her son's bedroom four years previously. Sebastian was obviously trying to provoke her, and she didn't appreciate it! At least he hadn't become inhibited, that would really put a spanner in the works. But now wasn't the time to make a fuss so she squeezed a tight smile and managed not to yawn while he stroked, fondled and caressed himself until a large gob of cum shot over his shoulder to land on one of her satin cushions. Hiding her irritation she congratulated him on an impressive display, fetched a damp cloth and tossed it to him to clean the cushion and himself. After a quick wipe, he donned the minuscule pouch and paraded, choosing to ignore his mother's lack of enthusiasm.

Desolé had not the slightest sexual interest in any man, least of all her own son! Her current desire for him to be free of the usual inhibitions sprang from an entirely different set of desires, primarily economic. Since the video of Sebastian's eleventh birthday concert, which she had shown to her accountant, photographs and videos of her naked son in an interesting variety of poses and activities had earned her many thousands of dollars, thanks to Jack's contacts with foreign magazines and other people prepared to pay for that sort of thing.

As long as her privacy and financial security was assured, Desolé did not want to know about that side of the arrangement. She was obviously aware that her son was physically attractive, but she found his charm, smooth bronze skin and obvious fitness irritating rather than seductive. She only wished she could have been so self-assured. Men really were different from women. Increasingly, she felt she would have been happier as a man.

To Desolé's relief, Sebastian had never shown an interest in girls. Females were far too clever at ensnaring stupid men—and all heterosexual men became stupid when faced with female wiles. Women never lost sight of the main game—money, power, prestige. The employment agency she managed for Mr Farzdbuk saw a constant flow of silly young things who thought that simply being a woman was enough to demand respect, love, presents, and the fawning admiration of men. None seemed prepared to put themselves out for others—certainly not for their boyfriends or husbands. To listen to their gossip you'd think they despised the young men who took them to parties and bought them presents.

Adult females were no better. As Edith, a long-time acquaintance had remarked, 'If I don't know within five minutes of meeting a woman how often her husband wants sex, how good it is and the size of his cock, then she's a lesbian.'

If the men in their lives knew that their spouses and partners betrayed their personal details to the slightest of female acquaintances, they'd probably suicide. Just this afternoon a very ordinary young lass in the waiting room was regaling a dozen complete strangers with intimate details about her husband's tiny penis that she could hardly feel, his difficulty in gaining an erection, the rash he'd

developed under his testicles and the size of his haemorrhoids that popped when the piano she'd asked him to move fell on top of him. To everyone it was a great joke and proved the inferiority of men.

Desolé hoped Sebastian would be gay; she wouldn't be able to tolerate another female in the family! Once had been enough. She liked the word, Gay. He was usually happy and gay. However, he still never brought anyone home. Went to the pictures and bush walking with a friend on weekends and was always talking about what a great guy his wrestling teacher was, but he wasn't a friend, thank goodness. Friends can be nose and demanding.

The front door slammed. Desolé relaxed. Sebastian was home. A few seconds later he burst into the room, gave Desolé a wave and ran off to shower.

For several months Sebastian had suspected his mother had secrets; that she wasn't honest with him. Increasingly he'd realised there was something very odd about their relationship and the way he'd been brought up. As he'd grown older the similarities between his life and that of other guys his age had shrunk, and differences grown. Emotionally and socially his peers already seemed like old men; riddled with inhibitions about what they could and couldn't do, say, think, believe. Their futures appeared to be inscribed indelibly on both their and their parents' hearts. Get a steady job, be respectable, marry a suitable girl, breed two or three children, work till sixty-five, retire and die in a nursing home.

They seldom questioned anything political or social, wore whatever was in fashion, got drunk on weekends, and thought it was sissy to enjoy reading, singing, dancing, talking and chatting. Cars, football, cricket and rating the sexiness of girls walking past, were the topics of conversation. They told their parents nothing—for there was nothing to tell. Sebastian told Desolé everything because in the telling he sorted out his ideas, values and hopes, and her reactions gave him an insight into her mind—a mind he was beginning to suspect was not as he had been led to believe.

'I met Massive Martha at the pool,' Sebastian began while they were doing the dishes, 'and...'

He was a great storyteller and they laughed at Martha's debut as a topless bather. Desolé hid her irritation at his meeting a young man who was going to watch Sebastian run at the School Athletic Sports. He hadn't even told her it was on, or that he was likely to win the hundred metres! Her brain drifted off while Sebastian regaled her with a deliberately unnecessarily detailed account of his dalliance with the handsome pool-guard.

'Goodness,' Desolé smiled tightly. 'How nice.'

She blew her nose then burst into tears. 'I'm happy, Sebastian. Really, darling. So happy for you. I just hope you know what you're doing... sex with strangers can be dangerous. I know you can tell a person's character in the first nanosecond, whatever that is, I just want you to live a few years longer, that's all.'

Sebastian looked at his mother. She was good, he gave her that. The tears looked real. She wanted him to live longer to look after her, that's what it was all about. Well, she'd brought him up to be independent, and independent he would be.

'By the way, darling,' Desolé sniffed while patting her eyes, 'Mr Farzdbuk rang to see if we'd take another guest next Friday. I said if he was as pleasant as the others, there was no problem. He assured me he was. Are you fine with that?'

'Sure, why not?' Sebastian shrugged as if it was of no consequence. This was another thing that had been bugging him lately. All those young homeless guys his mother's boss dumped on them for a few days or a week. Apparently people were streaming up from the South to laze on tropical beaches, but when their unemployment cheques stopped they were abused, assaulted, and even abducted. Mr Farzdbuk was a benefactor. If he heard of such a case he'd rescue him, have him repaired and checked for bugs and diseases, bring him to Desolé's to recover his sanity and looks, then when he was presentable and stopped bursting into tears every five minutes, he'd find work for him.

Sebastian did not like Mr Farzdbuk. He was overweight, had too many chins, smiled too much, had clammy hands and, despite a drenching of cologne, smelled sour. The guest's were always

potentially good-looking young men about the same age as Sebastian. Desolé was well paid for her trouble and the visitors assisted with house cleaning and cooking, which pleased Desolé who hated housework. Complaints about wearing no clothes soon stopped when they were told they were free to go back on the streets.

Desolé's house was large but had only two bedrooms, one at either end. Sebastian's was huge with a desk and armchairs, an en-suite bathroom and dressing room. French doors opened onto the patio and garden, and a gigantic four-poster bed, the sort usually seen in raunchy, romantic French period-films, dominated one end.

The weekend before the first guest had arrived, Desolé prepared the way by arranging for fifteen year-old Sebastian to meet her accountant, Jack, a youthful looking thirty-one year old who could easily pass for Sebastian's brother. Slightly less than average height, Jack was tough with a muscular, sun dried body, and thinning hair. Fighting had donated a broken nose and prominent ears; features that added interest to an otherwise plain countenance. A beguiling smile assisted in the manipulation of others, but Desolé worried Sebastian would see through his superficial charm and refuse to cooperate.

Having been told to expect Jack to be there when he arrived home from school, Sebastian had peered through the French doors at a man sunbathing by the pool. He was used to being the only naked person in the house and felt irritated. He studied the fellow, unable to decide if he was angry or interested. He still hadn't decided when he wandered out and introduced himself.

Jack stood and Sebastian was pleased to see he was a few centimetres taller than his visitor, who appeared shy and diffident. Jack's arms, chest, groin and legs were sprinkled with short brown hairs. Not like an animal, though. Muscular definition was clear. The effect was sexy and Sebastian wondered what it would feel like to stroke him.

Normally, Sebastian's knack of putting people at ease meant that within a few minutes whoever was basking in his attention imagined he was the friend they'd been searching for all their lives. For Sebastian, though, it was but a game, a game that wasn't working this time. Jack appeared impervious to Sebastian's chatter and charms, remaining politely impassive. In a last ditch effort to make the muscled runt take a shine to him, Sebastian asked if, seeing he was an accountant, he would help him with his maths homework.

Jack shrugged pleasantly and trailed the young man to the bedroom, gazed vaguely around and asked if the bed was as comfortable as it looked. Sebastian told him to try it. Jack neatly folded the cover down and sprawled over the sheets.

'There's enough room for several people in this bed.'

'Yeah.'

'You'd never know the other person was there.'

'I would. I like to sleep alone.'

'So you can wank?'

'Yes.'

'It's more fun to share.'

'Wanking?'

'Lying on a bed with someone.'

'Doubt it.'

Jack patted the bed. 'Try it and see.'

Curious, but unwilling to seem like an obedient puppy, Sebastian shook his head.

'Frightened I'll bite?'

Reluctantly, Sebastian lay on the edge of the bed.

Jack bounced up and down, making Sebastian roll towards the centre. Then Sebastian bounced and they ended up lying side by side laughing, thighs touching. Sebastian suddenly didn't like it any more but Jack felt playful and shoved Sebastian off the bed. Sebastian's wrestling skills apparently surprised Jack who found himself on his stomach, one arm up his back, Sebastian astride, demanding submission.

At that moment, Desolé, who had been watching on the monitors, came in and plonked herself down in an armchair.

‘Oof! It’s great to be home. The traffic was horrendous. You’ve met, I see, that’s excellent. Are you staying to dinner, Jack?’

Jack hesitated.

‘Yeah, stay,’ Sebastian insisted. ‘You haven’t helped me with my maths homework yet.’

During the meal Jack told them about a great spot beside a river a few kilometres inland, and invited Sebastian to go camping with him that weekend. Sebastian failed to hide his pleasure.

A two-man tent was erected, they stripped and sunbathed while Jack talked about the history of the area, then they clambered up a steep rocky escarpment for a view over the plains. The river was full and they swam in a series of deep holes scoured out between giant granite boulders. A whirlpool dragged Sebastian under. He surfaced and grabbed a lungful of air and water, but the rock was too smooth and slippery to grasp. He sank, surfaced again and took another mouthful of water. As if in a dream he could see the bank and Jack standing with his back to him. Down for a third time. No panic, merely resignation. He was going to drown. The realisation was oddly relaxing and he released the air in passive acceptance of his fate.

Suddenly a strong hand grabbed at his hair, hauled him out and held him upside down. The water gurgled from his throat and he coughed violently. Jack laid him on his side and stroked his head.

‘Lucky you’ve long hair, Seb.’

Sebastian was shivering violently from cold and a sudden fear that seemed to clutch at his belly. Jack placed him gently on the sleeping bags in the tent, lay beside him and wrapped them both in a blanket. After several minutes of gentle massage, stroking and comforting words, the shaking stopped and Jack unwrapped himself.

Sebastian was relieved.

Later, Jack taught Sebastian how to spot dangerous currents, apologised for not warning him, and, courage restored, they swam again and enjoyed the rest of the weekend.

On the way home Jack brought the incident up.

‘You OK after your brush with death?’

‘Yeah! Sure. Thanks to you.’

‘We don’t tell Desolé.’

‘No, she’d have kittens.’

‘That’s right...but it’s more important than that. Always bear in mind that it is stupid to tell people about your woes and problems, accidents and fears. Not because you’re ashamed of them, but because it gives them ammunition. Some time in the future—you never know when, someone will want to hurt or damage you and they’ll use the information you carelessly let slip against you. It’s the way of the world. Trust no one, keep your secrets, and you’ll not get hurt.’

Sebastian thought for a bit. ‘Yeah. I can imagine several kids at school who’d love to sneer at me for nearly drowning and having to be rescued. Thanks. Good advice.’

‘Well, here’s some more. The young man who’s coming to stay with you has suffered far more than you. He was kicked out of home, hitched north, was seriously beaten up, then locked, blindfolded in a room for a week. He was on the verge of madness when Mr. Farzdbuk found him.’

‘Why did someone do that?’

‘No idea. The point is, what did I do to calm you after your near drowning?’

Sebastian blushed. ‘You cuddled and stroked and massaged me.’ He blushed and added, ‘We were naked and I got a hard on, but you ignored it as if it was normal and that made me feel it was OK.’

‘Why did I do it?’

‘To make me feel safe?’

‘Right. And believe me, the young man who’s coming to stay with you is going to need a great deal of that sort of attention. Can I trust you to give it to him if you think he needs it? No embarrassment; just make him feel safe?’

‘As long as he’s clean and isn’t covered in sores...’ Sebastian looked at Jack who wasn’t smiling.

‘That’s very wise. Your own health must always come first. But I assure you he isn’t. He’s been in hospital for a week where he was checked for diseases, sanity and drugs. He’s clean and healthy—but emotionally scarred. He needs a week with someone sane like you before starting work.’

‘He’s got a job?’

‘Yes, Farzdbuk’s arranged it.’

‘I don’t like that man.’

‘Well, don’t tell him that. He’s...’

‘What?’

‘Nothing. So, are you going to do the job properly?’

‘Yes! I’ll look after the guy for you.’

‘No. You’ll do it because it is the right thing to do.’

Sebastian blushed again. ‘Yeah. OK. I understand.’

Neil had been a little older than Sebastian, but leaner, taller, less sure of himself. Not bad looking if he stopped that nervous twitch of his nose. Farzdbuk was standing beside him in the entrance hall. Neil was wearing a short towelling dressing gown and looked embarrassed. He had good calves. No sores. Desolé invited Farzdbuk to stay for dinner, but he shook his head brusquely. He turned to go then swung back and held out his hand.

‘The gown belongs to the hospital.’

Reluctantly, Neil removed it and handed it over, then held his hands in front of his groin, embarrassed. An upwelling of sympathy for the young man coursed through Sebastian’s young veins so he put an arm round Neil’s shoulders and led him to the dining room, telling him gently not to be embarrassed, he had a great body and...

Desolé was friendly and relaxed, the meal was tasty, Sebastian chattered constantly about life’s banalities, and Neil relaxed sufficiently to fall asleep in front of the TV. Sebastian woke him gently and led him to the bedroom where a second bed had been placed a metre from Sebastian’s. He tucked Neil in and settled into his own to read. All was peaceful until the lights went out. Neil sat up shrieking. Sebastian turned on his light and raced over. Neil sat, rigid on the edge of the bed. Shivering.

‘Sorry...I...I spent too long in the dark, I...’

Sebastian took the unprotesting guest to his own bed, left the light on and massaged him until he fell asleep. That was the pattern for the first three nights, so the spare bed was removed and Desolé got some fine videos for her collection during the rest of the week.

During the day, Neil spent time with Jack, telling Sebastian it was just boring stuff. Sebastian didn’t probe.

That had been 18 months ago. Sebastian let his thoughts drift over the events of the last few days and his suspicions about his mother and the bizarre set-up grew. He didn’t believe she didn’t know who had raped her, but it was impossible to broach the subject without a screaming tantrum. It remained a festering sore in his heart. He had a right to know who his father was. He had no idea what he would do if faced by the man who had forcibly squirted semen into his mother, but it would be memorable. Kill him? No, too easy. He wasn’t jealous of his school friends for their fathers. They seemed cold, irritable and unfriendly. One guy in his economics class often had red welts on his legs thanks to a length of electricity flex wielded by his loving father. When he thought about it, which was increasingly often, he was pleased to have only one parent to irritate him.

He wondered if he’d see Ari the pool guard again. He’d been so proud to be Sebastian’s first sexual partner. That little white lie had given pleasure to all nine of the guests who had slept in his bed since Neil. It was strange, though, that although they’d all promised to keep in touch, none had. Desolé said it was normal; that was how humans were. Never to be trusted. But this was yet another mystery that rankled. Another thing that needed explanation.

What had happened to those guys?

Chapter Three

The opinions of Massive Martha's scrawny anthropologist tumbled around in Sebastian's head all weekend.

On Monday he waited till lunchtime and approached the Principal as he wandered the grounds checking for smokers. Mr. Noall was a lean and handsome man of sixty-four, not at all impatient for retirement, being one of those rare people who truly love their work. A distracted frown, brusque manner, and clipped speech preserved his sanity by deterring self-important pettiness, while amusing his few true friends. He was a scrupulously impartial observer of both teachers and pupils and, with the invaluable assistance of his wife's daily spying through binoculars from their verandah, knew more about them than they did themselves.

Mr. Noall was unashamedly human and accepted with equanimity both his and other peoples' faults along with any virtues. Wisely, he seldom put anything in writing and thus managed to avoid failures. Success, on the other hand, was a burden he was always prepared to shoulder.

Mt Hurmese Boys Grammar was one of the few socially successful results of the government's support for private schools. Whereas most of these so-called educational establishments had become examination factories and grooming grounds for organised religion, Mt Hurmese was belligerently secular and broad in outlook. Situated in the heart of the most prestigious of the city's garden suburbs, its astronomically high school fees ensured that only the obscenely wealthy had access to its small classes, cutting edge electronics, science, art and everything else. While other schools were touting for business and becoming co-educational to increase profits, the extremely well heeled parents of Mt Hurmese did not think it necessary to share their fortune with less favoured families. One hundred and thirty-two pupils was just about right, the School Committee reckoned.

Sebastian had never questioned how his mother, the manager of a small, downtown employment agency, could afford the fees. On the odd occasion when he'd pondered the question he assumed she had inherited money.

The Principal had taken an instant delight in the shirtless and inquisitive thirteen year-old who, unaccompanied by an adult, had registered for classes on the first day. Normal procedures requiring parental presence had been waived on presentation of a brief note from Desolé claiming sickness, and a cheque for his first two years' instruction. This colossal amount of money would earn multi bucks for the school's general purposes fund, so was gratefully and unquestioningly accepted.

Sebastian recognised a kindred spirit in the Principal and they had become clandestine friends. Clandestine, because Mr. Noall guarded his personal privacy as assiduously as he ferreted out the secrets of others. Not that he had the slightest objection to teachers becoming friends with pupils—quite the reverse. He deplored any tendency of staff and pupils to consider themselves on opposite sides of the educational fence. It was his opinion that teachers, in their search for knowledge and wisdom, have as much to learn from pupils as pupils have from them; so placing themselves on pedestals is counterproductive.

The respect he enjoyed was such that he was trusted to act like a benign dictator, hiring only male teachers who were in agreement with his philosophy.

Mr. Noall watched his protégé approach and bestowed a rare smile.

Sebastian's responding grin enlivened the Principal's day.

'Sir, I was talking to an anthropologist recently who said too much modesty was dangerous for society.'

'His justification?'

Sebastian outlined Lysander's arguments.

Mr. Noall considered them and grunted, 'Makes sense.'

'The school pool's private, so why do we have to wear togs to swim?'

'You don't.'

'We don't?'

'We didn't when I was a student here. It's as your anthropologist acquaintance said, idiotic middle-class morality.' The sneer on the words 'middle-class' was worthy of a great actor—which, like all good teachers, Mr. Noall was. 'Over the years, Principals gave in to parents' increasingly puritanical notions about nudity and sin, so by the time I took the reins it was a fait accompli and everyone wore clothes when swimming. Mad. On the other hand, it will amuse you to know that there's no rule saying students must wear clothes at all at school.'

Sebastian looked his astonishment.

'The parents' association when I first took over was full of SNAGs, sensitive new-age guys who decided to abolish school uniforms. They were not expert law-writers, so the appropriate school rule simply says, and I quote: "From the date of this meeting, clothing for both pupils and teachers is optional". I realised at the time that it didn't say what they intended, but as a dedicated weekend nudist myself, I happily signed it into the School Rule Book.' His self-satisfied smile made Sebastian laugh.

'Brilliant! So I can swim naked this afternoon?'

'If you want.'

'And I can go to class nude?'

'Except for a few wet, cool days, you have never worn more than running shorts and sandals in the four years you've graced this establishment. I don't think you even own a proper shirt. Do you really want to plonk your naked bum on seats other boys have been farting into.'

'No thanks! But how about at the sports next week?'

'No, that's a public place on that day, so you have to obey State laws which demand you cover your bits.'

'Pity. But at least I can swim naked. Should I warn Mr. Sprague?'

'Why?' The Principal's smile was sly. 'What time is your swimming class?'

'Last period.'

'Damn, I forgot my togs.' Sebastian was searching through his knapsack in the changing room. 'To hell with it, I'll go naked.'

'You wouldn't dare'

'Wanna bet?' He stripped.

'Fuck! You've shaved your pubes!'

'Like it? The cheeky response got a laugh and no one dared comment further in case someone thought they were queer.

Mr. Sprague stared at the twenty-three young men lined up on the side of the pool and was about to give instructions when he noticed Sebastian.

'Sebastian, where are your togs?'

'Forgot them, Sir.'

'Then you can't swim.'

'But...'

'No buts.'

At that moment the Principal bustled into the pool area, apparently unaware that he'd dropped a folder by the gate.

'Old man Noall's here, Seb,' someone whispered. 'Now you're for it!'

Ignoring the students, the Principal walked briskly up to Mr. Sprague, stopped and rifled irritably through the bundle of papers he was carrying. 'Damnation! Where's that...' He swung round, saw the dropped folder in the gateway, turned to Sebastian and snapped, 'Get that folder and be quick about it!'

Sebastian ran and picked it up, returned at a sprint and handed it to the Principal, who barely nodded before turning back to the swimming teacher.

‘Mr. Noall, Sir!’ one of the students called. ‘Sebastian’s naked.’

Mr. Noall turned, studied the fellow and with testy tongue hissed, ‘Cruikshank, speak when you’re spoken to. And what are those things you’re wearing?’

‘My togs, Sir.’

‘Togs? They’re death traps. Great bags of material that fill with water and would drown you if you fell overboard.’ He gazed around venomously. ‘The only boys I see who are ready for swimming are Charles and Reginald in their Speedos, and Sebastian in his skin. The rest of you look ridiculous and would drown if caught in a rip.’

Silence.

‘You disagree?’

Silence.

‘I’ll prove it. You’ll each swim one length in your baggies, and a second length nude. No cheating by deliberately slowing down on the second lap.’

Shocked mutters and no one moved.

‘You get changed in front of each other for all sports, the pool is private, what’s the matter with you men?’

That was the smart word—men. As ‘men’ they dared.

Mr. Sprague irritably produced another three stopwatches for Sebastian, Charles and Reginald, and, as Mr. Noall predicted, the lap times when swimming naked were markedly superior. Furthermore, what everyone thought but no one admitted, swimming was not only easier but also more fun, and the water felt great flowing past groins and thighs. When the students were told to spend the remaining time swimming lengths because Mr. Noall had to speak to their teacher, no one put on their baggies.

‘What did you want?’ Mr. Sprague sounded truculent as they walked towards the office.

‘I wanted to tell you that you’re a fine teacher, but so bad tempered and unpleasant you’re causing stress to both staff and pupils. Therefore, I think it is time for you to find another school.’

‘You can’t!’

‘I can. Unless...’

‘Unless?’

‘You’re twenty-eight.’ Mr. Noall stated apropos of nothing.

If he was surprised by this change of tack the P.E. teacher didn’t show it. ‘Twenty-six.’

‘Bad temper makes you look older. No wife. No Girl friend...’

Mr. Sprague clamped his mouth shut.

As if unaware of mutiny brewing, the Principal continued blithely. ‘Who’s the best kid out there?’ indicating the pool.

Without hesitation Mr. Sprague snapped, ‘Charles!’

‘Charles is the pool and gymnasium monitor and you spend a great deal of time alone with him during and after school. It is obvious that you like each other. Furthermore, Charles hangs on your every word and gesture. He wears Speedos exactly like yours and cuts his hair the same way.’ Mr. Noall smiled benignly and asked gently, ‘Is your relationship sexual?’

‘No!’ exploded Sprague with such force the swimmers looked up.

‘Why on earth not?’ Mr. Noall asked as if shocked. ‘The lad’s not a minor, and you’re both obviously crazy about each other.’

‘But that would be... Are you telling me I should...?’ Sprague spluttered.

‘Are you stupid as well as unpleasant? It wouldn’t be unusual. I had an affair with my Latin teacher when I was Charles’s age; she was petite and wore six-inch heels. Quite the best thing that had happened to me until then. Set me on the path to happiness.’

‘How do you know these things?’

‘I’ve a third eye.’

‘Why don’t you mind your own business!’

‘It is my business to care for staff, pupils and school, so I need to know everything relevant.’

Charles, worried that his mentor might be in trouble, got out of the pool and hovered indecisively as if ready to come to his hero’s aid. He was a tall fellow, solidly built, swimmers shoulders, close-cropped light blond hair, blue eyes and a determined mouth. Not handsome, but then neither was Sprague. Youth and fitness were their strengths.

‘So here’s my ultimatum,’ the Principal continued calmly. ‘Take Charles to bed and do whatever makes you both happy. If after a few days of this you change from a bad tempered oaf I want to get rid of, to a pleasant young teacher, then you can stay. However, as you obviously realise, the experiment demands absolute discretion. As far as I know I’m the only one who has divined your relationship, and while Charles is a pupil it must remain a secure secret. Agreed?’

Mr. Sprague remained speechless so the Principal beckoned Charles.

‘Charles, how much do you like Mr. Sprague?’

Charles’ eyes grew round and moist as he gazed in abject fear at the Principal. With his retrousse nose he looked like a sentimental pig.

‘Very much, I think,’ Mr. Noall said with a gentle smile.

‘Yes, Sir,’ the lad whispered.

‘Well, he has just confessed that he feels exactly the same about you, so after the lesson I want you to wait for Mr. Sprague in his office and he will explain the situation. What he has to say is very personal so I hope you will not be shy?’

‘No Sir.’

‘Good lad.’

The following afternoon, buoyed by the knowledge that, technically, clothes at Mt Hurmese Grammar were optional, Sebastian decided to broach the subject with Mr. Achilles, his wrestling teacher.

When karate classes had taken over the gymnasium and with it all the other wrestling hopefuls, Achilles and his sole remaining pupil had cleared a hundred and twenty years of junk from a surprisingly large room under the main stairs, cleaned the drain of the small washbasin, placed a couple of rubber mats in the centre, put a Yale lock on the door and created a private and perfect space to wrestle—as long as they remembered where the stairs were and didn’t bang their heads.

‘Mr. Achilles, we’re doing Graeco-Roman wrestling, right?’

‘Sort of.’

‘They wrestled naked.’

‘They also punched, kicked, grabbed hold of their opponents balls, gouged eyes and tried to kill each other.’

‘Did they?’

‘What?’

‘Kill each other?’

‘Sometimes. Mainly during intercity games’.

‘But...with the boys and young men in the Gymnasium it wasn’t like that?’

‘No.’

‘And they were naked.’

‘All sports were done in the nude.’

‘Then so should we.’

‘OK.’

‘You agree?’ Sebastian’s surprise showed.

‘Your swimming pool escapade is the staffroom gossip topic of the week. Mr. Noall clearly supports you, so why shouldn’t I? But first I’d like to know why you like to bare all. You cycle to school in nothing but shorts and sandals, and that’s what you wear all day, every day. I’ve never seen you wear a shirt or long trousers. You now swim naked in the school pool, even at the

lunchtime free for all today. And a young man who sounds very much like you was swimming at the public pool on the other side of town wearing nothing but a tiny yellow pouch.'

'Who saw me?' Sebastian demanded.

'My cousin is a pool guard there.'

'With a seahorse tattooed on his shoulder and a butterfly on his bum?'

'The seahorse, yes. I've no idea what he's got on his buttock. How do you know?'

Sebastian just grinned and changed the subject. 'You wonder why I like being naked. It feels good.'

Not to be deterred, Achilles persisted. 'What did you and Ari do?'

'Why?'

'He has a wife.'

'That's his problem. As for being naked,' Sebastian continued determined to get off this potentially hazardous topic, 'I think I also want to test people.'

'Test them?'

'Yeah. People seem to like me, but will they also like me if I'm doing something most people don't do? Something that is considered weird or rude, like running around naked.'

'So you want people to like you?'

'Not really. After all, I don't like many people so why should they like me? It's just fun doing things to make them like me and then seeing how far I can go before they drop me.'

'Has anyone ever dropped you?'

'No, and that's odd don't you reckon?'

'Not really, it's just that they don't see you as competition—you're too...different.'

'As in strange, ugly, deformed, abnormal?'

'As far as looks go you could never be called handsome with that large hooked nose and hooded eyes, one slightly lower than the other. On the plus side you've a strong jaw and an amused mouth. Good thick hair. Slippery eyes.'

'Slippery? What's that supposed to mean?'

'It means you're impossible to pin down. For example at the moment I can't tell if you're serious or having me on. Most people's eyes give them away but you keep people guessing. I think that's part of your charm.'

'So I'm charming?'

'Only in the sense of casting a spell. It has something to do with your energy and enthusiasm; the way you involve people when talking to them...I don't know. Your individual bits are nothing to write home about, but the sum of the parts is a winner. I've watched teachers and kids talking to you. They don't really listen, they just watch you and smile as if mesmerised. And if you haven't put a spell over Mr. Noall then my names not Conias Achilles.'

'We're friends.'

'Sure; a seventeen year old pupil and a sixty-four year old Principal who let's him do whatever he wants.'

'Having demolished my face, how about the body?'

'You'd never win a bodybuilder competition but you're lean and firm with a permanently tanned satiny skin. You're obviously fit and strong. Good shoulders and slim hips. Excellent legs, tight bum and gigantic balls.'

'You've noticed?'

'It looked as if you were wearing water wings between your legs in the pool at lunchtime.'

'Does that mean you like me?'

'Do you care?'

'Yes.'

'I like you enough to keep wrestling.'

'Would you still like me if you knew I got a sexual thrill thinking about wearing my yellow thing in public, swimming naked at school, and wrestling naked with you?'

‘I’d assumed that would be the case. After all, the only things you don’t normally expose are your genitals, so it must be a thrill to expose them.’

‘It’s only thinking and planning that’s sexy. While I’m doing something it just feels completely normal. Not sexy at all. I wasn’t thinking of having sex with you, by the way, just wrestling.’

Achilles was silent and Sebastian wondered if he was disappointed at not being considered a potential sex partner. Too bad. If he wanted sex then he had to be a bit more like his cousin.

There was, of course, much more to Sebastian’s behaviour than he was prepared to divulge, or even realised himself. Apart from school he had led a solitary, lonely life, the only visitors to their house being adult strangers who usually took no interest in him. To compensate for real friends he had devoured books, starting with the Grimm Brothers and advancing swiftly through junior adventure to strong adult stuff, especially quality crime fiction.

Recently, his life had been enhanced by the wondrous manic violence and cutting social commentary of Christopher Brookmyre’s books, and of course the internet where he swapped ideas and dreams with hundreds of people on forums.

When he was twelve he’d argued with a teacher about meaning and purpose in life, so the well-intentioned fellow lent him a book on Western Philosophy that he read with increasing dismay. All the purportedly wise men based their arguments on the premise that humans are perfectible, ignoring our evolutionary animal instincts, and accepted without question the existence of a supernatural perfect being. The precocious young lad had already rejected both assertions as silly after discussions with his mother and a few older men who took the trouble to talk with him.

Good fiction writers, on the other hand, reveal the true character of humans, complete with their avarice, fear, cruelty and lack of empathy for their fellow humans when things are going badly. Fictional heroes, despite having been born with the same instincts and faults as everyone else, usually manage to lift themselves above the common herd and be brave, decent, honest, just and merciful.

An astute observer of other humans, Sebastian had become increasingly contemptuous of the difference between the behaviour of most people he met, and the fictional characters he admired. Where were honesty, strength, endurance, generosity, and gentleness? Who bothered to take care of their bodies? Why were most of the people he met overweight, unfit, fearful of difference, terrified of doing anything unusual or saying what they thought? They didn’t even dare to stick up for themselves, preferring to sacrifice their individuality to be accepted by a group.

While despising their submission to fear, because fear is the killer of joy, he understood that caution and respect for danger is essential, because foolhardy daring results in disaster. Inevitably, he had developed a healthy scorn for those who believed in omnipotent heroes, invisible gods and all other such fictions.

‘Do you often have sex with strangers like Ari?’ Achilles demanded brusquely, interrupting Sebastian’s reverie.

He dragged his thoughts back to the present. ‘Sorry, Sir, what was that?’

Achilles repeated the question.

Sebastian’s grin was cheeky. ‘Only if they’re sexy—or it’s my duty.’

‘Duty! When has it ever been your duty to have sex with strangers?’

Calmly Sebastian outlined the arrangement he and his mother had with Mr. Farzdbuk. ‘So you see, it’s a form of therapy for them and they’re all nice guys so it’s no penance.’

The silence became oppressive so Sebastian continued.

‘Jack, the bloke who brings them, explained it like this. For the first two or three hundred thousand years humans lived in small family tribes. The men would sometimes be away for days or weeks and would sleep with each other. Once you’ve been fucked by or have fucked your friends, you knew they found you worthy and you were bonded. For the women it was the same. Today, it’s been declared wrong for men to bond like that so they’re going off the rails. These guys who come to us have lost all sense of self worth, so by enjoying intimacy with another man their self-respect is restored to the primeval state and they can move on. One should never rape though! That’s deeply wounding, whereas consensual sex is healing.’

‘What about you?’

‘It’s a real ego trip to know that a strong, healthy person likes you enough to let you kiss, cuddle and so on.’

‘What about disease?’

‘Mr. Farzdbuk has a private hospital and I get checked every month, and so do the guys who stay. His doctor says I’m the healthiest person he’s ever examined. So you’ve no worries on that score. How about you and your girlfriend? Both infection free? I guess I ought to know before we wrestle naked, just in case.’

Achilles sat back in astonishment. Instead of the student being on the back foot after his confession, it was the twenty-seven year-old teacher who felt like an incompetent old fuddy duddy. The lad was brilliant!

‘She’s my fiancé, not girlfriend, and I’ve no idea. I simply assumed she was clean. As far as I know she doesn’t sleep around.’

‘Do you?’

‘Not since I gave her a ring six months ago.’

‘Did she give you one?’

‘No.’ Achilles wondered why he suddenly felt cheated.

It was Sebastian’s turn to leave a weighty silence that went on so long Achilles felt obliged to break it.

‘Why have you been so honest?’

Sebastian grinned. ‘Perhaps I’m trying to shock you to see if you still like me.’

‘I think it would be impossible to dislike you. Do you wear clothes at home?’

‘Never. They’re constricting. Mum also prefers it. She’s only nice to me when I’m naked. Even then she isn’t really nice. I’m pretty sure she hates me.’ He stopped in surprise. Why had he said that? But it was true, he realised.

‘I’m sure she doesn’t,’ Mr. Achilles said quietly.

‘She used to like me, I think. But things changed after I started wanking. She said it was perfectly normal, but somehow the way she behaved with me after that was different.’

‘Disapproving?’

‘No! Not at all. Quite the opposite. She was always encouraging me to do it. Told me it was the best way to grow strong and healthy and I should do it as often as possible in bed before sleeping. Once I managed seven times, and when I told her she gave me a hundred dollars to do with as I liked. And sometimes when we’re going to have special visitors she makes me practise my dance routines and perform for them.’

‘Naked?’

‘Of course. It’s not really dance—it’s more like gymnastics to music. I have this final sequence when I raise my arms high then bend backwards till my fingers touch the floor, I’m very flexible, then I strain every muscle, especially my abs. This causes an erection, and after a minute or so I ejaculate. I’ve practiced in the mirror and can make it spurt straight up like a fountain, that way it doesn’t stain the carpet.’ Sebastian turned to his teacher, ‘Are you shocked yet?’

‘Not yet. I guess the audiences like it?’

‘Yeah. They keep asking me to perform at their places, but Mum says I should wait till I leave school. But they make videos and pay me for it—a hundred bucks each.’

‘You mother is OK with that?’

‘It was her idea.’

‘And you? How do you feel about this? Used? Abused? Victimised?’

Sebastian laughed aloud. ‘That’s what kids who are forced to do these things feel! I love the attention. I love the fact that the fat creeps in the audience wouldn’t dare do it, and even if they did they’d look revolting because their bodies are crap. I get a solid kick out of it and feel seriously superior to cretins who have to watch others jerk off to get their thrills.’

Mr. Achilles was silent, wondering if he was also an inferior cretin, because the thought of watching Sebastian dance was most appealing.

Sebastian studied him for several long seconds until his teacher began to feel uncomfortable.

‘Do you still like me?’

‘Yes.’

‘I like you too, that’s why I’ve told you things I’ve never told anyone before. Don’t tell anyone.’

‘I won’t.’

‘Let’s wrestle then!’

They stripped, tossing their clothes into a corner as if they’d never need them again.

Conias Achilles was slightly shorter than Sebastian with heavily muscled shoulders and arms.

His face, however, was an astonishing contrast; deeply tanned and delicately beautiful rather than handsome, large dark eyes and heavy black eyebrows framed by bristle cut hair that caught the light like flecks of dark gold. A generous mouth and lips that curled up at the corners suggesting a smile, were enhanced by a medium sized nose with a bump in the middle where he’d broken it as a youth. Designer stubble decorated his jaw. A bikini line was scarcely visible against tanned skin. Nestled between massive thighs, his genitals looked deceptively normal. To the rear, a lean strong bum.

He stared at Sebastian, wondering if it was such a good idea. The young man seemed wholesome and decent, but just as his smooth slimness hid powerful muscles, so his innocent-seeming eyes concealed a character as calculating and shrewd as any he’d met. He shrugged off his doubts.

‘You’ve shaved your pubic hair! Now I can’t get you by the short and curls,’ Achilles attempt at light-hearted insouciance failed miserably. He was very nervous and stared at Sebastian thoughtfully.

‘If you tell anyone about this I will kill you. Understood?’ Pale grey eyes glinted coldly.

‘Because no one would believe it wasn’t my idea and that I wasn’t molesting you. I know you’re seventeen and legal and more experienced than me in many ways, but as your teacher I’d lose everything and probably serve a jail term for corrupting you. Got it?’

Sebastian didn’t doubt the threat was genuine; a chill ran through him. Naked, Mr. Achilles was a totally different person from the genial maths teacher and Lycra-clad wrestling instructor. Removal of the wrestling gear that had until then covered his thighs and most of his abdomen, revealed a chest covered in tight brown curls that continued in a line down to the thick pubic thatch that ran between his legs and spread over his bum, which was as hairy as his thighs. There was something feral; almost savage that reminded Sebastian of a large wild cat he and Reginald had once watched tearing apart a struggling bandicoot in the forest. When they’d tried to intervene, the cat had snarled and bared its teeth with such venom they’d retreated in fear.

Achilles’ smile lacked humour and Sebastian wondered why he’d never noticed how sharp his teeth were.

‘I’ll not tell a soul, and don’t you tell about me either.’

‘Of course not.’ Achilles tousled Sebastian’s hair and the atmosphere returned to normal. ‘The rules remain the same. No punching or kicking or breaking fingers. Everything above the neck is untouchable and so are the balls. Too sensitive and fragile and yours are enormous! Like brown duck eggs.’

‘Do ducks lay brown eggs?’

‘No idea. Cocks, on the other hand, don’t lay eggs, but are reasonably protected between the thighs and usually shrink when you’re fighting seriously. If you let your opponent grab it, tough luck. OK, let’s go.’

Achilles prediction proved accurate, but Sebastian still felt incredibly vulnerable. Consequently, although his defensive moves improved, attack suffered and his teacher floored him five times in succession.

Drenched in sweat they sprawled over their towels on the mats to recover.

‘You’re nervous,’ Achilles observed.

‘Yes.’

‘Of me?’

‘You’re...different today.’

‘How?’

‘You seem dangerous.’

‘Wishing you had your gear on?’

‘No way! I never want to wear it again! This is real, just as swimming naked is real.’ He grinned. ‘I just have to trust you’re not going to bash my balls, and not worry I’m going to hurt yours. And you, Sir? Do you prefer wearing gear?’

‘No. By the way, my name’s Conias, you can call me Con, and stop being so cautious. Attack me with all you’ve got. I’m not breakable.’

‘Have you done this before?’

‘You’re the first kid who’s brought out the ancient Greek in me.’

‘Adult?’

‘Too many questions. Back to work and do your worst.’

‘Right on, Con.’

The instant the time clock rang Sebastian dropped, wrapped his arms round Con’s knees and heaved up in an attempt to throw him onto his back. Con twisted in the air, landing on all fours. Sebastian fell onto his opponent’s back, thighs squeezing his neck, arms wrapped round his loins. Con grabbed Sebastian’s ankles and was about to drag them under and flip them both over when Sebastian grabbed a fist full of pubic hair and heaved sideways with all his strength. Con grunted in surprise and was forced to change position enough for Sebastian to finish the move and claim his first point.

‘That does it!’ Tonight I’m shaving them off. Can’t have you doing that again.’

Sebastian threw himself into the next three bouts like a madman, and managed a win, a draw and an honourable loss.

Lying side by side they relaxed, breathing raggedly and counting their bruises, as it had been a particularly rough afternoon. Sebastian could feel his muscles complaining and his bum tingled where Con had pulled his cheeks apart to prevent being floored ignominiously.

Con turned to Sebastian with a grin. ‘That’s the sort of fighting I like! Rough, tough and rude.’

They splashed each other with water from the washbasin to rinse off the sweat, dressed, shook hands and parted; both uncommonly pleased with their exercise.

Sebastian arrived home feeling oddly excited. ‘Next time he’d...’ He smiled to himself at the thought and wondered if Conias Achilles was also planning their next bout.

Chapter Four

Thursday arrived hot and still, a good omen for Sebastian who ran best in the heat. He was looking forward to winning both the two hundred and one hundred metre sprints. Not that there was any serious competition with only twenty senior students in the entire school. Pleasurable anticipation was spoiled, however, when at breakfast his mother chirped, ‘I’ve decided to come and cheer you on at the athletic sports this afternoon.’

Her son looked up in alarm. ‘It isn’t necessary for you to come, Mum, it’s just a school sports meeting, no big deal and...’ He was furious. How dare his mother go to the Sports Day! She’d never gone to his high school before for anything — not even to enrol him! Why now? He had to find a way to stop her.

‘That’s sweet of you, dear, but I’ve recently realised I’ve been a poor mother as far as your schooling goes. I’ve never even been to a parent meeting in the four and a half years you’ve been there. It’s time for me to be less selfish. I was speaking to Mrs Blackthorn, you know, Reginald’s mother...’

Of course he did! Reginald was his best, indeed his only friend. The tall, big-boned, sandy haired, hazel-eyed eco freak whose karate chop could floor an ox. A gentle giant who didn’t fit the

macho mould, preferring to use a sharp tongue to ward off aggression. Of course there was always one dork who misread the signs. Like the previous Friday when a hefty kid had flapped a limp wrist and yelled across the quadrangle, 'Hey Reg, rumour has it you're queer, are you?'

'Why?' Reginald had asked innocently, irritated at being called Reg. 'Do you fancy me?'

Everyone laughed, making the idiot feel foolish enough to prove his manhood. Arms flailing he charged at Reginald yelling, 'Fucking pansy!'

Without any apparent effort, Reginald deflected a punch, leg tripped the guy and cuffed him across the back of the head as he went down. It looked like the sort of harmless slap a mildly irritated parent might give a child, but the side of the hand was hard and travelling at speed. The would-be hero staggered, fell, sat up, looked stupid, then burst into tears; unseen by Reginald who was walking away chatting to Sebastian as if he'd forgotten the incident already.

Reginald's greatest claim to fame among his sexually-guilt-ridden peers was his encyclopaedic knowledge about sex. Many a young man now slept easily because of Reginald's confident assertion that masturbation is essential to masculine health and sanity because the increased flow of blood during erections keeps the penis healthy, and frequent orgasms make a man contented. Therefore it should be practised as often as possible.

Sebastian admired his friend's relaxed, self-confident bravery and wished he could be as easy about himself; but he didn't dare. His apparent confidence was built on very shaky foundations.

'Anyway,' Desolé continued, 'Reginald told his mother that you're the best runner in the school and would certainly win the hundred yards.'

'Metres.'

'Metres what, dear?'

It's the hundred metres, not yards. It's over forty years since we went metric, Mum!' Anyway, I'm not a certainty to win and I'll feel stupid if you're watching when I lose.'

'Don't be silly; I'd still be proud of you if you came last. Wave when you see me and make sure I don't miss your race.'

Sebastian ground his teeth in impotent fury. In his first week at high school other kids had seen him in the town with his mother and asked who she was. He'd told them she was his grandmother who liked to pretend she was his mother. The other day he'd overheard a couple of classmates laughing about his crazy old skinny grandma. Eleven years of embarrassment was enough. Could a child divorce his mother for being embarrassingly old and not telling him who his father was? He couldn't even go north and live with the Uncle he'd never met because he was gaga in a nursing home. Perhaps he could put his mother in a Home? Seventy was as good as dead and she was always sickening for something because she wouldn't eat.

Angrily he shouldered his knapsack and jogged to school.

Rodney was looking forward to the school's Sports Day at his old school, hoping to see the cute guy in the tiny pouch who looked at least twenty, but had confessed to seventeen. Sebastian. That was his name. Perhaps they'd...no, probably not. A quick kiss under the water didn't mean anything. Lots of young guys would do it for a laugh. He hadn't admitted he was gay but he was easy company. Rodney was twenty-three, not that big a difference in ages. Lots of young guys preferred older men. Then he remembered he wasn't into relationships. He also wasn't into deep thinking so tossed the thoughts to the back of his handsome head and faced the mirrors. He was in good shape for seduction. If not Sebastian, then some other not quite so young male would find him desirable. He gazed at his reflection. Lean and mean. No! Lean and not mean.

A recent check up declared him to be in excellent health, although absence of body fat had the doctor suggesting he put on a few extra kilos. Rodney disagreed. His body may have cost him uncountable hours of exercise, a dull diet and sufficient sleep, but muscles as clearly defined as an anatomical drawing, a handsome face and natural grace of movement were a lucrative meal ticket he had no intention of risking.

He turned slowly between the four full-length mirrors arranged so he could see himself from every angle. Dragging long, sensitive fingers over his loins triggered twinges of arousal and he smiled in anticipation. Usually he would devote at least an hour to his lovemaking, but this morning he was in a hurry; Mt Hurmese Grammar, Sebastian and the world were waiting for him that afternoon.

He hadn't been back to the old school in seven years. Would his old Maths teacher still be there? More to the point, would he see Jason Boieluv; jerk-off Jason who'd railroaded him out of school? He put on a CD with a strong sexy beat, let his body movements synchronise with the solid pulse, caressed his small but perfectly formed nipples and attained full arousal. With practiced grace he lowered himself to the carpet, planning poses and moves for that night's performance at a widow woman's fiftieth birthday.

The booking had been made by her son, who had been prepared to pay for total nudity, erotic play, and orgasm. If Rodney could entice the fellow's mother to participate in the shenanigans, then there was an extra fifty bucks. If he fucked her in front of the other guests, there was another hundred. Not for the first time he wondered at the bizarre love-hate relationship so many young men have with their mothers. He had learned to ignore such requests and play it by ear, putting on a show that everyone, especially the mother, would enjoy.

Picturing the coming evening's performance and Sebastian at the pool, increased the pleasure of orgasm and he groaned in relief, relaxing for a minute before showering off sweat, cum and carpet fluff. Making love to his reflections was a daily reward for maintaining his strict dietary and exercise regimen. Unashamedly, he admitted to anyone who asked that he preferred solo sex because another body not only got in the way, but was never up to the high physical standards he demanded of himself. Imperfection was a turnoff. Your body is your instrument, he lectured all who would listen, and a well-tuned instrument is essential to a successful life.

But what did one wear to a High School Athletics afternoon?

Desolé checked her thinning hair, patiently rearranging strands to cover the head evenly. The rinse had turned out more pink than beige and instead of distracting, had drawn attention to the mauve blotches on the scalp. She should have dyed her skin the same colour as her hair! Ah well, a hat would cover it. She plonked on the wide-brimmed straw with daisies clambering around the brim that she'd bought for her sister's wedding. Was it really forty years ago? She sighed in resignation at wrinkles that a thick paste of foundation had failed to fill, and stepped back to view the overall impression.

An impertinent shaft of sunlight set her wondering if showing a cleavage wasn't such a good idea. It wasn't clear which of the vertical folds *was* the cleavage. A swathe of pink chiffon draped over the offending flesh was rather fetching, she thought—not stopping to wonder what it would fetch.

A lifetime of bulimic bouts ensured her figure still looked youthful—as long as it was fully clothed and seen from a distance. Her friends had always admired her courage in choosing clothes, and she thought the apricot skirt and green blouse would cement her reputation. Fortunately, she could still manage six-inch heels, if the ground was firm and flat. She smiled and wished she hadn't. A less subtle reminder to keep her lips together was difficult to imagine. It was too late to get false teeth, her dentist had insisted; they'd never stay in place. So she was stuck with the yellowing, chipped originals.

The High School Grandstand had been built when the student population was seven hundred, so even with about fifty parents occupying the front rows, there was plenty of space for the students to spread out and make a picnic of the afternoon. The seniors were expected to run the event with minimum interference from teachers. Mr. Sprague, as Sports Master, was in overall charge and,

assisted by Charles, wandered around astonishing everyone with his pleasant chatter while ensuring everything went well.

Sebastian, Reginald and Zoltan were the judges. For the field events they traipsed around from high jump to long jump, from shot put to discus, and then it was time for the running races. For these they stood on temporary steps at the finishing line in front of the V.I.P seats.

Sebastian chose to judge third place because he would be standing on the bottom step where he had an unobstructed view of the crowds on the stands, and their view of him was equally unhindered. Reginald, in skin-tight Lycra stood above and behind, while Zoltan took the top step. Charles and Sprague came to stand beside them for a while and Sebastian nudged Reginald when he saw them touch fingers. Reginald said he wasn't jealous; he had someone else lined up as a future lover.

'Sebaaaaaaastian!'

The high-pitched shriek caused the starter to fire his pistol too early and chaos ensued as the boys began running and had to be called back. There was nowhere to hide. Sebastian was trapped at the finishing line in full view of everyone. He gave a short wave and watched as his mother pushed her way to the front and squeezed with the maximum of fuss into a space beside the Principal.

Irritation is too insignificant a word to describe Mr. Noall's reaction to Desolé's intrusion, however, exasperated indignation turned to pity when he learned that the ancient crone was his favourite pupil's mother. Poor Sebastian! How on earth had such a harridan given birth to an intelligent and perfect young gentleman?

Instead of shaking hands and sitting quietly, Desolé grasped the Principal's arm and asked if he recognised her.

'I'm sorry, madam, but I don't recall the pleasure.' He prised off her claws and restrained the urge to wipe his hand.

'I was your secretary for the first month of your appointment as Principal, seventeen years ago.' She smiled winningly, forgetting to keep her lips closed.

Mr. Noall blanched visibly and shrank back in alarm. He remembered now, and dredged up a smile. 'Yes, of course... Destructiva, isn't it?'

The shriek of laughter nearly unmanned him and caused far too many heads to turn. 'Oh you wicked man. It's Desolé.'

'Ah yes,' he muttered. 'Desolé.' What a desolate month that had been for everyone, he thought. If she hadn't left, the entire staff would have gone on strike. She was the reason not one woman since then had gained employment at Mt Hurmese Grammar in any capacity... temporary or permanent.

'I was so sorry to leave you in the lurch after only a month,' she chattered, 'but I was pregnant with Sebastian.'

'We managed to cope,' was the best Mr. Noall could manage. 'Look, the seniors are lining up for the start of their sprints. There's Sebastian.'

There were no side seams in Sebastian's running shorts. There was precious little material either. Two little flaps of flimsy pale blue nylon, one at the front and one at the back, were joined between the legs. This permitted maximum leg extension while covering the minimum of flesh. Everyone agreed he had a beautiful navel. When standing still the view was tantalising. His legs seemed to go all the way up to his armpits. Private, or in Sebastian's case not-so-private, parts were bunched in his new yellow pouch making an attractive bulge at the front, and a centimetre of firm brown cheek escaped below the hem at the rear. When running, the wind lifted the diaphanous material, revealing a pair of perfectly formed gluteus maxima.

As the running track was grass and Sebastian ran in bare feet, his minimalist garb made the other runners in their Lycra or traditional cotton shorts, singlets and running shoes appear somewhat overdressed. Charming modesty combined with the fact that he was obviously completely unaware of how breathtakingly sexy he looked, meant that no one raised the slightest objection. Naturally, he won both his races.

With heavy steps he crossed to his mother.

‘Well done, Sebastian,’ Mr. Noall said with a smile.

‘Oh I’m so proud,’ squawked Desolé, sounding as well as looking like a demented parrot.

Mr. Noall turned to Desolé. ‘It’s been a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Sanspere.’ He stood up to go, then relented, turned back to her and added vaguely. ‘Perhaps you would like to join the staff and parents for afternoon tea?’

Desolé simpered her acceptance and Sebastian raced away to catch Rodney who he’d seen talking to Mr. Boieluv, the Technical Drawing teacher. As he approached it looked as if they were arguing. Curious, he sauntered over.

‘Hi, Rodney.’

Rodney turned and his angry scowl transformed into a knee-melting smile.

‘Hi. Saw your races—nearly as brilliant as your shorts! Where’d you get them? Show me round the school.’ He draped an arm across Sebastian’s shoulders and they sauntered off, leaving Mr. Boieluv to simmer. Sebastian turned back and was shocked at the fury on the teacher’s face.

To his chagrin, Desolé trailed Mr. Noall up to the Staff Room for afternoon tea where, desperate to offload his unwelcome guest, he hailed the Economic Studies teacher.

‘Peteru Viol, meet Desolé Sanspere.’

Mr. Viol, a swarthy, balding, overweight fellow in a tracksuit, kept his hands in his pockets and looked blank.

‘Desolé was the Principal’s secretary when I first arrived, Peteru. You were here then.’

‘Don’t remember,’ the fellow replied insolently, turning away to grab a cream cake as he exited the room.

Mr. Noall shrugged. ‘Young teachers today can be as rude as their pupils.’

‘He’s not young. I remember him clearly,’ Desolé said with quiet venom. ‘He is thirty-eight and in poor physical condition. He arrived on my fifty-fourth birthday. A young graduate of twenty-two; full of himself and arrogant to boot.’

‘Yes. Well, as they say, no one really changes. I’ll have to excuse myself I’m afraid, Mrs. Sanspere, but I’m required to circulate. Perhaps we’ll meet again.’

Finding no one prepared to talk to her, Desolé tottered back to her car, wondering why she’d come and wishing she hadn’t worn such high heels; her bunions were killing her.

Sebastian and Rodney found a quiet spot under a tree and lay on the grass in the shade.

‘How come you know Creepy Jason?’ Sebastian asked.

‘Who?’

‘Mr Boieluv. The way he looks at me sometimes gives me the willies. You looked furious as if you were going to hit him.’

‘He wasn’t always like that. When I was here seven years ago he directed the school play. I was desperate to be in it. After my auditions he said I was too short and looked too young, but he’d give me lessons and then perhaps find me a small part. The lessons were at his place and he reckoned I’d learn to move more naturally if I took off my clothes. I didn’t object. . . I was too keen to get on stage. Then he said an actor had to be prepared to take parts he disliked as well as parts he liked. I said I understood that.

‘When teaching me to stand and walk properly he pushed and stroked me on my bum and thighs, which I didn’t like, but in a funny way it made me proud to have an adult paying me so much attention. I got an erection and tried to hide it but he told me to be proud of it—it proved I was a man. Then he said there was a kissing scene in the play, so he’d act the girl. I refused to kiss him because his breath smelled like rotten horse shit. He got angry, dropped his tweeds and forced me to suck his cock. Everything went cold. I couldn’t think. I. . . I’ve never been so scared in my life.’ His face turned pale at the memory. ‘I still can’t talk about it. Sorry.’

Sebastian didn’t know what to say. He was horrified. ‘Did you get the part?’

‘I had three more lessons and had to do it each time, but then he said I wasn’t good enough. When I protested he threatened that if I told anyone what he’d done he’d deny it and tell everyone I was a crazy queer who’d made it up because I hadn’t got a part in the play.’

A shocked silence.

‘I was a mess. I refused to go to school. My parents are Jehovah’s Witness so I couldn’t tell them or they’d have locked me away, then shamed and blamed me in front of the whole congregation and had them pray for my damned soul. So I ran away to Brisbane for four years. When I finally got the courage to return, they’d gone to a mission in East Africa, thank goodness. I never want to see them again.’ Rodney sat silently as Sebastian digested this.

‘And today you confronted him?’

‘I told him what a vile pig he was. He started to argue. Said he thought I’d enjoyed it and it was me who’d come on to him! I’m such a wimp! I wanted to strangle him but... Thank goodness you came along.’

Sebastian took Rodney’s hand and stroked it, unable to find words of comfort.

‘Speak of the devil! He’s over there with Mr. Trovert. What the hell’s Trovert doing with such a bastard? Lets follow.’ He dragged Rodney to his feet.

‘I liked Mr. Trovert. He let me hide in the library during sport.’ Rodney said listlessly. ‘I can’t believe they’d be friends.’

‘I think they’re going to the swimming pool. Come on.’

The pool gate slammed shut as they crept to the rear of the enclosure, out of sight of anyone passing. The clink of bottles and voices made them curious enough to climb onto the roof of the pump room, which served as part of the wall. Peering over they saw Boieluv and Trovert sitting with their backs to the wall directly below.

‘What a fucking circus,’ Jason Boieluv complained.

‘Yes. You said you wanted to talk to me.’ Mr. Trovert’s voice was impatient. ‘What about?’

‘Just had a run in with an ex-pupil. Reckons I sexually abused him seven years ago and forced him to leave school without any qualifications.’

‘Did you?’

‘No! Well... perhaps... but not intentionally. It was all a misunderstanding. He wanted to be in the school play, but was a bit of a short-arse. Good looking kid though. I offered to give him tuition and if there was a part for a runt he could have it. He came to my place after school. Randy little bastard; the most beautiful kid I’ve ever seen... and sexy with it. And what a flirt! I got a hard on whenever he fluttered his eyelashes at me. Wondering what he’d do I said he should try acting naked. Yes, I know, I’m a fuckwit, but I stupidly thought that’s what he wanted—he certainly didn’t object; dropped his tweeds and pranced around like a priapic young satyr. Had a bloody big cock.’ Mr. Boieluv took a swig of beer, burped then continued.

‘I used the excuse of teaching him how to move to feel him up. He didn’t seem to mind. Kept his hard-on. He was sixteen and I imagined he knew what he was doing. I tried to kiss him. He said my breath stank.’

‘It does. You’re a smoker. You all smell like incinerators. I can’t understand, though, why you thought he knew what he was doing. I sure as hell didn’t when I was sixteen. You were the teacher supposed to take care of him, not seduce him.’

‘Yeah. I was a total idiot. I’ve no idea what got into me. I’ve never done it before or since. I’m not a paedophile. I’m not interested in boys. But some young men are irresistible. I guess testosterone was raging. Then I told him to suck my cock. He didn’t want to, I could see that, but I was too far gone to stop. He came twice more for lessons and the same thing happened, but then I got frightened. If anyone found out what I was doing to a pupil I’d be in prison getting raped. So I told him there wasn’t a part after all. He raced away crying foul and I never saw him again. It’s the truth. He just took off and I’ve felt rotten and terrified for seven years’

‘Terrified? Of what?’

‘You see in the papers guys in their forties and fifties suing teachers who fiddled with them thirty years before! For seven years I’ve broken out in a sweat every time I think about it; imagining

I'm going to get a court summons. I tell you it's ruined my life and it's all my fault. I tricked the poor kid and abused his trust.'

'Did you tell him that?'

'No. I was going to, but then thought if I admitted I'd done it he'd sue me. I'm a fucking wimp.' There was nothing to say, so nothing was said for several minutes.

'I've also had an unwelcome blast from the past today,' Rex Trovert said quietly. 'Did you see that old crone who sat beside the Boss? She was his secretary when I first arrived. Hoity-toity bitch. It was my first teaching post so I tried to make a good impression by offering to drive her home after the first of Noall's long staff meetings. It was raining and she didn't have her car. She invited me in for a thank-you drink, then demanded I screw her!'

'Rather you than me! She looks a hundred now so she must have been ancient then.'

'Fifty-four, she told me.'

'Tell me you're joking.'

'I kid you not! When I refused she threatened to have me fired. Said she'd accuse me of attempted rape and I'd never get another job. I was too innocent to know any different.'

'A bloody dangerous situation. Any man who goes anywhere alone with a woman he doesn't know well, is asking for a lawsuit. They're always believed. So what did you do?'

'I shut my eyes and thought of a Bavarian Gateau. But once wasn't enough. The following week she demanded another. I was on the point of quitting when she disappeared. Suddenly she was gone! I was free and never saw her again—until today. She's got her reward, though. She was a plain Jane then, now she's a really, really ugly old carcass. Luckily, I recognised her and stayed well away. Just looking at her made me feel dirty. Let's go for a swim.'

'No togs.'

'The place is surrounded by two metre high concrete walls, the gate's locked and Sebastian Sanspere's been swimming naked all week at lunchtimes with the boss's approval. Did you see his running gear today? Bet that turned you on.'

'Had a hard-on all afternoon watching him. That body! In the pool he's as lithe as a seal, on the track he's a god.'

'You come at lunchtimes to watch?'

'Of course.'

'He's certainly a great kid.'

'I'd like to lick him all over.'

'Kinky.'

'Bet you do it to your lovely wife.'

'Fee is not a student and not a male. Come on! Get your gear off.'

They stripped. Jason Boieluv boasted a sickly paunch, unhealthy sagging skin, limp buttocks and a tiny penis. Rodney thought he'd never seen anything more revolting. Rex Trovert was in better shape, but if he didn't take care budding love handles would spoil the effect of smooth, naturally dark skin, narrow hips and wide shoulders.

'Jeez, your balls are as big as Sebastian's,' Boieluv laughed. 'Have you seen them? Tennis balls. I'll bet he fills a cup every time he comes.'

'You're incorrigible. Find yourself a lover and forget the students.' Rex slapped Jason on his bum, leaving a red hand print, and dived cleanly into the water.

Sebastian's face was white from shock. 'That means...' he muttered.

'Wait here,' Rodney whispered, lowering himself down the side wall of the filter room into the enclosure, out of sight of the swimmers. He slithered round to the front, grabbed their clothes, tossed them over the wall, and clambered back himself, joining Sebastian who'd already scrambled down. Gathering everything up they raced back to the main building, dumped their plunder behind the door of the Principal's study, then retreated to the almost deserted car park and Rodney's Mercedes Sports.

'Can I come with you?' Sebastian couldn't face going home to his mother. He had to think seriously about what he'd just heard.

‘Where are your bike and clothes?’

‘The bike’s locked and safe enough. This is all I wore today.’

‘You cycled to school and spent the day wearing nothing but those two flimsy flaps of cloth with your bum practically hanging out?’

Sebastian looked confused. ‘Yes? Why not?’

‘What’re you wearing under it?’

Sebastian pulled his shorts down to expose his yellow pouch.

‘Very nice. Aren’t you worried about getting raped?’

‘I ride too fast. Get some good wolf whistles though.’

‘I’ll bet. OK, get in.’

At that moment, Reginald ran up.

‘Rodney! What’re you doing here?’

‘Visiting my old school.’

Reginald stared at Sebastian in dismay. ‘Are you two...?’

‘No, Reginald, we aren’t.’ Rodney gave a sudden laugh. ‘Don’t tell me! Sebastian is the guy you’re up to the eyeballs in love with!’

Reginald blushed furiously.

Sebastian seemed not to have heard. He just stood staring into space, face creased into a frown.

‘Well, you’ve good taste and we’d love to stay and chat, but we’re going back to my place.’

‘Can I come with you?’

Reginald looked so sad Rodney let him fold himself into the space behind the two bucket seats. Like an automaton, Sebastian lowered himself into the passenger seat and ten minutes later they pulled into the basement garage of a modern block of flats. Upstairs, Sebastian sat in silence in an armchair while Rodney took Reginald into the kitchen and told him what they’d just done while making coffee. Their voices and laughter passed over Sebastian as he pondered the revelation that Rex Trovert was his father. It explained his olive skin, almost black hair and brown eyes, but what else did it mean? He felt happy and nervous and sick. At least his father liked him. And he’d always enjoyed his father’s classes. And he ran the library brilliantly.

The other two returned with coffee, and drank and chattered.

Sebastian stared across the city to the sea and wondered what to do.

Chapter Five

Back at the school swimming pool, Jason Boieluv and Rex Trovert were impatiently waiting for dusk to fall. When the last sounds of activity had died they ventured forth and, keeping to the fence-line, made their way to the Principal’s house, an old Queenslander on high stumps, accessed through a gate near the tennis courts.

‘Jason and Rex, isn’t it?’ welcomed Mrs. Noall, apparently unconcerned at her visitor’s lack of clothing. ‘Come in. Adam’s on the phone, he’ll join you directly.’ She led them into a comfortable lounge, placed small towels on the seats of two sprawling armchairs and went off to make a cup of tea.

‘I guess these are for us,’ Rex said, plonking himself down on one of the towels and leaning back with a grin. ‘It would seem the Noalls are not unfamiliar with naked visitors.’

‘He’s a nudist at weekends, belongs to some club,’ Jason said thoughtfully, sitting forward to conceal his potbelly and genitals. ‘Even so, her equanimity at the arrival of two stark naked men is more than a tad surprising.’

It wasn’t so surprising. The high-set house gave a view over the entire school grounds, and the Principal and his wife had watched with delight as the two teachers crept nervously towards their house. Earlier in the afternoon, ensconced in her favourite chair on the verandah, Mrs. Noall had

observed the comings and goings of the sports day. She disliked crowds so hadn't joined the parents on the grandstand, preferring to spy. Thus she had also seen Rex and Jason disappear into the swimming pool enclosure, and a few minutes later, Sebastian and Rodney wander up and disappear behind the wall, followed by the clothes thrown over and the two lads scampering off.

Very little escaped Mrs. Noall's Argus eyed vigilance. Since the day her husband became their Principal, everyone, teachers and pupils alike, had wondered how he knew so much about them. How he managed to pounce at exactly the right time on smokers, on teachers avoiding their playground duty or arriving late and sneaking into school, or getting pupils to clean their cars, or borrowing school equipment for the weekend. Some had attributed supernatural powers to the man who remained always friendly, especially when pointing out their peccadilloes. They soon discovered, though, that a reprimand delivered with a smile is no less impressive than a negative rant.

Knowing his boss, Rex was not worried about explaining the situation. They'd always been on the best of terms and from Mrs. Noall's welcome he guessed there would be no problems.

"You're looking irritatingly relaxed," Jason snapped.

"What do you mean?"

"Sprawling there with your cods in full view."

Rex looked down. "They're rather fine, so Fee tells me. Why would I hide them?"

"You're as bad as Sebastian."

"If you've got them flaunt them," Rex said smugly. He was proud of his genitals. Large without being ridiculous. Smooth and manly. "So, the boss is a naturist; that explains why he supports nude swimming."

"I'm surprised you haven't joined them at lunchtimes."

"I intend to from tomorrow. Just wanted to clear it with Adam."

At that moment, Mrs. Noall arrived carrying a teapot, followed by her husband with a tray of cups and biscuits that he put on a side table. Turning to the teachers he said thoughtfully, "Someone stole your gear and you've no idea who it was?"

"Not the foggiest."

"At least your clothes are no problem, the cleaner just called to say he found a pile of clothes behind my study door. He's bringing them over."

"So it appears they weren't trying to really hurt you," Mrs. Noall said brightly. "Just to let you know something."

"Yes, but what?"

"I'm sure if you think hard enough you'll discover the answer to that," she said with an enigmatic smile.

"By the way," Rex added casually. "Is it OK if I also swim au naturel at lunchtimes?"

"Of course, if you think your reputation can stand it."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing at all dear boy. Nothing at all," said Mr. Noall, thus encouraging his teacher to think carefully before leaping into cold water.

"Whoever took our clothes had been listening to us," Rex said thoughtfully as they returned to their cars. "And the person that springs to mind is your put-upon ex-pupil."

"Mmm, makes sense. That's worrying."

"Not at all. If he held a real grudge we wouldn't have seen our clothes or wallets again."

"I hope you're right."

Rodney pulled up in front of Sebastian's house and stared at a blank, pink-stuccoed facade that stared right back. Just left of centre, three steps led up to a featureless door with no apparent means of ingress. On the right, a short drive descended steeply to the closed door of a basement garage.

‘Very intimidating,’ he said in some awe. ‘Your folks must be rolling in it.’

‘Hardly,’ Sebastian replied in some confusion. ‘Mum’s just a secretary.’

‘Your father then.’

‘Haven’t got one,’ Sebastian replied curtly. ‘It’s just a house.’

‘Worth several million dollars.’ Rodney snapped, irritated at Sebastian’s attitude.

‘Sorry, I didn’t mean to sound like that. It’s just that my life is getting complicated. Forgive me?’

‘I never refuse requests from desirable young men,’ Rodney grinned. ‘Now, where’s your place, Reggie?’

Sebastian leaned through the window. ‘Reggie, would you...I mean can you stay with me tonight?’

‘But...’

‘Please?’

‘Like Rodney, I’m the slave of your charms.’ Reginald clambered out unable to believe his luck.

They waved goodbye to Rodney and mounted the steps. Sebastian placed his palm on an unobtrusive panel to the side of the door. It opened silently and they entered.

‘Very hi-tech,’ Reginald observed admiringly. ‘I’ve been trying to get Dad to upgrade security, but he reckons we’ve nothing worth stealing.’

The entrance foyer was a hexagonal space with doors in the centre of each wall. A tiny chandelier, ornate coat stand, and a hexagonal oriental carpet were the sole furnishings.

Reginald gazed around in amusement. ‘Six identical doors. Which one do we take?’

Sebastian pointed to each door in turn ‘We’ve just come through this one, that one on the left goes to the guest washroom and toilet, the one on the right is the internal entrance to the garage below. That one in the middle leads to the lounge and kitchen, etc. That one between the garage and lounge goes to Mum’s quarters; they’re the mirror image of mine, and this one’s mine. Come on.’

He led a bemused Reginald into a large, empty dressing room and closed the door.

‘We take off our clothes here,’ Sebastian whispered, removing his shorts and pouch. ‘I never wear clothes at home, and neither do the guests we take in from time to time, they even arrive starkers. You’re the first friend I’ve ever brought home, so Mum will expect you to be like me I guess. She’s begun to frighten me a bit lately. I’m too nervous to think but it’s probably best if you don’t wear clothes.’

The strain in Sebastian’s voice was obvious so Reginald asked no questions, stuffed his jeans, underpants and shirt in a shelf and put his sandals on the floor beside the only other things in the room; Sebastian’s leather thong sandals.

‘Where are all your clothes?’

‘When we first moved here, this room was used to store everything so I kept the few clothes I had on a shelf in Mum’s dressing room. I never wear anything other than shorts, and when I put a pair out to be washed she puts another in here. It’s not worth arguing with her about it; I’d never win. My running shorts and new yellow pouch, though, I keep in the cupboard beside my bed.’

‘Still seems odd.’

‘She told me that Mr. Farzdbuk was worried the guys who stayed here would take my clothes and run away, whereas if they had no clothes they’d have to stay.’

Reginald shook his head in disbelief.

‘Yes, I know. It sounds criminal but somehow Mum made it seem perfectly reasonable. Odd, isn’t it, how we don’t question things when adults tell us it’s normal? It never occurred to me that we might be holding guys against their will; that they had the right to leave if they wanted to; because we were the good guys and they needed taking care of. That’s the power of brainwashing. I don’t even have towels because she says they go smelly in the humidity. A few press-ups and I’m dry in a minute. I don’t like clothes so don’t feel deprived, but I do have a beautiful bathroom.’

They walked through into a luxurious bathroom with shower, sunken tub, toilet and vanity unit. Sebastian tossed his running shorts and ‘g’ string into a laundry basket and they stood side by side gazing at their reflections in the large, full-length mirror. This was the stuff of Reginald’s wildest

fantasies, but in them he'd forgotten that he looked long and lanky, despite his physical strength and honed karate skills, while Sebastian was physical perfection.

'What're you thinking?' Sebastian asked.

'That you're beautiful and I'm ugly.'

Sebastian looked at his friend in surprise. 'No! No! It's the opposite, Reggie. Beauty is a reflection of character. I'm a false front; an emotional mess, while you're an island of sanity in a sea of hysteria; therefore to me you are beautiful. I'd love to be as tall as you, as calm and rational as you, as easy and uncaring of the opinions of others as you. I wish I could fight like you and had a sharp tongue like you... I wish... I wish I was you.'

'Bollocks. Mum says I'm just a long streak of pelican shit.'

'She's mad. You've already started filling out and soon you're going to have a much better body than me, and your strong jaw and noble brow mean your good looks will last your whole life. I'll be just another boring body in the crowd in ten years.'

'Strong jaw and noble brow! Really Seb, This isn't a fairy tale.'

'It is for me now you're here.'

'You don't mind that I'm lanky and pale?'

'You're not lanky; you're tall and fit. Your body looks as if it's carved from the most expensive ivory, you can walk all day, you're a karate kid, the only really interesting person I know, and you respect nature.'

'If I'm so perfect, why don't you love me? You know I'd do anything for you. I'd die for you.'

'Now who's into fairytale sloppy sentiment? You're my best and only friend and I do love you.'

'But not sexually.'

Sebastian looked up into Reginald's trusting eyes and felt a twinge of guilt. 'Reggie, I'm not good enough for you. My life is very odd and strange. I've had sex of one sort or another with about fifteen guys and felt nothing. I'm terrified that if we take our friendship to the sexual level it will spoil things. You'll be disappointed and realise I'm an empty shell.'

'What sort of sex? Bum fucking?'

'No, not that. At least no one's done it to me, but I've done it to others.'

'Was it good?'

'Not really. I prefer just kissing and stroking, touching and playing with each other and finally jerking off, but often I don't care if I don't come.'

'That sounds exactly what I dream about doing with you.'

Sebastian's smile was unsure. 'Well, if you stay the night who knows what might happen.'

'I'm staying.'

'Shower first.'

They showered together, soaping each other timidly as if frightened the dream would shatter. Neither became aroused, it was too special an experience for that. They scraped off the water with their hands and jumped up and down to dislodge the last droplets. After a score of press-ups they went through to Sebastian's bedroom where Reginald laughed at the bed, admired the space and said he'd have to call his parents.

'Reception's bad inside — too much concrete. Grab my mobile.'

They went out through the French windows to the rear patio and made the call, then wandered back through the lounge to the bedroom.

'Like Rodney said, your mother must be rolling in it to own this place. Everything's so huge and modern and expensive. The patio and garden are enormous and totally private, this is one of the most sought-after residential areas in the city, and your bedroom's like something in a period movie. That king-size four-poster! Is it comfortable?'

'Try it.'

Reginald lay on the bed and grinned. 'Very comfortable. Is this where your guests stay? With you? In this bed?'

'Yes, and one's coming tomorrow for a week.'

'I'm jealous.'

‘Don’t be. It means nothing. I just help them to regain confidence in life after being beaten up and hospitalised. A friend in need sort of thing. Come outside again.’

Sebastian led Reginald to the far end of the garden, discussing plants and flowers as they went. They stood in silence for a few minutes until Reginald could bear it no longer.

‘Why did you want me to come today, and stay the night?’

‘I don’t know. I feel something’s wrong. I’m nervous. Don’t face the house or talk loudly. I’m probably paranoid, but I think I’m being watched, spied on. Mum sometimes knows things I’m sure I haven’t told her, and Jack too sometimes comes up with things that he can’t know.’

‘Who’s Jack?’

‘Mum’s accountant and confidant. He taught me how to treat the guests, after rescuing me from drowning.’

‘Have you had sex with him?’

‘No, just a cuddle. He’s not gay I don’t think. Actually, I know nothing about him. I know nothing much about anyone in my life. Mum has always insisted she has no idea who my father is because she was raped by a masked man. I’ve no idea where she came from. Her parents were dead before I was born. Her boss, Farzdbuk, is fat, ugly and very strange. All I know is he’s insanely rich, rescues homeless young men from the streets, owns a private hospital where he puts them back together again physically, then trusts me to give them a psychological boost and physical male bonding crap until he finds work for them. I get friendly with the guys, but not one has ever contacted me again afterwards.’

Sebastian paused, sighed and shook himself as if trying to dislodge something unpleasant from between his shoulder blades, before continuing in a voice even softer than before.

‘Farzdbuk seems to have some sort of hold over my mother. She manages his employment agency. Once or twice a month we have a soiree here for Farzdbuk’s business acquaintances; mostly from China, India or the Philippines. I’ve no idea what they talk about or why they come, although sometimes I perform for them.’

‘Perform?’

‘I’ve always made up dances and routines since I was old enough to walk... crappy stuff. But they seem to like it.’

‘Naked.’

‘Of course.’

To Reginald there was no of course about it, but Sebastian’s innocence precluded any comment. ‘And I’m the first friend you’ve ever brought home?’

‘Yes. Mum’s never said I can’t, but I know she didn’t want me to. It didn’t matter until now. You see... you’re the first person I’ve wanted to bring home. It took what happened this afternoon to make me realise I need the support of someone I can trust.’

‘What happened?’

‘Rodney told you about us eavesdropping on Boieluv and Trovert?’

‘Yes.’

‘What he didn’t tell you was that Rex Trovert confessed to Boieluv that my mother forced him to have sex with her a bit less than seventeen years ago when she was the temporary school secretary. The dates are exact. He’s my father. And now I know, I can see all sorts of similarities. His skin colour to name only one. My father was raped, not Mum! I don’t know if I can act normally with her any more. That’s one reason I wanted you here, so if I seem strange she’ll think its because I’ve a visitor.’

Reginald took Sebastian’s hand and stroked it. ‘Why did Trovert talk about it today do you reckon? Seems a bit odd — especially with Boieluv.’

‘I guess it was because Boieluv was so upset and confessed what he’d done to Rodney, so the shock of seeing my mother at the sports brought back unpleasant memories and a secret he also wanted to get off his chest. He knew Boieluv wouldn’t tell anyone.’

‘My mother likes yours.’

‘No accounting for taste. Anyway, she doesn’t really know her. She’s never been here—they only meet at that ridiculous born-again religious happy-crappy place.’

‘At least Mr. Trovert is a really excellent guy. I always wondered where you got your looks and character.’

‘Meaning my mother was an unlikely source?’

‘No offence, but yes. I always assumed you’d been adopted by your grandmother. Are you going to tell Mr. Trovert he’s your father?’

‘He won’t want to know he’s got a nutcase for a son! He’s married now, probably with kids of his own.’

The sound of a car pulling into the basement garage silenced them. Sebastian took Reginald to the rear wall of the house where a small shed concealed the swimming pool pump and the downpipes from the roof that passed through a wide opening to the garage beneath, before disappearing into the city’s storm water drains. It was dim inside and as long as they didn’t move they were invisible from below. They peered down and watched Desolé get out of her Audi, take a bag from the back seat, lock the car and walk towards the stairs. Reginald felt inexplicably nervous.

In the event, Desolé was distracted, seemed coolly uninterested in Reginald’s staying the night, and ignored him. She microwaved three frozen dinners, reminded Sebastian to be home early to meet the new guest the following day, then took her tray to her room and shut the door.

Left to their own devices, shyness overtook them. They lay on the bed and talked about nothing in particular.

‘How come you know Rodney?’ Sebastian asked.

‘Dad’s his manager.’

‘Manager?’

Yeah. He manages loads of show business people. Singers, dancers, actors... Finds gigs, makes appointments, organises concerts. Mostly for the tourist trade. Rodney’s so popular for private parties Dad has to turn people away. He also runs a couple of nightclubs.’

‘Rodney?’

‘No, Dad.’

‘What nightclubs?’

‘Phallus Palace and Hole in One. They’re gay nightspots. Dad used to have a heterosexual one too but gave it up because there was always trouble — drunken fights, violence, drugs. The gay ones are usually well behaved and polite to performers — unless they’re invaded by straights.’

‘But... what does Rodney do?’

‘He’s the most popular ‘creative dancer’ in the city,’ Reginald said with a grin. ‘Creative meaning very sexy stripper who’ll do anything in front of an audience. And I mean anything!’

‘And you’ve seen him? Is he good?’

‘He’s brilliant. If I’m there I act as his assistant. When he tosses his gear off I collect it without being obvious so he can exit gracefully.’

‘At the clubs?’

‘Sometimes, also at afternoon hen parties, bridal showers... that sort of thing if it’s on the weekend. I also help Dad at the clubs, he reckons it might change my mind about being gay if I see what they get up to.’

‘Does he care if you’re gay?’

‘Not at all, I think. We’ve never really talked about it. He’s not the sort of person you can talk to seriously. Doesn’t listen.’

And has it put you off? What do they get up to?’

‘Of course it hasn’t, I was born queer. But it’s taught me not to be focussed only on sex. They’re private clubs, members only, so the only rule seems to be no coming on the dance floor because the insurance doesn’t cover falls on slippery semen.’

Sebastian’s face was a picture of disbelief. ‘You’re joking!’

‘Yeah, they’re usually a pretty conservative lot. Some of the young guys are hot; great sweaty torsos and of course the occasional ‘g’ string worn by someone who should have known better. We

had a “Mr. Nude Phallus Palace” competition last month. You’d have won it hands down. But most patrons are as boring as everyone else you meet on the street and not particularly friendly. Downright rude most of them. I’ve seen no evidence of a gay culture, support network or any other sign that they’re less egocentric and selfish than the rest of the population. Being gay doesn’t mean they’re interesting. Doesn’t mean anything, I’ve decided.’

‘Great minds. I decided that recently too. Can I go with you one night?’

‘As soon as you’re free. Rodney performs every Saturday and sometimes on Wednesdays.’

Sebastian promised to take Reginald to the river where Jack had rescued him, then mentioned vaguely how well he was getting on with Con Achilles, but didn’t tell about their nude fight. Reginald reckoned he should drop wrestling and join karate because it was much more useful.

‘I’m too dumb. All those katas you have to learn, and shouting and prancing around makes me feel stupid. I tried it for a while but could never remember the moves.’

‘You get used to it. And if you persevere, after a while the kata moves become like reflexes so you don’t have to think no matter what someone does or where they attack from. There’s just an instantaneous defensive response. Wrestling’s useless in a real-world fight; no one’s going to stand there and obey the rules, they’d just slam a metal bar into the back of your head.’

‘I agree karate’s probably more useful, but I don’t want to let Mr. Achilles down.’

‘Yeah, I understand. The karate bloke’s OK, not as friendly as Achilles, but a damned good teacher. I’m going to enter the secondary schools karate competition, and last weekend I successfully smashed the nose of someone who tried to steal my mobile phone outside the post office.’

‘Reggie! That’s brilliant.’

‘Yep, I’m a dangerous man, Seb. You’re lucky you’ve got a killer on your side. Together we’ll outface the world.’

Sebastian leaned over and kissed his friend. Gently. A soft brushing of the lips.

Reginald immediately got a hard on and giggled.

‘I’d completely forgotten we were naked. It’s great, isn’t it? I understand now why you do it. It was excellent swimming naked the other day too.’

‘Join me at lunchtimes.’

‘If I was as beautiful as you.’

‘You are beautiful.’

They wrestled lightly, kissed some more then settled to exploration and sweet nuzzling until finally the pressure became too much and they ejaculated simultaneously, each holding the other’s erection, lips glued together.

‘That was much better than I ever imagined it would be.’

‘Me too,’ Sebastian whispered. ‘It’s nothing like what I’ve done before. That was just playing around. This feels serious. I think I’m in love! I wish it was you sharing my bed tomorrow.’

‘It will be soon. We’ll sort this out, don’t worry.’

‘You’re not jealous?’

‘Of course not. If you love me, I trust you. If I can’t trust you, then you’re not worth loving. It’s simple.’

In the morning they pleased each other again and promised eternal friendship and love.

Chapter Six

Half an hour after Sebastian returned from school the following day he heard a car. Ensuring he was invisible to anyone in the garage below, he watched from the pool pump-house as a car drove down the ramp. The garage doors closed and Jack got out followed by an obviously nervous, naked young man.

‘Jack, I’m sure this can’t be right. I’m perfectly well now and don’t need to spend a week with some snotty nosed teenager. And seriously, you can’t expect me to just go in naked.’

‘It’s all part of your psychological grounding. The doctor explained it to you. Only when you feel equally at ease naked as clothed, are you strong enough to shake off the effects of your experience and ready for the job Mr. Farzdbuk has lined up for you. The reason so many soldiers suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder is they only get psychological counselling. The physical side is ignored. You have yet to feel completely at ease with other males, and that will only happen when you’ve spent at least a week in intimate physical contact with someone like Sebastian.’

‘Tomorrow I’ll take you and Sebastian to a forest for a weekend of rough living. If you get through that then you’re on the way to recovery. Now go through that door and up the stairs and press the bell to the left of the inner door.’

When the fellow had closed the lower door behind him, Jack used his remote to open the garage doors and backed out.

The bell rang and Sebastian walked slowly to open it.

The new guest, who looked to be in his early twenties, held out a trembling hand.

‘Hi, I’m Guapo Dauntless.’

‘Sebastian Sanspere.’

They shook hands and Sebastian liked the firm, dry grip.

‘I’m glad you’re naked too. Otherwise I’d feel silly.’

‘Why? You’ve a good body.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Fancy a swim?’

‘You bet.’ They wandered through to Sebastian’s bedroom so Guapo could orientate, then out to the patio and pool. Guapo dived in, then swam to the side, face in pain.

‘Fuck! My balls!’

Sebastian laughed. ‘You’ve got to keep your legs apart so they have somewhere to go and don’t smash against your legs when the water hits them. I also learned the hard way.’

‘Bastard, you could have warned me.’

After an hour of swimming lengths in silence they lay on the grass beside the pool. Guapo stretched out in the sun to refurbish his tan, Sebastian considered himself quite dark enough and lay in the shade, studying his guest. Medium height, stocky and solidly built. Good, lightly hairy legs. A patch of hair in the middle of his chest wasn’t attractive. Everything else was on the average side of average. No spare tyre. Face round rather than oval with widely spaced eyes, and the back of his head was flat. A good nose and strong, thick neck. Jaw line a little weak, although the mouth was firm. Guapo turned his head and fixed cold grey eyes on his host.

‘What are you staring at? Tonight’s fuck? Is that what this is all about? Free fucks for the boss’s favourite son?’

‘Do you want me to fuck you?’

‘No.’

‘Then I won’t. And I’m not the boss’s favourite anything. I detest Farzdbuk. He’s my mother’s boss and we do as he tells us. According to Jack it’s to help you recov...’

‘Yes, I’ve had all the psychological shit, thanks. Is this your first time?’

‘No, you’re the tenth.’

‘And does it work?’

‘Seems to. At least when the guys leave here they all seem reasonably well balanced and no longer have nightmares.’

‘And after that?’

‘Good question. None have ever contacted me again, even though we became friends.’

‘You’re not bad looking. Great body. I’m jealous.’

‘You’re much stronger than me. How old are you?’

‘Twenty-four. And you?’

‘Just turned seventeen. Usually the guys we take in are around my age; runaways who’ve been set on by thugs. You’re too old to fit that category. What happened?’

‘I’ve no idea. I’m a freelance photographer from Melbourne. Been here three months. I was working on a photo essay about winter in the tropics when I noticed a large number of obviously wealthy oriental men arriving and departing from a five star hotel at the northern end of the Esplanade. Sometimes the stretch limos were queuing up. Whenever I had a spare moment I’d go there and see what was happening, hoping for a story to back up the photos.

‘There seemed to be two sorts of guest. Some were overfed and healthy, others appeared almost dead. Trying to look like a tourist with a camera, I took photos and noted their movements. There were always several sexy young men and women in the foyers, and after a short wait they would be summoned upstairs where they stayed about an hour. I guess they were call girls and escorts. Rather than me! The sickly tourists usually left the same day in an unmarked ambulance. It was odd and I was sure there was a good story if I could piece the bits together, but one evening a couple of shaven headed thugs punched me in the guts, shoved a bag over my head, thrust me into a car and took me to a concrete room somewhere. I don’t know how long I was tied up, sometimes used as a punch bag or dartboard when they got bored. They didn’t wear masks and seemed not to want anything. I told them my parents were poor so there was no hope of a ransom, but they just said to shut the fuck up or they’d sew my lips together. They would have too!’

Guapo looked away, swallowed and sniffed slightly, determined not to cry. Sebastian remained silent in an agony of pity. No one should be treated like that.

‘I see their faces in nightmares, so apologies in advance. I’d given up hope of surviving when one night the place was busted by cops in black gear and balaclavas who said they’d been watching these guys for a while and were expecting drugs, not a naked, near corpse.

‘They took me to a private hospital where I met the unlovely but generous benefactor of lost boys, Mr. Farzdbuk, and was sewn back together by his excellent doctor and taken care of for a few weeks by a couple of male nurses. Then Jack arrived yesterday and briefed me on the next stage of my recovery, promising a job at the end if I did as I was told. End of story.’

‘So that’s how you got those,’ Sebastian said, pointing at a multitude of almost healed scars on Guapo’s back and belly.

‘Yeah. They’re fading fast. The doctor says they’ll be invisible in a week. Mostly whip cuts, punctures from darts, cuts and cigarette burns. Except for this.’ He pointed to a narrow dark red scar. ‘I was lucky to have been found in time, the doctor reckons. This was a deep stab that nearly punctured my stomach. If the acid had leaked I’d have digested myself. I was hungry enough, having had nothing but dry bread and water.’

‘What did they want? Sex?’

‘That’s the strange thing. They did nothing except hurt me on the few times they came in. Didn’t ask for anything. Not even my name. At the time I didn’t think about it, but now it’s beginning to really bug me. Who were they and why? And there was something about those cops that didn’t ring true.’

‘What?’

‘No idea—but something.’

Seb put his fingers to his lips. ‘Hear that? It’s Mum’s car entering the garage. Come on, I want to show you something.’

They crouched in the dark pump house and watched Desolé get out of the car, lean back in and press the remote to close the door, then totter towards the stairs.

‘That’s my mother.’

‘She looks really old and tired. Will you go and open the door for her?’

‘No way! She’s made no noise so how would I know she was there? This spy hole is a secret. No one must ever know they can be seen from here! Understood?’

‘Yes, Sir, sorry sir.’

‘It’s no joke! Promise!’

Shocked by Sebastian’s intensity, Guapo nodded anxiously. ‘I promise, I really promise.’

Desolé rang caterers who brought a three-course meal on disposable plates. She decorated the table with candles, opened a bottle of white wine, and played the perfect hostess until, pleading a headache, she left the 'boys' to clean up and amuse themselves. Guapo lay on the bed and watched TV while Sebastian did his homework because there'd not be time over the weekend. After a short swim, they retired to bed and Sebastian worked his magic as a masseur. It had never failed before, and didn't fail this time. Within half an hour Guapo was asleep, lying on his back and snoring slightly.

At about two in the morning, Sebastian was wakened by muffled cries and whimpering. He rolled over and stroked and cuddled and cajoled until they both fell back to sleep.

In the morning he was awoken by someone sucking softly on his erection.

Guapo looked up, embarrassed. 'Sorry. You really are too beautiful to ignore, and I was suddenly hungry, and having read that semen is full of nutrients and vitamins and protein, I...'

Sebastian was silent.

'Look, I'm really sorry. Please forgive me.'

'Not unless you finish what you started.'

Sebastian's whimpers of release were overheard by his mother who was drinking her morning coffee on the patio outside the open French windows of her son's bedroom. Her smug, self-satisfied smile would have earned her a punch on the nose, had anyone been there to see it.

After breakfast they were driven by Jack to a private rainforest, part of Farzdbuk's domain, and dumped, bare-arsed and footed to make their way to a hut where they'd find food and somewhere to sleep. It had been raining, so Jack took off in a spray of mud leaving the two intrepid explorers to wonder if they'd been foolish to agree to the tramping holiday. Dense cloud prevented severe sunburn but the humidity and temperatures were so high it was like wading through the steam room of a Turkish bath.

After warning Guapo about snakes that looked like sticks, leeches, and the terrible Gympie-Gympie bush, *Dendrocnide moroides* whose silica tipped leaves cause agonising stings that last for months, they followed an overgrown trail towards the escarpment. A stiff climb through giant granite boulders brought them to the top of a ridge where they inspected stubbed toes, grazes and sore feet before admiring the view of treetops and the sea shimmering on the horizon. A pinkish haze indicated the city. Only birdcalls and cicadas broke the silence.

'It's liberating, isn't it?' Guapo said with a slow smile.

'What?'

'Hiking naked, carrying nothing, not even matches or a knife. It makes us as free as wild animals. And it isn't even embarrassing knowing you're looking up my arse as we climb.'

'It's an attractive arse, no haemorrhoids or dags, so what's to be embarrassed about? As for being like wild animals, they don't have food and shelter waiting for them at the end of the trail, they have to search and kill their own.'

'Spoilsport. But you know what I mean.'

'I've known it since I could crawl, but few people understand liberty, let alone desire it.'

'You're right. They can't wait to join the scouts, the footy team, get a steady job, spouse and two kids, house in the suburbs, giant mortgage, pension fund and life insurance.'

'Not to mention funeral insurance.'

'OK, I won't mention it.'

The track led down to a watercourse and several small pools; enough to drink from and splash each other cool. Another, much steeper climb to an even higher ridge had Guapo staggering.

'It shames me to admit it, but this is the first time I've ever been bush walking. And I'm nowhere near as fit as you!'

'You've been ill, so take it easy, I don't want to have to carry you.'

It seemed further than Sebastian remembered, perhaps because Guapo's blistered feet and exhaustion were slowing them down, but his guest lived up to his name and remained undaunted, uncomplaining and cheerful, insisting he was happy just to be alive in this wonderful spot.

‘I don’t care if I drop dead at this moment,’ he said softly when they paused to admire the view and listen to the birds. ‘This place is so beautiful I’d dream enchanted thoughts through eternity.’

‘I like you, Guapo Dauntless,’ Sebastian said seriously.

‘I like you too, Sebastian Sanspere,’ his new friend said equally seriously.

They were hungry, thirsty and tired when the tiny stone cabin appeared round a bend in the track. A long soak in a waterhole just below the building relieved most of the itches, soreness and dust, and then they devoured a plateful each of cold meat, bread and papaya, leaving boiled eggs, bread and bananas for breakfast.

Exhaustion set in soon after darkness and they fell asleep on top of the large blanket. In the middle of the night it became chilly so they wrapped themselves in it and slept till dawn.

‘I had no nightmares!’ Guapo announced proudly the following morning. ‘This therapy seems to be working.’

Sebastian only smiled.

After breakfast and a lengthy dip in the pool they set off again. This time there was a swamp to wade through, leeches to scrape off, mosquitoes to murder, biting ants and a patch of scratchy lantana to get through before they arrived at another pool large enough to swim in. Then it was easy walking downhill to the edge of the forest.

‘I don’t want to leave the trees,’ Guapo said sadly. ‘I hate the idea of civilisation and other people. I want to live for the rest of my life in the forest. I was born several thousand years too late.’

At the bottom of a long slope lay a sprawling house. Square, white stucco, modern, like a sterile sarcophagus dumped on the stony earth. As they approached they could see half a dozen men in shorts lounging under umbrellas round a pool, being served by waiters in dinner suits, and guarded by six over-muscled pugilists in jeans and T-shirts; guns visible in shoulder holsters.

‘That’s odd. Usually the place is empty and Jack’s waiting.’

They’d been seen, so had no alternative but to let themselves through the gate in the fence around the pool area. The six men and their minders stared at them silently.

‘Ah, Sebastian,’ Mr. Farzdbuk wheezed as he wandered out of the house. In a suit he was flabby. In nothing but flowered baggy shorts and unflattering sunlight he was a dietician’s nightmare. A heart attack with a great dropsical head and two fat pearly hands. Between the rolls of flesh that surrounded them, looked out two black eyes speaking of avarice and cruelty. A mean and miserable soul that had refused itself nothing was imprisoned in all that lard. He was his own bitter jailer, but thought himself fortunate.

‘Don’t go in the pool. You’re both filthy. Come in and get those scratches attended to and take a shower.’

‘Where’s Jack?’

‘Held up.’

His tone did not invite further questions, so Sebastian and Guapo followed Farzdbuk inside, where Gerald, a nurse from the hospital, directed them to the showers and afterwards put disinfectant on scratches and rubbed soothing cream into bruised feet.

‘You’re bloody fit, the pair of you,’ he said admiringly. ‘I can’t believe you, Guapo, it’s only two weeks since you were looking like death warmed up.’

‘Thanks to you and the others,’ Guapo smiled. ‘I can’t tell you how grateful I am.’

‘Grateful enough to do a little something for me, I hope,’ wheezed Farzdbuk as he came in to the bathroom.

‘Anything,’ Guapo declared without thinking.

‘Good. Come with me.’

They went to a well-appointed bedroom along the corridor where a bulbous oriental of about forty-five was lying naked on the bed.

‘This is Mr. Chai,’ Farzdbuk said unctuously. ‘He saw you arrive and wants to get to know you. I said you’d be delighted to let him. He comes from Huang Chow, a most interesting city. I’ll leave you to get acquainted.’ He left, closing the door behind him.

Blood drained from Guapo's system. He began to shiver. He'd sometimes wondered how young guys could bear to let old men slobber over them for money. He wasn't even sure he was gay, despite having performed fellatio on Sebastian that morning. He still didn't understand how he'd dared, putting it down to posttraumatic stress. He'd never had the slightest interest in girls or other men, so assumed he was asexual. This gigantic puddle of lard on the bed was so utterly repellent Guapo felt sick and terrified.

'Come here,' leered the reclining Buddha from his couch, extending an arm and beckoning seductively.

Like an automaton Guapo shuffled forward.

With a surprising turn of speed, Mr. Chai reached out and grasped his prey's penis. 'I am going to fuck you,' he said calmly, 'get down on your knees.'

Guapo's senses finally switched on and without thinking he wrapped both hands round the neck of his would-be raper and squeezed until his penis was released. Mr. Chai, eyes bulging in shock, turned to the wall and slammed his hand on a button that summoned Farzdbuk and a giant bodyguard who grabbed Guapo, shoved an arm up his back and put a throttle hold round his neck.

'He tried to kill me!' screeched the furious man. 'Kill him!'

'I will kill him, personally,' said Farzdbuk softly after Guapo had been dragged out. 'And I'll send you his testicles and a video to prove it.'

His guest's smile was evil.

Sebastian was furious when he saw Guapo being manhandled, and ordered the guard to release him. He was obeyed, albeit reluctantly; Farzdbuk's goons were never sure about Sebastian's status.

'A fat pig wanted to fuck me!' Guapo said breathlessly. 'I couldn't! I know I said I'd do anything, but I couldn't.' He turned to Farzdbuk who had just entered. 'I'm sorry, Mr. Farzdbuk, I really wanted to do something for you but...I couldn't. I'm not a prostitute and never want to be! I...'

To everyone's surprise Farzdbuk patted him on the shoulder and said not to worry, it was a terrible misunderstanding. Someone had told him Guapo had been an escort, so it was Farzdbuk who should apologise. His smile, which exposed too many perfectly arranged teeth, never faltered as he suggested that Guapo and Sebastian should leave quietly and wait down by the gate.

Guapo remained despondent and felt alarmingly vulnerable standing naked by a gateway in the middle of nowhere. All joy in the weekend adventure dissipated as the two young men mulled over the unpleasant incident. Sebastian didn't trust Farzdbuk, but kept his fears to himself until Jack finally arrived to take them home.

When he learned what had happened, Jack laughed and said not to worry, but Sebastian and Guapo were unable to stop worrying.

'Will we tell your mother?'

Sebastian thought for a few seconds. 'No way! I don't trust her. She's too thick with fat Farzdbuk.'

Chapter Seven

In bed the following morning, Sebastian impressed again on Guapo the need for extreme caution; he shouldn't do or say anything that might upset anyone. Jack would be spending part of the day with him, and he seemed a good bloke, but you never really know about people, so Guapo should treat everyone as an enemy until proven otherwise.

After breakfast, Desolé was unnaturally bright and cheerful. Sebastian prepared for school, but was unprepared for his mother to walk out to the street with him and wave goodbye and watch as he cycled away. If he'd been less preoccupied with thoughts of his father, he'd have been suspicious.

Since overhearing Rex Trovert at the pool, Sebastian had been determined to confide in him; but when and how? He had practiced the words, tried to imagine how his teacher would feel, and was prepared to act very cool and matter of fact in case of rejection. He wasn't asking anything of him; he just needed to know that Rex really was his father and wasn't upset at knowing Sebastian was his son. The trouble was, the more he thought about it, the more complicated it seemed. Perhaps he should just let sleeping dogs lie.

As soon as the bell rang for lunch he headed for the library, interrupting his quarry in his office as he was opening his sandwiches.

'Excuse me for barging in on your lunch, Sir, but have you time to talk?'

'At your service, Sebastian.'

'I want to apologise for taking your clothes last Thursday.'

Rex's eyebrows shot up in surprise. 'It was you! We guessed it was that fellow Jason Boieluv had...but I never imagined you'd be in on it.'

'I wasn't really. I was with Rodney when he saw you both heading for the pool. It was a spur of the moment thing for him and I just tagged along; nothing planned. Rodney was still angry at Boieluv's reaction when he spoke to him, but he holds no grudges and has no intention of bringing it all up again.'

'That's generous of him.'

Sebastian laughed. 'Not really. He feels sorry for Boieluv because he's got so fat and ugly and is in a dead end job. In retrospect he did Rodney a good turn, encouraging him to leave school where he was doomed to failure, and by leaving town he got shot of his ultra religious parents and is now doing very nicely—drives a Mercedes Sports! But that's not what I want to talk about. I overheard you talking about that woman who was sitting next to the Principal that afternoon. How she'd forced you to have sex with her.'

'Well, you certainly lead with your chin, young man!' Mr. Trovert sat straighter in his chair. Suspicious. On guard. 'What on earth has it to do with you?'

'A lot, I think. I've worked out it was just on seventeen years ago, is that right?'

'Sebastian! This is too bad! You have no right to probe me on this. Get out!'

Sebastian turned at the door and the pleading in his eyes made Rex relent.

'OK,' he admitted. 'It was about seventeen years ago. Why?'

'And the woman's name was Desolé?'

'Yes, I don't remember her surname. How do you know?'

'She's my mother. I was conceived seventeen years ago, and my skin's the same colour as yours and...'

 Sebastian turned away to hide tears that were streaming.

Rex Trovert was silent for several long minutes.

'That means...'

'Yes.'

'If it were true,' the teacher said slowly, 'how would you feel about it?'

'So, so, so relieved. I can't tell you how I've wanted to know who my father was, but dreaded knowing. Mum always said she'd been raped by a masked man. I haven't believed her for years, but still I... I imagined a brute. Instead...it seems I might have you, and honestly I can't think of anyone I'd sooner have as a father.' He swallowed back his tears and asked nervously, 'How about you?'

'I don't want to offend you, Sebastian, but I must say I cannot imagine how an ugly, evil old witch like Desolé could have produced and raised the most pleasant and interesting young man it's been my good fortune to know.'

'So...you don't mind?'

'Mind? I'm over the moon. Can't wait to tell Fee, my partner.'

'Fee?'

'Short for Phoebe.'

'Partner. Does that mean you're not married?'

'We can't see any reason to, and it's better for her business if she keeps her own name.'

'Which is?'

‘Lyne.’

‘Fee Lyne. I like it.’

‘You’ll like her too.’

‘Won’t she mind about me?’

‘We decided not to have kids because of the state of the planet and all that doom and gloom stuff, but it’s been difficult living with that decision, especially for her, she’s a born mother. She’ll love you! When can you come and meet her?’

‘As soon as I’m invited. So you’re sure I’m your son?’

‘Jason mentioned our matching balls, and the boss once said we looked like brothers. And even if you aren’t I still want you to be. OK?’

Sebastian’s tears gushed, accompanied by wracking silent sobs that shook his frame. Rex came round from behind his desk, wrapped his arms around his son and rocked him gently as if he were a baby. When the tears stopped, he handed Sebastian a handkerchief, supervised the blowing of nose and wiping away of the tearful evidence, then suggested they go for a swim.

‘Is it OK if I join Sebastian’s club in the pool?’ Rex asked Mr. Sprague, who laughed, nodded, placed a finger beside his nose and winked obscenely.

‘He thinks we’re on together, like he is with Charles,’ Rex confided as they stripped, leaving their clothes outside the office.

‘Are they?’

‘So the gossip goes. Who cares? They’re both boring farts and deserve each other.’

‘You’re not homophobic, then?’ Sebastian asked nervously.

‘Hardly! Not with a gay son.’

‘How did you know?’

‘I’ve a seventh sense.’

Loud cheers greeted them as they walked to the edge.

Rex was clearly nervous, wondering if he’d just destroyed his reputation, but needn’t have worried; if possible he ended up even more popular than before. At least half the swimmers were also naked and crowded round them in the water telling jokes, doing honey-pots to try to drown him, and before long he even dared the diving board where he showed good form.

‘Do we tell people?’ Sebastian asked as they were dressing.

‘Do you want to?’

‘Not their business.’

‘Agreed. Except for Mr. Noall; after all he’s your friend.’

‘How do you know? I’m beginning to have doubts about a father who knows more about me than I do.’

‘I’ve seen you two talking. Only friends are so easy together, just as the way Reginald looks at you is broadcasting to everyone who cares that he’s in love. Is it reciprocated?’

‘Yes! But you’re dangerous! I’m going to have to be careful near you. And what’ll I call you? Daddy? Pops? Father?’

‘You dare and I’ll disown you. Sir or Mr. Trovert at school, Rex everywhere else. No point in setting tongues wagging.’

They swapped mobile phone numbers, shook hands and parted with great fat grins plastered over their faces.

Reginald was as pleased as Sebastian when he heard the news, and the afternoon passed in a glow of happiness.

With a light heart Sebastian unlocked the door under the stairs and prepared the mats for wrestling practise. Con Achilles arrived a few minutes later. They stripped and Sebastian whistled appreciatively.

‘You look great! All your muscles are visible now. You look a hundred times better and years younger! What did you use? Number one?’

‘If that’s what it’s called. I bought some electric hair clippers, put on the shortest spacer and ran them over everything. Feels much better I have to admit; and no hairs in the shower.’

Sebastian ran his left hand over Con’s chest. ‘Mmm, bristles, they feel sexy. I can see your nipples now.’

Con’s smile was a little forced and very nervous; should he object? He decided to go with the flow as Sebastian’s hand slid down his belly to his groin and ruffled the bristles that the previous week had been a bush.

‘No hairs to grab! Spoilsport. I’ll have to grab here instead,’ he laughed, taking a firm hold of his teacher’s rapidly firming manhood.

Con held his breath, making a determined effort to remain open minded and not leap to conclusions. No man had ever touched his penis, let alone grabbed hold of it! It was so bloody intimate! He forced himself to relax and discovered to his surprise that it wasn’t unpleasant.

‘Your cock’s gigantic!’ Sebastian said in admiration. ‘Not longer than mine but at least twice as thick. Do you use two hands to wank? I’ll bet your fiancé loves it.’

Con gazed down at his erection, wondered if he ought to be embarrassed, but decided to accept the fact that he wasn’t. ‘My fiancé’s never mentioned it. I don’t think she’s very impressed.’

‘What? Is she blind to beauty? Immune to magnificence?’ Sebastian reached round with his other hand and stroked Con’s buttocks. ‘More sexy bristles! Did you do your ring too? Bend over!’

Blushing to the roots of his bristles, Con bent over.

‘Yep,’ his cheeky pupil announced, ‘neat and clean. No dags.’

At that moment Con farted and Sebastian leaped back laughing wildly.

‘It spoke to me! Your arse spoke to me! I saw the lips move. Got really foul breath though!’ He rolled on the ground laughing hysterically.

Collapsing onto the mat and laughing in relief, Con wondered why he didn’t feel embarrassed; why everything Sebastian did seemed normal. Why was it that with everyone else he knew he felt he had to be on his guard? Why had none of the women he’d had sex with praised his hard-earned muscles? Why had no woman ever wanted to stroke his chest, belly, cock and bum like Sebastian had just done in fun? Why hadn’t any of his girlfriends wanted to look at his arse and watch him fart? He was expected to admire them, ply them with endless compliments, tell them how sexy they were, get down and lick their cunts that usually smelled like arseholes. Why did he always feel he hadn’t quite come up to scratch with any of the women he dated, including his fiancé? Why was he always feeling that he should be apologising for something and buying them flowers in expiation of some nameless failing? Why was he engaged to someone who clearly appreciated him less than one of his pupils did? His brain felt as if someone had doused it in iced water, because that was a bloody good question and demanded an answer!

Unaware of the effect he was having, Sebastian straightened the mats.

‘OK, Teach, time to wrestle. Let’s get down and dirty.’

‘There’s something I want to discuss with you first.’

‘Sounds serious.’

‘Could be. I’ve been debating whether to tell you, but I think it’s too important to ignore. Take a look at these.’ He opened his briefcase and took out two magazines, each open to a page of coloured photographs.

‘Where’d you get them?’

‘My cousin the pool guard collects gay porn from all over the world, he showed me these from India because I told him I knew the guy in the yellow pouch.’

Sebastian studied a photo of two adolescents kissing while playing with each other’s erections. ‘It’s me and...I forget his name, one of the first guys who stayed with us. Jan, I think. But how did it get in this magazine?’

‘And this?’

A different young man was performing fellatio on Sebastian, whose head was thrust back in apparent ecstasy.

‘Mmm. That’s me again. Can’t recognise the other bloke with his head down, but that’s my bed.’

Con took out his laptop, opened it and turned it on. 'Ari emailed me this internet link today.'

The video started and Sebastian was astonished to see himself performing one of his dances, culminating in the pose where he ejaculated.

'That's the dance I told you about in our lounge. I guess one of the guests put it on the web.'

'Aren't you worried?'

Sebastian thought for a bit. 'Could be a problem if any unsympathetic people see it. But what interests me is how they got photos of me in my bed!'

'I've one more video.'

The scene was Sebastian's patio. He and Guapo were horsing around at the edge of the pool. They did nothing sexual, but it was a sexy scene. Con paused it on a still of Guapo.

Sebastian was utterly confused. 'That was last Friday! The day Guapo arrived! He's staying with us for a week.'

'He's a very beautiful young man.'

'Not so young, twenty-four.'

'He looks like a really nice guy.'

'He is. We hiked through bush for two days and although he wasn't fully recovered from being bashed up and imprisoned and was covered in cuts and bruises, he never complained. Always cheerful, even with a dozen leeches sucking on his scrotum. The best guest we've had.'

'I'd like to meet him.'

'And you shall.' Sebastian looked at Con and laughed. 'Mr. Achilles, you're looking at that photo like a sappy puppy. Are you in love with Guapo?'

Con snapped to attention, shook his head and said far too violently, 'Of course not! I don't know the guy. He just looks...'

'Loveable?'

'Yes...No! Nice.'

'He is. But back to these photos and videos; who the heck took them?'

'Whoever did isn't worried you'll find out.'

'There must be hidden cameras everywhere! Mum must know about it. I'll bet Jack set it up. He's always there when I'm not.' Sebastian was silent while Con put the magazines and laptop away. 'What's the time?'

'Four o'clock, why?'

'I told Guapo I'd be back at five and I don't want to be late. I've a bad feeling about this. He had a run in with Farzdbuk yesterday.'

'What about?'

'Farzdbuk wanted him to be fucked by a Chinese bloke as payment for his rescue and stay in hospital. Guapo refused and that pissed Farzdbuk off big time.'

Con couldn't contain his outrage. 'If this Farzdbuk fellow is trying to force Guapo into prostitution he has to be stopped! Call the police!'

Sebastian looked at Con in astonishment. 'The cops? This is Queensland, Con, where the police murder Aborigines with impunity, beat up innocent tourists and kill suspects with Tasers for fun. They're probably behind it all. Get real! No cops!'

'OK. I just thought I'd better make the suggestion. As it happens I agree with you. But I'm surprised you seem so unconcerned about having your intimate encounters and private bits exposed for all the world to admire.'

'I'm bloody not unconcerned! I'm furious and really worried for Guapo, but we've got time for a couple of bouts. Come on let's wrestle. It'll settle my mind and put me in the mood to do something.'

They faced each other, hands on knees. The timer rang and the thud as they crashed into each other must have been heard out in the hallway. Sebastian's concentration paid off and he easily floored a distracted and worried Con.

In the next bout, heavy breathing and grunting prevented them from hearing a key turning in the lock and the door opening. Standing in the shadows under the stairs, Mr. Noall and Guapo, loins

inexpertly wrapped in a beach towel, stared in astonishment at two naked bodies straining audibly in the pool of light created by a 60-watt lamp.

Con was behind Sebastian; arms wrapped round his waist having just heaved him into the air. Sebastian's arms and legs whirred wildly until the pair fell forward, Con on top of Sebastian who prevented his opponent from rolling him by planting himself firmly on hands and knees. Con reached between his opponent's legs and lifted with all his strength, flipping Sebastian onto his back with a thump as the timer rang and they collapsed, laughing.

'Thought you were going to grab my cods, Con.'

'I would have if my hand had slipped. You were lucky not to be emasculated.'

'Lucky indeed,' the Principal said quietly.

The two wrestlers sat up in surprise.

'I had no idea wrestling was so rough! Are you all right, Sebastian? That fall looked painful.'

'Looks worse than it is. I didn't feel a thing. What're you doing here? And Guapo!'

'I apologise for interrupting your practice, but this young man is desperate to see you.'

Guapo seemed much more in need of sympathy than Sebastian. He was pale and shaking.

Sebastian shot to his feet. 'Guapo, what is it? Why are you here? Where's Jack?'

After many assurances that he was safe, the story emerged.

Shortly after Sebastian's mother had left for work, Guapo heard a vehicle enter the garage. Curious, he spied from the pump housing and watched an unmarked, windowless van pull into the garage. From the back doors emerged the same two thugs who had attacked him on the esplanade and imprisoned and tortured him for two weeks. When Farzdbuk climbed out of the passenger seat, Guapo's utter panic and dread of recapture spurred him to make the superhuman leap to the top of the three metre high rear wall where he hung by his fingers, then hauled himself over, dropping five metres to the neighbour's lawn and straining his ankle. Oblivious to the pain he grabbed a towel off the clothesline, crawled under their windows so they wouldn't see him, and on reaching the street girded his loins and raced away.

Imagining Sebastian was part of the plot, he headed for the backpacker hostel he'd been staying at, then remembered he owed them money, had no identification, no cash, nothing. What to do?

Fearing the police as much as Farzdbuk, he hid all day under bushes in a park, drinking water from the public fountain and nursing his ankle. As the afternoon ground on he accepted that his only hope was to trust his instincts and find Sebastian.

His towel attracted little attention in a city that lived on tourism; people imagined he was walking back from the Esplanade Lagoon. Unfortunately, though, everyone he asked for directions seemed to be a tourist, so it was late before he finally found the school, which was closed. Luckily, Mrs. Noall had seen him from her house and dispatched her husband.

His tale told, Guapo swayed on his feet and it was Con who caught him, lowered him to the ground and cradled him in his arms. Guapo buried his face in Con's chest and tried not to cry.

Mr. Noall turned to Sebastian.

'This sounds dangerous, Sebastian. The young man seems honest, so I'll leave you and Con to decide what to do. If you need my help, ask for it. But the fewer people who know your plans, the better. Should I phone your mother?'

'Fuck no! Sorry sir, but I'm pretty sure she's part of this. I can always go to my father for help.'

'Your father?'

'Rex Trovert.'

Mr. Noall's face split in a grin. 'I always thought so! Oh what excellent news. I gather its a secret?'

'Yes, for now at least.'

'Excellent news. Excellent news,' the Principal muttered as he let himself out and the lock clicked into place.

Con and Guapo were whispering. Con telling him not to worry, he'd take care of him. He looked up with a bemused smile. 'So, you're Rex Trovert's son?'

‘Yes.’

‘Figures. Why is it a secret?’

‘We’ve only just discovered it ourselves. I’ll tell you about it when this is all solved.’

Con nodded, looked down and smiled goofily. Guapo smiled back, then reached up and touched Con lightly on the cheek.

‘I believe Guapo,’ Con announced seriously, ‘and have decided to take him home with me. He’ll be safe there. No one knows I know him and...’

‘And you’ve discovered he’s even better in the flesh than in the video.’

Con shook his head as if to clear it and smiled down at the young man in his arms. ‘No, no. It’s just that I want to make sure he’s safe and...’

‘Conias Achilles, You’re in love! Have you forgotten you’re an almost married man?’

‘No. But it’s your fault if I’ve changed my mind.’

‘How?’

‘By making me think about my relationship with women in general and my fiancé in particular.’

‘Ha! You’re going to replace her with Guapo. An excellent decision, old man. Guapo, do you take Con as your friend and possible lover?’

Guapo looked up with a nervous grin. ‘Well, I wasn’t really looking for an older man, but I guess he’ll do.’

‘Cheeky bastard! I’m only a bit older than you.’

‘But so sexy and much more mature.’

Con bent and kissed him on the forehead. ‘Well, are you coming home with me or not?’

‘Yes, please.’

Con looked at Sebastian with a grin. ‘That’s settled. Now what about you?’

‘I’ll go home as usual and be surprised that Guapo’s not there. Then when the place is empty I’ll find those cameras and smash them. After that I’ll take whatever I want and call Rex to come and collect me. It’s his turn to take care of the unfortunate youth he sired.’

‘Not a good idea, oh hot-headed youth.’

‘Why not?’

‘Do we want to discover what’s behind all this cloak and dagger life you’ve been living for the last seventeen years?’

‘I guess.’

‘Then after discovering the hidden cameras and anything else that might be useful, act exactly the same as normal; as if you know nothing, otherwise they’ll cover their tracks and disappear.’

‘Extra good advice. So... after I’ve discovered useful things I’ll find a way to destroy these bastards.’

‘With the help of your friends, Sebastian Sanspere. No mad plans to single-handedly take on the criminal fraternity.’

‘OK. By the way, I’ve changed my name to Trovert.’

‘Trovert it is, and together we’ll solve the riddle. Meanwhile, take care.’

‘You too. And you, Guapo.’

‘Thanks, Sebastian.’

Chapter Eight

No one was home when Sebastian arrived, so he showered, did his homework, made a bite to eat, did a casual circuit of the garden, surreptitiously working out where a camera must have been to take the photos of him and Guapo beside the pool, noticed from the corner of an eye a sprinkler at the edge of the flowerbed that seemed larger than normal, felt the soil nearby, nodded his head as if making a decision, turned on the sprinklers and wandered back, noting with satisfaction that no

water spouted from the one he'd suspected. After a quick dip in the pool he turned the sprinklers off, then settled down in the lounge to watch TV News.

At half past seven Desolé arrived looking harassed. Sebastian looked up with an easy smile.

'You look exhausted, Mum, you work too hard. Sit down and I'll get you a drink.'

Wordlessly she sank into an armchair, accepting the large gin and tonic with a pathetic sniff.

'Where've you been? And where's Guapo? I was going to play chess with him tonight after he beat me yesterday. I reckon Jack's working him too hard after our hike last weekend. I know it took it out of him.'

'What happened up at Mr. Farzdbuk's place?'

'Nothing. We had a much-needed shower after wading through a swamp. Then Farzdbuk asked Guapo to keep a bloke company, but he said he was too tired, apparently. I wasn't there.'

'Did Guapo say anything else about it?'

'Nope. Then Mr. Farzdbuk came out to see us off. He was very pleasant. I didn't realise he was such a great guy. We had a fantastic weekend, thanks to him. Guapo told him again that he was really grateful to have been rescued and patched up for nothing in the hospital, and felt bad at disappointing him, but he really was on his last legs by then.'

Desolé was silent.

'What's this all about? Where's Guapo? Has something happened to him? Come on Mum, I really like that guy.'

Desolé shook her head irritably. 'No, dear, nothing's happened. It's just that a job came up sooner than expected so Guapo had to leave suddenly. That's all.'

It being a very long time since his mother had called him 'dear', Sebastian knew she was up to something. 'Did he leave a note? How can I contact him? He wouldn't just leave without leaving a note at least.'

'Well, it looks as if he did. Just like all those other boys. No gratitude, that's the trouble with the world. It's all take, take, take, but never give anything. I'll ask Mr. Farzdbuk next time I see him if he has a contact address for you.'

'Thanks, Mum. That'd be great.'

Pleading exhaustion, Desolé went to her room. Sebastian watched a video of the State wrestling finals, then stood for some time outside looking at the stars. When he finally got into bed he took great care not to look as if he was aware of hidden cameras. However, knowing he was probably being watched by dozens of heavy-breathing sex-starved voyeurs was rather amusing, so before switching out the light he gave a stellar performance.

As soon as Sebastian left the wrestling room, Con drove his car from the car park to the quadrangle, where a door led directly to the main staircase. The school was deserted, but even so he checked the way was clear, then led Guapo in his towel to the car, buried him under a blanket in the back, locked the door to the wrestling room and drove sedately to his house in a beach suburb about five kilometres north of the city. Parking in the garage, he lowered the doors before Guapo clambered out and was led inside for a shower, food and rest.

Suddenly nervous and unsure about the wisdom of bringing a stranger home and promising to protect him, Con spent some time cleaning the kitchen, preparing something to eat and inventing unnecessary tasks. Unable to delay it any longer he stood at the door of his bedroom and marvelled at the young man sprawled over the bed, snoring lightly. He tiptoed over and lay carefully beside him. Guapo woke and stretched out a hand, stroking Con's cheek.

'You're beautiful.'

Con blushed and shook his head.

'You are beautiful and incredibly generous to take me in.'

Con's smile was uncertain. The feelings that had prompted him to invite Guapo to stay had vanished and he was unsure if he still wanted it. What the fuck had made him kiss the bloke and stroke him like a lovesick poof? What must old Noall be thinking! He blushed in shame. What if it was all a mistake? Bloody Sebastian, he thought, when he's there everything, no matter how bizarre

or unusual, seems normal and sensible. With Sebastian there are no worries or fears, you feel able to deal with whatever life throws at you. But Sebastian wasn't there now and Con wasn't sure what he wanted, or if what he wanted was a good idea. Or if..

Guapo gazed at his rescuer and realised the problem. He stretched out a hand and touched Con's fingers. 'You're having second thoughts. It's OK, I understand. It was all rather crazy and theatrical and we both got carried away. So if it's OK with you I'll just borrow a few clothes and go.' He sat up.

Panic gripped Con's heart as the truth of the situation rammed home. 'No!' he said far too loudly. 'No! Don't go. I want you here! I... I just have to get used to the idea.'

'What idea?'

'That I was engaged to a woman this morning, and this evening have a naked, handsome young man in my bed who I don't want to leave.'

Guapo smiled uncertainly. 'If you're certain?'

'I am, definitely!'

Guapo's smile morphed into a luminous grin. 'Then I won't leave.'

As if controlled by the same puppet master they turned to each other and shared delicate, tentative kisses that became delicate but not so tentative touches. A delicious calm spread over Con that he'd never felt before. This felt right! This was what he wanted and had wasted too many years of his life searching for in all the wrong places, with all the wrong people!

Each explored the other with tongue and lips, fingers and feet, and the intensity grew until the desire to somehow get inside Guapo became an obsession almost as strong as the desire to have Guapo inside him. The second desire won and he reached over to the side table for a blob of the lubricant that had greased his way into his fiancé's protesting vulva. Taking a condom from the drawer he rolled it onto Guapo's unprotesting manhood, greased up and straddled the object of his lust. Although he had to stop several times during the descent to wait for the pain to ease, the urge remained strong and soon fifteen centimetres of the man he desired was buried deep within him. He had never felt so fulfilled and sighed in ecstasy.

'This is what I've been missing,' he whispered with a heartfelt sigh. 'Real intimacy.'

Unable to believe his good fortune, Guapo ran his hands over Con's massive chest, flexed his hips and, as if they'd practised, gentle thrusting achieved a natural rhythm until Guapo heaved his hips high and exquisite orgasms engulfed them both.

Lying side by side in silence they dragged still inquisitive fingers over their lover's chest and belly.

The doorbell rang.

They ignored it.

It rang again, continuously, so Con heaved himself reluctantly off the bed and padded to the door without bothering to cover himself. If Sebastian could do it, so could he. 'Who is it?'

'Me, you bastard! You were supposed to meet me in the pub at six o'clock!'

Silence, then, 'Hang on a tick.'

He raced back to the bedroom. 'It's Margo, my fiancé. What'll I do?'

'Do you want to continue the engagement?'

'Fuck no!'

'Then put her out of her misery immediately.'

'But...'

'Are you the man I think you are?'

Con raced back to the door, opened it, Margo barged in and he found himself apologising to her back as she flounced along the hallway and into the bedroom, only to flounce right out again.

'There's a naked man in your bed.'

'I know.'

'And you're naked!'

'I know. Come in and meet Henry.'

'No way!'

Con grasped her wrist, dragged her into his bedroom and sat her on the end of the bed.

Guapo sat up, reached out a hand and said calmly, 'Hi, I'm...'

'Henry!' Con quickly interrupted.

'So? What're you doing in Con's bed?'

'We've just had sex. I'm in love with him.'

Con stifled a shout of joy.

Margo's eyes grew round and pale. 'But... Con and I are getting married.'

'Sorry, Margo, change of plan. I've discovered I prefer men for sex.'

'But you can't! We've had good sex.'

'You might have enjoyed it; I was bored shitless, whereas with Henry the heavens opened and I was bathed in celestial glory. More to the point, as you heard he loves me and I love him.'

'But... I love you!' Anger rather than affection was the dominant chord in Margo's shout.

'Then why have you never said so? Why have you never told me I'm beautiful, sexy, handsome, have a great body, that you like my butt, that you love getting screwed by me, that you like my cock? Speaking of which, why don't you stroke and touch it? Play with it and my balls? Why don't you take pleasure in my body as well as in the presents you're always demanding?'

'You're disgusting! What a vain creep! Wanting to be admired, to be told you're handsome! How pathetic.'

'Yet you want me to tell you all those things.'

'That's different—I'm a woman. Men are there to admire and woman are there to be admired and given presents and be taken care of. It's the way it always has been and always will be!'

'Well, obviously I misunderstood the whole male/female marriage caboodle. I made a mistake for which I apologise. Still, better now than after we were married. And thanks to your brilliant analysis of gender differences, I'm now certain I don't want to live with a woman. I want to share my life with someone who considers my pleasure, my wants and desires, my well-being. Someone who treats me as an equal. Someone like Henry.' He knelt by the bedside and faced Guapo whose eyes were luminous with delight. 'If he'll have me?'

Guapo took Con's face gently in his hand. 'Con, I don't even know your surname, but I know when I've met the best man I'm ever likely to meet.' He dragged Con onto the bed where they hugged and kissed as if alone in the room.

Margo's eyes were mere slits as she stood and marched to the door, turned and sneered, 'This is the most disgusting thing I have ever seen in my life! Two naked men kissing as if they're man and woman. Thank goodness I discovered you're a queer! I'm going to tell everyone we know! I'm going to tell your school Principal. I'm going to ruin you, Con Achilles! You will live to regret this day.' Predictable clichés seldom make for grand exits, and this was no exception. No one watched her stomp out and slam the door.

'Well, that was easy,' Con said softly, cuddling Guapo in his arms. 'I'm glad I followed your advice.'

Guapo roared his laughter. 'Con Achilles! What a perfect name. Are her threats serious?'

'Hardly. I despise her friends, and you've met the school Principal. So no worries.'

'Well, what's with the Henry?'

'You're on the run, remember? I've no idea who that cow knows. She might be buddy buddy with your captors for all we know.'

Guapo was silent.

'Sorry to be such a wet blanket.'

'You're not. You're right, and such a breath of fresh air you made me so happy I forgot all about that stuff.'

'A better excuse has never been invented. Are you up to trying that last little exercise again? Con grasped his lovers swelling erection and nodded. 'Good man!'

Meanwhile in a modest but pleasant house perched on the side of the escarpment overlooking the Great Barrier Reef, Rex Trovert was describing his son to Fee, who had shut down her computer in excitement at the news.

‘A son! Oh Rex that’s so wonderful. How old?’

‘Seventeen.’

‘And you’re thirty-nine, so you were twenty-one when his mother raped you.’

‘Sounds pathetic, doesn’t it?’

‘Not at all! It reflects reality. Just as many men and boys are sexually abused by women as the other way round, but to acknowledge it would undermine the myth that men are the sexual predators and women their prey. If men realised they are but pawns in the game of sex and procreation they’d slit their veins.’

‘You mean we’re wimps?’

‘Useful wimps. Someone has to put out the rubbish and repair stuff.’

Well, at least my son isn’t going to fall into that trap, he’s gay.’

‘That’s a relief. Another non-breeder. And he looks like you?’

‘Much more handsome.’

‘Not possible.’

‘And smarter, quicker, braver and more popular.’

‘His father’s son.’

‘And he never wears clothes.’

‘That’s my side of the family. None of my ancestors wore a stitch of clothing before the whiteys invaded. How about school?’

‘In class he wears shorts. Believe it or not he talked old Noall into letting him swim naked at school, and today I joined him and a few dozen others at lunchtime.’

‘Naked?’

‘Yes.’

‘Rex Trovert! I am so proud of you! When can I meet this paragon of perfection?’

‘As soon as you like.’

‘The first time he’s free he must come to dinner.’

‘You’re not jealous?’

‘I’m insanely pleased! We have a child without all the nappy crappy stuff. He’s done all the hard growing up bits, we can just sit back and enjoy the result.’

‘Oh excellent woman.’

Desolé couldn't sleep. Her meeting with Farzdbuk had been frightening. He'd all but accused her of treason; of warning Guapo and telling him to go. In vain had she protested her innocence. She was the gaoler and the responsibility for his escape was hers and hers alone. There was no other explanation. Both doors had been covered when the van arrived and no one had left, therefore he must have left before Farzdbuk arrived. And if so, why? Escape over the back fence was ruled out as it was so high and there was a five-metre drop to the neighbours below. When questioned they said they'd been home all morning and seen no one. Furthermore, none of Sebastian's clothes were missing and Guapo had no clothes, so...

Losing the house would be bad enough, but she knew too much about Mr. Farzdbuk and his business. She was dispensable; she knew that. Certainly, if they didn't find Guapo her role was ended and so, almost certainly, was she.

Perhaps if she let him have Sebastian? He was old enough and very healthy. He'd be worth plenty to Farzdbuk for several years, and then...

She nodded to herself. Yes. That was the solution. She'd bargain to keep the house and income in exchange for Sebastian. Farzdbuk had often hinted that he'd be worth a great deal to him.

Problem solved, she took three diazepam tablets and slept deeply.

Reginald tossed and turned in his bed. Whenever he thought of Sebastian, which was for roughly sixty minutes in every hour, he felt uneasy. Sebastian's life had always been complicated, but now he sensed it was beginning to run amok. There was a new, brittle quality to his boyfriend's charm. He was taking more risks, not caring who knew he was gay or saw him naked. His mad mother was even more demented than he'd expected, and the 'guests' and Sebastian's sexual exploits were surely dangerous? The only good thing was finding his father. Reginald decided to speak with Rex Trovert first thing in the morning and share his nebulous fears.

Rodney had his head screwed on right. He'd know what to do. Reginald would ask his advice when he took Sebastian to the club next Saturday. And he should stay with Sebastian from now on, to guard him. Yes. He'd suggest it at school tomorrow. No, not suggest, he'd tell him it was going to happen, as much for himself as for Sebastian. Reginald needed to get away from his mother whose demands that he join her church were becoming intolerable. His father was no use as he was almost never home, and when he was he kept reminding his son there was no such thing as a free lunch, and an after school job should be considered. All very well for an entrepreneur who could sell gloves to an amputee, but what sort of work was there for a Karate addicted nature freak with an interest in poisonous reptiles and plants?

Chapter Nine

Problems, real or imagined, brought out a stubborn streak in Sebastian. After the shock of Con's revelations about hidden cameras, photos in magazines and on the internet, and Guapo's near capture, instead of retreating to the relative safety of more conventional behaviour so as not to attract attention, he went further out on a limb and cycled to school wearing nothing but his skimpy running shorts. The fresh air rushing over his loins was so invigorating he decided to take Reggie for a long naked ride in the country to share the sensual thrill.

A nervous premonition after his sleepless night had Reginald cycling the long route to school, past Sebastian's house. The place was empty so he sped up in the hope of overtaking him, which he did about a kilometre from school on a quiet, tree-lined street. Two scrawny louts of about Sebastian's age in boots and fake army camouflage had shoved Sebastian off his bicycle and were taunting him with what looked like small baseball bats; feinting, prodding, tapping his head and shoulder, landing the occasional more solid blow on ribs while dancing around teasing him as they would a dog.

Sebastian looked unworried, but his attempts to get close enough to attack were stymied. If he approached one, the other would batter him from behind landing a light blow to his head, cheek or neck. Painful but not lethal.

'Fucking queer shit, riding round with ya balls hanging out! What are ya? Looking for trade? Wanna be fucked up the arse? Showing your privates to the whole world. Bloody sick pansy, you're a fucken disgrace.'

So engrossed were they in their fun they didn't see Reginald approach.

'Stop this ignorant violence and return to your institution,' Reginald said calmly, leaning his bike against a tree.

'Another fucking queer smart arse! Looking for a hiding?'

'Something like that,' Reginald said softly, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

'Here's your poncy Grammar School bum chum,' the other jeered to Sebastian. 'Also looking for trouble.'

He raised his bat in readiness to strike at Reginald, expecting him to back off. Instead, with a remarkable turn of speed Reginald's bony fist smashed into the side of his head. He dropped like a stone. Reginald turned to face the other attacker, not so bravely looking around for an exit strategy.

‘Typical fucking queer, can’t fight clean, had to take him by surprise.’

‘Whereas it’s a proud heterosexual tradition for two guys to beat up one, unarmed man.’

‘Sure is, especially if he’s a queer!’ With that he lunged.

Reginald easily sidestepped, slammed the side of his hand down on his attacker’s arm, and smiled peacefully at the scream of pain.

‘You’ve fucking broken my arm. You bastard, I’ll get you for that!’

‘It would be better if you apologised to this guy for attacking him,’ Reginald said, watching Sebastian pick up one of the dropped bats.

‘Like fuck! You guys are dead meat!’

Sebastian’s bat slammed into the oaf’s back, causing him to fall onto his face on the grassy verge where he lay groaning and twitching.

‘Now you’ve two people to ‘get’,’ Sebastian said softly, landing a solid kick on what were almost certainly broken ribs.

‘Fucking faggots!’ hissed the first guy Reginald had floored. He was on his hands and knees attempting to stand.

‘Do you apologise for attacking a defenceless man?’ Reginald asked sweetly.

‘I’ll fucking kill you both first. Filthy brown-nosed crap eaters!’

Sebastian walked forward and stomped on the thug’s hands. His feet were bare, but the soles were as hard as seasoned leather and Reginald heard the snap of several bones milliseconds before shrieks of agony tore along the quiet street.

‘Attaboy, Seb,’ Reginald said cheerfully as he picked up his bike. ‘The first rule of defence. If you’re forced into a corner and have to fight, make sure they never want to attack you again. The only people these sorts respect are those who can dish out more punishment than them.’

Sebastian was already astride his bike. ‘Thanks, Reggie, I’d have been late for school if you hadn’t given me a hand.’

‘No worries. I hope you’ll forgive me for butting in, but I’ve been looking for an excuse to practice my moves in a real situation and couldn’t resist.’

‘Nothing to forgive, Reggie. What’s mine is yours.’

‘Even the family jewels?’ Reginald asked, indicating the fine set of genitalia dangling out of Sebastian’s shorts.

‘All yours.’

‘Excellent. But why are you revealing them to passers by? Are they in need of airing?’

‘Something like that,’ Sebastian answered with a laugh. ‘Turns out not to have been such a great idea. Apparently seeing balls is confronting to heterosexuals.’

‘It’s not only homophobic yobs who might feel intimidated by a pair of testicles and a not insignificant penis flapping in the breeze as you cycle through this genteel suburb. What must all those schoolgirls waiting for the bus back there have thought?’

‘Can’t imagine and I don’t give a tinker’s cuss what they or anyone else thinks. The whole world can go fuck itself. I’ll leave them alone if they grant me the same respect. But don’t fret, I’ve a pair of Speedos in my knapsack to put on at school so you can sit beside me in maths and not be embarrassed.’

‘Nothing you do could ever embarrass me.’

‘Great, then I won’t bother with them.’ Sebastian blew a kiss as they cycled through the gates, and Reginald’s heart pounded with love for the brittle, sensitive young man whose brave exterior hid a deep and complex melancholy.

Instead of improving, Sebastian’s day got worse. Reginald had gone to check on an experiment in the science labs before assembly and Sebastian was crossing the quadrangle when several not-so-bright scions of wealthy parents wolf-whistled and yelled, ‘You touting for business Sebastian?’

Sebastian turned, frowning. ‘What’s that?’

‘Are you peddling your arse, Sebastian?’

The quadrangle was crowded with students waiting for the assembly bell and a sudden silence descended. Sebastian looked around at faces grinning in expectation of a fight.

‘What do you call a male prostitute?’ someone yelled.

‘He-haw,’ came the response.

Blood drained from Sebastian’s face, a sudden chill enveloped him and he felt sick. Had someone seen the videos of him on the Internet? Fuck! He scanned the faces for friends and found only predators ready to feed on the carcass of a victim.

‘Sexy shorts, Sebastian,’ yelled David Jacobs, the largest and ugliest senior student of all time in Mr. Noall’s opinion. ‘Bit rude though, exposing your butt cheeks.’

Relieved that it was only his shorts that had caused the comments, Sebastian laughed. ‘I’m glad they turn you on, David.’

‘Fuck off! I’m not your wrestling mate! Save your poncy clothes for the queers in the park. Flashing your arse here will only get you a boot up the ring; not what you’re looking for.’

‘Don’t be a fuckwit!’

Ernie Goldberg, who’d always seemed friendly, wandered towards them. Sebastian turned in the hope of support and was too late to react when David wrapped his arms round him from behind and lifted him off the ground for Ernie to whip off his shorts. Loud cheers and jeers as they waved them in the air tempting Sebastian to try to get them.

Sebastian’s principle survival trick at school had been to never appear ridiculous. He wasn’t concerned about standing naked in the crowded quadrangle, dozens of the kids present had been naked with him in the swimming pool the previous lunchtime and he knew he looked good. Racing round trying to snatch his shorts off two fully dressed guys would make him look utterly stupid, so he took a textbook from his knapsack and read it quietly, to the amusement of his audience and irritation of his attackers, who were now the ones looking foolish. A few minutes later the bell rang and he joined everyone in the Assembly Hall, a magnificent structure of fake marble columns and Roman arches supporting a vaulted ceiling.

Since his first day at school Sebastian had carried a clean handkerchief in his knapsack, just in case. It had only ever been used to clean his hands after his bike chain came off, or to bind scratches and wipe off blood, because he never caught colds and so far hadn’t had to wipe away tears. Placing the handkerchief on the seat, he sat on it. All around him guys were turning their heads, whispering, giggling and laughing.

‘Silence!’ roared the Deputy Principal. The teachers processed up the aisle to their seats on the stage and it was business as usual until the end when the senior school was instructed to remain behind.

‘Come to the front of the hall, lads,’ Mr. Noall said quietly, waiting till they stood in a small half circle in front of him. ‘Until today I was proud that there was no bullying, no harassment and no gang violence in this school. However, before assembly I watched a lad being verbally harassed, then set upon in an attempt to humiliate him. Defend yourself, Jacobs.’

‘Sir, it was just a bit of fun.’

‘I see.’ The Principal turned to Reginald and said, ‘You hold his arms, Reginald, while James takes his trousers down and runs off with them.’

‘Sir! No!’

‘Just a bit of fun, David, and then we’ll do it to young Goldberg.’

‘Sir! Please!’

‘So it is only fun when it’s done to others? How many of you,’ he asked the twenty young men standing before him, ‘would like to live in a world where most people were like Jacobs and Goldberg? Don’t answer; I want you to think about it today and tonight. Do you want to live in a world where the bullies force you to be like them? Or do you want to be free to live, dress, act and be interested in whatever you choose, as long as it doesn’t affect the right of others to do the same?’ He stared at Jacobs. ‘What prompted this disgusting display?’

‘Sir! Some of us reckon Sebastian should wear more clothes.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it’s... rude.’

‘Mr Noall looked David Jacobs up and down and sighed. ‘David, you’re out of shape, your long baggy shorts make your legs look skinny and weak and your belly flabby. You look totally sexless and singularly unattractive, especially with those ridiculous black boots hanging off the end of hairy white legs! Do you really think Sebastian would look better if he dressed like you? What do the rest of you think? Who looks the best?’

Silence and embarrassed shuffling.

‘Well, I would certainly prefer to look at a fit and healthy naked person than an overweight, flabby fellow in ridiculous baggy gear that he wears simply because it’s fashionable. I also wonder about the state of mind of young men who take so much trouble to hide their legs and crotches. It bodes ill for the future of men. Where are Sebastian’s shorts?’

‘In my locker, Sir.’

‘Well, we’re late for first period, so as neither of you can afford to skip classes, both of you bring them to my office at interval, with a written apology to Sebastian. You may go.’

‘But Sir! What about him?’

‘What about whom, Reginald?’

‘Sebastian. He has nothing to wear.’

‘Does that worry you, Sebastian?’

‘No, Sir, but I’ll have to explain to the teachers.’

‘They will understand. I told them what had happened and the possible outcome before they entered assembly.’

‘Thank you, Sir.’

And so it happened. Not a question was asked and the giggles and stares and occasional secret smiles of complicity from other students in the corridor between classes were tinged with respect. One young junior sidled up to him, lightly touched his buttocks and whispered, ‘I think you’re the greatest’ before racing away. Sebastian was quietly pleased, but had learned a valuable lesson. Popularity is not an occupation. It is an ephemeral and very temporary thing. Admirers easily become antagonists if led by a ‘strong’ critic. It had come as a nasty shock to realise that virtually every boy in the quadrangle that morning had been prepared to join in the harassment, to take pleasure in the hope of his humiliation and see him made a fool of by two louts.

His already wafer thin respect for the opinion of others had in that moment dissolved. Never again would he assume he had the support of anyone except Reggie, who never left his side for the rest of that morning, furious with himself for not having been in the quadrangle before assembly to protect his lover. Sebastian, on the other hand, was remarkably pleased with his morning, especially Mr Noall’s reaction.

At the beginning of third period Mr. Achilles breezed into the senior Maths class, unable to hide a smile that seemed to have been stuck there since the previous evening.

‘Why the big grin, Sir?’ someone asked. ‘Looks as if you’ve hit the jackpot.’

‘I certainly have, Gerald,’ Con Achilles replied, winking at Sebastian as he turned to the whiteboard.

‘Are you going to share your winnings?’

‘Winnings are not always of the pecuniary sort, Desmond.’

‘You’ve set a wedding date? Can I come?’

‘The opposite, young man. I have cancelled my wedding.’

‘Good on you, Sir. As Oscar Wilde didn’t say, the decision to marry is usually taken in haste and repented at leisure.’

‘Yeah. My parents should never have married,’ someone said softly.

‘Mine neither. Mum’s nagging Dad into an early grave.’

My father expects me to hate my mother like he does. I wish they’d both drop dead.’

Mr. Achilles held up his hand for silence. ‘It’s never a good idea to broadcast family details you might regret sharing later.’ He sat on the edge of his desk. ‘But the topic is important because you

are fast approaching marriageable age. All of you would be considered a 'good catch' by any woman, because you come from wealthy families. Therefore you need to be aware of the pitfalls.

'If you watch popular movies it won't surprise you to learn that the human female is an extraordinarily cunning sexual predator with a proven success rate in getting the man of her choice to father a child, and then support her until he drops. That's one of the reasons there are five or six thousand million more humans than the biosphere can sustain.'

'Right on, Sir!' Reginald said with feeling. 'Since the beginning of this lesson the planet's population has increased by more than two thousand, one species has become extinct, four hundred hectares of forest have been cut, two hundred hectares have become desert, and forty-one million dollars have been spent on warfare!'

Everyone cheered.

'Thanks, Reginald for that dollop of doom and gloom. Where was I? Ah yes... The female mating instinct was probably the main reason humans didn't become extinct when half of all infants died before their first birthday, but they have to share the blame for population stress with modern medicine.

'Both males and females have a powerful, primeval urge to breed, but the female instinct can be alarmingly irrational. Considerations such as; is there enough money to support the child? What will happen if the mother gets sick? Will she make a good mother? Would a child born to her be happy when it grows older? Are seldom considered.'

'In this morning's paper there's a piece about a 75 year old Italian woman who's just given birth to twins after an assisted pregnancy. Yuk!'

'Thanks for that titbit, Arthur.'

Reginald looked at Sebastian who nodded thoughtfully, thinking of his own mother. She was one of the reasons that all his life he'd wished he hadn't been born, and perhaps accounted for his none too secret contempt for other humans.

'Men,' Mr. Achilles continued, 'usually only want to breed if the domestic situation is stable and financially secure enough to give the child the essentials for a good life. If the decision to have children were entirely left to men, there would be no overpopulation. Arguments over whether to have children add to all the other strains on marriages.'

'You make marriage sound like a punishment.'

'Does anyone know of a truly happily married couple?'

Silence. Then...

'My sister divorced after fifteen months.'

'My cousin's being sued for maintenance by a slut he reckons he never even screwed.'

'My uncle gave his Mercedes away for a dollar so his wife wouldn't get it when they divorced.'

'Our next door neighbour went mad and shot himself because he loved his kids but his wife was given them and the house when they split, so he had to live in a dump to pay the maintenance.'

'I'm never getting married. It's cheaper to pay for sex when you need it, and there's no strings.'

Another silence, then...

'It looks as if you've done the wise thing, Sir. Got out in time.'

'Indeed I did, Gerald. Indeed I did!'

At interval, before going to see his father, Sebastian called in to the Principal's study to pick up his shorts and the apologies, and then shake the unwilling hands of his attackers who then left the room. 'Keep away from the main entrance and avoid school visitors,' warned the Principal, as Sebastian stuffed his shorts in his knapsack.

'Don't worry, I won't embarrass you.'

'I know.'

Outside Jacobs and Goldberg were waiting.

'Aren't you going to put the bloody things on?'

'No.'

'All that fuss and you fucking choose to stay bare arsed.'

‘I didn’t make a fuss, Mr. Noall did because you were trying to force me to conform to your ideas on how to dress by using violence and making me look ridiculous.’

‘Aren’t you embarrassed?’

‘Why?’

‘Walking around starkers.’

‘No. Why should I be?’

‘Fuck Sanspere, you’re a true weirdo.’

‘Perhaps, but don’t try anything else or you’ll regret it.’

‘You threatening me?’

‘Yes!’ The look in Sebastian’s eyes was cold and both Jacobs and Goldberg felt a flicker of fear. They held out their hands. ‘Peace?’

They shook hands again, this time warily.

‘Actually, you don’t look naked—you’re more like a wild animal. I mean that as a compliment.’

‘Accepted.’

‘I can’t imagine anyone else looking more relaxed naked than dressed. Somehow...it’s...I don’t know, it’s strange; but why do you shave your pubes?’

‘For the same reason you shave your chin. See you.’ And he was off

On arrival at the library he was surprised to see Reginald deep in conversation with Rex Trovert in his office. Rex looked up and waved him in.

‘Reginald’s worried about you, Sebastian. He thinks you might be in danger at home, is it true?’

‘Probably, now Guapo’s done a bunk and I’ve discovered they’ve been secretly photographing me and posting stuff on the Internet.’

A shocked silence.

‘Sebastian! Why haven’t you told me this?’ Reginald was almost angry.

‘Didn’t want to worry you, Reggie, but I’ve told you now.’

‘That does it! I’m sleeping at your place from now on — you need a bodyguard.’

‘Suits me,’ Sebastian grinned.

‘I want both of you to come to dinner tomorrow and you can fill us in on everything.’

‘Us?’ Reginald asked.

‘My partner Fee, and me. She’s much smarter than I am and far more useful in an emergency. Can you come?’

Reginald looked at Sebastian, who nodded. ‘Looking forward to it, Sir.’

‘Call me Rex, if you don’t mind, Reginald. It’s bad enough suddenly learning I have a seventeen year-old son without being addressed by his boyfriend as if I’m a stranger.’

Reginald blushed charmingly. ‘You don’t mind?’

‘Mind?’

‘About Seb and me being...’

‘Far from it! I’m relieved my son has such excellent taste. So, tomorrow straight after school you’ll both cycle here.’ He wrote the address on a scrap of paper and handed it to Sebastian. ‘I’ll get home as soon as I can, but Fee will be expecting you.’

‘Sure thing, Rex, and I’ll make sure Sebastian wears clothes.’

‘Not for us, we’re easy about that.’

‘No, for the fuckwits who lie in wait to bash up handsome young men riding past on their bikes.’

‘Has that happened to you?’ he demanded of Sebastian.

‘This morning, but they’re wishing they hadn’t,’ Sebastian grinned. ‘Reggie taught them a lesson they won’t forget for a while — if they ever do.’

‘You’ve got me worried.’

‘No need, we’re a good team.’

‘I don’t doubt it. Meanwhile, son and heir, remember to put your shorts on before leaving school.’

Sebastian grinned and slipped them on. ‘Better?’

‘No, but safer.’

‘See ya Dad.’

The bell rang for lunch.

‘How about you and me taking the afternoon off, Reggie?’

‘Why?’

‘Our mothers will be joining a hundred other lost souls welcoming gentile Jesus into their bosoms with loud singing and clapping, so my place is free and I thought we might do a reconnoitre to see where cameras are hidden, and anything else that springs to mind.’

‘You’re on!’

No evidence of their morning’s battle remained as they rode swiftly past, and as predicted the Sanspere residence was devoid of life. After downing their cut lunches with a cup of tea they held a whispered conference on the far side of the pool, facing away from the house.

‘We don’t know if the cameras are on, so I reckon we should find the control post and see if anything’s being recorded, then if it’s safe, go looking for them. I imagine they’re only in my bedroom and out here, so it’s safe to look around the rest of the place.’

‘OK, lead on Mac Stuff.’

Leaving no cupboard unopened, no drawer not investigated, no wall untapped and no picture or mirror unturned, they agreed that the guest bathroom, garage, kitchen, pantry, lounge, Sebastian’s bathroom and dressing room were all innocent of guile. That left only Desolé’s suite.

Sebastian hadn’t been in there since he was ten. After he reached puberty his mother said it wasn’t right for a son to visit his mother in her private room, and he had never questioned this, mainly because the less time he spent with her the better, and he had not the slightest desire to enter her lair and risk seeing her without clothes and several layers of makeup.

At first glance it was the mirror mage of Sebastian’s own suite, until Reginald realised the dressing room and bathroom were narrower. No secret entrance presented itself, however, despite assiduous probing, so they entered the bedroom, a stale, overdressed but sombre place with curtains drawn and a heavy odour of age inadequately camouflaged with perfume.

‘Aha!’ Reginald sighed, gazing at a large mirror to the right of the door. ‘I wonder what’s behind this?’

Running his fingers round the edge of the gilt frame he triggered a catch and the mirror swung outwards to reveal a narrow room about two metres wide that ran the full length of both bathroom and dressing room. A light sensor startled them as they entered, bathing the space in soft light that illuminated a long bench on which were several pieces of electronic equipment including a computer tower, monitor and keyboard. On the wall at eye level, seven flat screens gazed blankly. As there was no activity, the cameras obviously weren’t on and they probably hadn’t been seen or heard.

Neatly shelved under the monitors were dozens of DVDs, labelled with date and name. Sebastian picked up one from the left and another from the right.

‘Sebastian,’ he read. ‘It seems this was made when I was twelve. I wonder what’s on it. Probably me wanking or dancing. Who on earth would want to watch a kid playing with himself?’

‘Lots of poor perverts, apparently.’

‘Do you want to watch it, Reggie?’

‘Would it embarrass you?’

‘Of course not. Why would it be more embarrassing than a video of me swimming or playing in the park? This other one is more interesting; it’s labelled ‘Sebastian and Reginald’, and dated last Thursday when you stayed. So, you’re already on candid camera. Would it embarrass you if we watched it?’

Reginald shrugged and blushed. ‘Probably. I’m not as easy as you.’

‘Don’t worry. You said we shouldn’t disturb things so we won’t.’

‘Good. Anyway, I can see the reality tonight.’ He checked out the rest of the bench. ‘The modem and router are standard with wireless connections to both this computer and yours in your bedroom. What sort of Internet connection?’

‘Just a satellite dish, it’ll be years before we get fibre-optics.’

‘There’s a good printer and fax and that’s about all. OK, lets go find the cameras that feed the images.’

‘Hang on. Look at these.’ Sebastian was rifling through a filing cabinet. ‘There’s a file on each of the guys who’ve stayed here. A sort of ledger. Names and dates on one side and amounts of money on the other. Fuck! She got ten thousand dollars up front for keeping Elbert here for a week last year, and another two thousand dollars for every video of us! According to this there were ten of them. He was rather sexy. All the guys were, now I come to think about it. You’d imagine that at least one of the homeless boys saved by Farzdbuk would have been plain, if not downright ugly, wouldn’t you?’

‘Mmm, very odd. But we mustn’t waste time, let’s go.’

Checking that everything was the same as when they entered, they left Desolé’s suite in search of the seven cameras that fed the seven monitors. Sebastian showed Reginald the one looking like a lawn sprinkler, and Reginald discovered another on the far side of the pool, pointing at the spot where Sebastian and his guests usually sunbathed.

Once they knew what they were looking for, the five in the bedroom were embarrassingly easy to see. Glittering eyes on gargoyles on the carved supports of the four-poster bed were tiny lenses. One on the left post at the head, another on the right at the foot of the bed, another in the centre of the foot board, and one in the canopy directly above the centre of the bed. The seventh was embedded in the ornate frame of a mirror screwed to the wall nearest the left side of the bed.

‘Must be a bouncy picture when you’re hard at it,’ Reginald muttered.

‘The posts aren’t attached to the bed, they’re bolted to the floor and the bed’s on castors so it can be rolled out for cleaning,’ Sebastian explained as he demonstrated.

Reginald got down on his hands and knees and inspected the floor. ‘See here? The concrete floor under the bed’s been chipped away and resurfaced in a line from the post to the wall to embed the wires. It’s a neat job. Only someone looking for it would notice. I guess the wires go inside the wall up to the attic and back to the control room.’

‘Knowing this, do you still want to sleep here tonight?’

‘Why not?’

‘You won’t be embarrassed?’

‘Too late for that. Your mother’s probably already earned a couple of thousand bucks with that video of us smooching and jerking off.’ He grinned at Sebastian, drew him into a hug and kissed him on the nose. ‘It’s sort of exciting knowing someone’s turned on by me. I’m beginning to understand you. Makes me feel proud... in a way...’ He stopped, embarrassed at revealing his thoughts.

Sebastian laughed. ‘Tonight we’ll give them a show to remember so they’ll not have a clue we’re on to them.’

‘Sebastian! Are you home already?’ came a high-pitched shout from the entrance.

‘Fuck! That’s Mum! Quick, get your clothes off or she’ll be suspicious.’

They tossed their clothes onto the floor of the dressing room, rolled the bed back into position, and were lying on it reading a school textbook when Desolé poked her head through the door leading to the lounge.

‘Ah, there you are, darling. Hello, Reginald. You’ve left your bikes in front of the door, be a dear and put them in the garage, I’m expecting a delivery and don’t want to pay the insurance if the fellow trips and breaks a leg.’ Her laugh was more a rasp than a tinkle, but clearly she suspected nothing.

‘Sure thing, Mum. Can Reggie stay the night?’

‘Of course, dear. He’s always welcome. We had such a lovely afternoon, your mother and I, Reginald. I feel so refreshed. You must join us one day, both of you. You’d enjoy yourselves. Many nice young people go.’

‘Do I have to wear clothes?’

‘Yes, dear, but it wouldn’t hurt you.’

‘OK, I’ll think about it.’ He turned to Reginald. ‘We’d better go and get your mother’s permission.’

‘Just telephone, Sebastian. You never use your mobile phone; it’s always off when I call you. Like this afternoon.’ Desolé sounded petulant.

‘We have to switch them off during class and I forget to turn the thing on afterwards. I’ll try to remember.’

‘Good boy. I worry if I can’t contact you.’

‘Reggie has some school books we’ll need for tomorrow, and we have to collect his homework.’

‘And a change of underwear,’ Reginald added.

‘Oh, do you wear underpants?’ Desolé said in a tone suggesting that wearing them was slightly perverted. ‘Off you go then, and I’ll make you both a delicious meal.’

‘Lucky we heard her,’ Sebastian laughed as they cycled away. ‘Ha! Did you hear that? She worries about me. Worries I might do a bunk like Guapo and she’d have no more sexy videos, she means.’

Reginald just smiled, thinking about the night to come.

Desolé was telephoning her boss. ‘Mr. Farzdbuk? Sebastian has been sniffing around in my room...I don’t know if he found anything, but... Yes, the school holidays start this Friday... Three weeks...next Monday...Fine, I’ll make sure he’s here.’

Chapter Ten

After school Con drove to the Backpacker Hostel where Guapo had been staying and explained that the young photographer had suffered a fatal accident. He was his nearest relative and had come to collect his things and pay any outstanding charges. The half-dressed young woman on duty unplugged earphones, asked him to repeat himself, shrugged her indifference and, as Con was able to describe in detail the pack and its contents, handed everything over in exchange for the money owed; not bothering to ask for identification or a receipt for the goods claimed.

Back at his place, Con began instructing his lover in the sort of self-defence that used any means available to do the maximum damage possible to one’s assailant in the shortest time with the least chance of being seen. The finest and lightest of Con’s collection of flick knives, a folding truncheon that looked like a fat souvenir ballpoint pen, a set of ultra light, non-metallic knuckle-dusters, four sachets of capsicum dust, and a pair of innocent looking boat-shoes with concealed blades in their toecaps that drew blood with a light kick, were some of the gifts he bestowed on the love of his life, along with several useful tips learned while paying for his university studies by working for his debt collector uncle in Sydney.

Reginald’s mother was as obese as Sebastian’s was scrawny, and of an equally opposite temperament. Although neither woman would admit the truth, it was only their god’s promise of brownie points in the hereafter if they were pleasant to someone they detested, that kept them from scratching each others eyes out whenever they met. Mrs Blackthorn welcomed Sebastian with a garlic scented hug and insisted they wash down a large slice of home made fruit cake with a glass of

fresh milk. It was the first time Sebastian had been inside Reginald's place and the first home made cake he had eaten. It seemed so cosy and homely he felt like crying, but had no idea why.

'I was just saying to your mother, Sebastian, that it would be so lovely if you and Reggie came to church one day and let god into your hearts.'

Sebastian felt like crying again, but for a different reason. Unable to stop himself he smiled brightly and asked, 'And which god would that be, Mrs. Blackthorn?'

She shook her head in confusion. 'What do you mean, dear?'

'Well, humans have worshipped about twenty-thousand different gods over the last hundred thousand years, so I ought to find out which one you worship before I put my foot in it.'

'Why, the one true god.' She said sweetly. 'All the previous gods were merely parts of the one true god. Jesus came and taught us that. We 'Holy Followers of the Invisible Superman in the Sky', worship the god who encompasses all the others in one Supreme Being.'

Sebastian's smile was beatific. 'Gosh! And you think he'd take an interest in me?'

She patted his head. 'Of course he does, Sebastian.' She turned to her son. 'Reggie darling, be a dear and take the dishes to the kitchen.'

Reginald sighed and did as he was told.

'I'm so pleased you are Reginald's friend,' Mrs. Blackthorn said as soon as her son was out of earshot. 'You're so manly, but are you sure you're not cold?'

'No, why?'

Dragging her finger lightly over his firm young chest she giggled, 'You've no shirt and only those teensy weensy shorts. I can...' She simpered coquettishly.

'What?'

'See your...'

'Genitals?'

Mrs Blackthorn's simper became an embarrassed twittering of delight. 'Oh you youngsters—so uncomplicated.'

You can only see the shape, just as I can see the shape of your breasts.'

'She giggled again excitedly, dragged her eyes away from Sebastian's crotch and whispered conspiratorially, 'Sebastian, you're obviously a healthy, normal young man and I need your help. Reggie tells me he's gay. This is of course impossible, but I can't change his mind. Please can't you persuade him to stop this nonsense.'

'Why?'

'It is dangerous for his eternal soul!'

'Dangerous? How?'

'God has decreed that those who fail the tests he sets can never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

'What tests?'

'Everyone is born with a cross to bear—something they must overcome, to prove they deserve to enter the kingdom of heaven. Some people have a tendency to stealing, to violence, to...'

'Obesity?' Sebastian cut in ruthlessly.

'If you are a real friend of Reggie,' Mrs. Blackthorn continued as if he hadn't spoken, 'then please persuade him to change his ways.'

'You don't like him the way he is?'

'Yes! Of course I love him, it's only that...'

'You love your Invisible Superman more?'

'Yes. No!'

'Homosexuality isn't a choice, you know, it's fixed, like eye colour and all the other things that make us individuals.'

'So they say. But that doesn't mean he has to...to do it!'

'And if your god decreed that blue eyes were bad, you'd close your eyes and refuse to see?'

'It's not the same thing.'

'You're right, it isn't. What you are demanding of Reggie is much, much worse. The need to love someone and share sexual pleasure with them is the most powerful human instinct, and the

source of a sense of self worth, happiness and contentment. You want to deprive your son of the joys of loving, sharing and caring for another person. This is the cruellest thing anyone can do to a fellow human! Not only will I have no part in it, but I will do all I can to persuade Reggie that to follow your demands is the path to misery and probable suicide.'

Sebastian turned abruptly and left the house, followed closely by Reginald. They cycled to a park and sprawled over the grass, watching clouds scudding across a yellowing sky.

'It's going to rain; possibly a cyclone.' Sebastian remarked.

'Probably.' Reginald was distracted. 'Sebastian, I listened to what you were saying to Mum just before we left. Thanks. But how on earth did you come up with all that stuff?'

'Internet chat. She thinks I'm 'normal' and can talk you into heterosexuality.'

'I know, she's always on about it.'

'Does her nagging affect you?'

'I try not to let it but...' Reginald shrugged hopelessly.

'I thought *my* mother was bad enough, selling my body and sexuality with videos and photos, but that's nothing compared to yours! I know most people would say what's happened to me is child abuse, but I think it's a hoot; an ego booster as long as the guys are lookers and the wrong people don't see it. But what your mother is doing is psychological abuse of the worst kind! If I'd stayed any longer I'd have been really rude.'

'You were perfect. Thanks. I know I'm not evil and sinful, and I know her god stuff is a load of crap, but it does get me down occasionally.'

'Well, not any more! You and I are never going to be victims of supernatural crap! Together we'll put the world to rights.'

'All of it?'

'Well, our bit at least.'

Desolé was irritated at their lateness but managed to conceal it beneath somewhat scatty chatter and a feigned interest in the boys' doings. Determined to seem totally open and innocent they told her about their day, making it all sound like fun, even the fracas on the street before school. She appeared amused at the idea of her son spending the morning naked, her sole concern being that he hadn't picked up a bug from the seats and had showered properly.

While they secretly congratulated themselves on a sterling performance, Desolé was pleased to have her suspicions confirmed. Sebastian was never normally so open and easy. This sudden candour had to be a facade to cover his snooping around. Well, she'd seen through his little ploy and was now even more delighted at the prospect of his departure. And after a sufficient interval the gangly Reginald could follow suit!

After watching the news Sebastian and Reginald turned on the outside floodlight and went for a swim, horsing around in front of the cameras, then lying on the grass watching the stars, kissing and fondling as if they were being paid for it. After doing their homework they put on an even more explicit show in which each explored every inch of the other, their bodies positioned for the best possible camera angle. Each managed three orgasms—one in a mouth, one in their lover's hand, and one sitting facing each other, erections tied together with red ribbon.

'That was brilliant, Seb,' Reggie panted once the lights were out. 'What do you say we hire ourselves out as performers?'

'You're kinky Reginald Blackthorn, you know that?'

'Mmm. And one day soon I...I want you to fuck me.'

Despite Reginald's apparent enthusiasm, it was obvious to Sebastian that he was not looking forward to the activity with unadulterated delight, so he answered with a vague, 'OK, if you want.'

'Don't you want to?' Reginald asked in ill concealed relief.

'Not especially, probably because I don't want it done to me.'

'But...I thought all gays did it. That you had to fuck up the arse otherwise you aren't really gay?'

'If so, then I'm not really gay. I just like being with you, playing around and sleeping with you. Apart from that I'm not queer.'

Reginald snuggled into Sebastian's side. 'That's a relief. I didn't really want to, but thought I had to, you know, prove I really love you and would do anything for you.'

'Reggie, what I want most in all the world is one friend I can trust to be himself. I don't want someone who is ready to go against his own principles and ideas because he thinks I might want it. If we're both true to ourselves, then nothing can go wrong because we'll always know what the other really wants. And all I want is you, exactly as you are.'

'Like Polonius said to Laertes, "To thine own self be true, it then must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."'

'Sort of, except we have to be false to just about everyone else because the world hates queers. Never forget that. Law changes have made no difference. More and more people are getting the religious disease like our mothers, believing the hatred spewed from pulpits.'

'I can't believe you've thought all this stuff through so well. Like how you spoke to Mum! I feel so ignorant.'

'I spend a fair amount of time alone here on the Internet. It's full of useful information about us.'

'Show me some time. I'm not allowed to go on the Internet at home now, Mum's decided it's a tool of the devil.'

'How does she cope with your father's job? Aren't performing artists and strippers sinners?'

'Not if Dad can make money out of them. Mind you, Dad's hardly ever home any more. At least that means they don't argue all the time. I reckon becoming religious is a bit like furnishing a house, you go to the salesroom and take the bits that suit you and leave the rest.'

On that piece of wisdom they fell asleep, waking far too late to do anything except grab breakfast, tell Desolé they'd be going for a long bike ride after school and wouldn't be back till dark, then heading off to school; Reggie in his usual jeans and tank top, Sebastian in knee-length torn off hipster jeans.

Before assembly Sebastian sought out Con.

'Sorry, Con, I can't make it to wrestling after school, Reggie and I are visiting Papa and his Frau.'

'Fee? She's lovely. How about lunchtime then? I need to talk.'

'That'd be great; I hate missing a session. See you then.'

After a quick check to ensure he wasn't watched, Sebastian let himself into the room under the stairs. Con was already there, stripped and ready.

'What'd you want to talk about,' he asked as he removed his jeans.

'Guapo's gone back to Melbourne to prove to his family he's not dead. I told him to stay there until this mess is sorted. The fact that your mother pretended he had gone with Farzdbuk means he is in danger here. I want to help you guys get to the bottom of it, OK?'

'Sure thing, Con. We might need your muscle.'

'It's yours. Also, I've learned a few tricks over the years that might be helpful.'

'You're brilliant, Con. I'll tell Rex tonight and let you know everything tomorrow. Meanwhile, I guess you're missing Guapo?'

'I'm a total mess! I'm in love, Seb. Can't imagine what on earth I was doing shagging that slut when I could have been enjoying glorious sex with a handsome man. I guess I was just too busy being the alpha butch male to admit the truth about myself.'

'But you suspected?'

'Of course. Why do you think I offered to continue wrestling instruction for just one kid?'

'Sebastian laughed aloud. 'Conias Achilles! You fancy me!'

'Not in that way! I like you enormously. And you seemed, I don't know...sort of vulnerable. I had...have this urge to protect you. Sounds pathetic, but I'm not a chicken stealer. I never thought of sex—although you're very sexy.'

'That's a relief, you're a bit old for me.'

‘Cheeky bastard!’ He laughed self-consciously. ‘I can’t believe I’m talking to one of my students like this.’

‘Why not? Relationships and friendships are important, and if you’re not wanting to make babies surely sex is just a fun thing to do with someone? No different from playing a game of pool or wrestling together. It’s not necessarily anything to do with love, although it’s much more enjoyable doing it with someone you love. I love Reggie and we’re great together, but that doesn’t stop me playing tennis with someone else. Hell, I’m too young to become a boring old husband. I’ve read that...’

‘Stop talking like a text book.’

‘Reggie said a similar thing yesterday when I ripped shit out of his mother for telling him he’d never get to heaven if he was gay. I log on to a dozen forums and these things are discussed all the time.’

‘Even so... I must be going bonkers telling you all my secrets.’

‘Not at all. We’re mates, aren’t we?’

Con was silent, not trusting himself to speak. Guapo had been the first man in his life he could call a real friend—someone he could be completely himself with, and now this strange but wonderful youth was offering his friendship. He swallowed away the lump in his throat and said softly, ‘Sebastian, to be your friend would give me great pleasure.’

‘So formal, Con? Surely you knew I liked you?’

‘Yeah, but I assumed we were just wrestling mates. I didn’t dare hope for friendship.’

‘I’ve had only one real friend in my life,’ Sebastian said reflectively, ‘and never expected to make another. And then...’ he stopped, wondering why tears were springing. ‘It’s just that...I’ve realised that you’re soft as well as tough and... and you care for me and I don’t know why, but I care for you too. I trust you and... Oh fuck! This is getting sentimental. Let’s wrestle.’

Refreshed by the exercise, there was just time for a quick wash in the basin before the bell for afternoon school.

The ride to Rex Trovert’s house in the hills above Mooroolbool tested their thighs as it was uphill most of the way.

‘Be great coasting down on the way home,’ Reginald called over his shoulder, noticing that Sebastian seemed to be struggling. ‘Come on kid, I thought you were fit.’

With a sudden spurt Sebastian passed him and arrived at the gate first.

‘Wassamatter, old man? Too much for you?’

A short driveway under Poinciana trees led to a blank wall and a heavy wooden door. They knocked and it opened to reveal a slight woman in a simple flowered shift. Her eyes were black, hair a mass of loose black curls, arms and legs slim, and skin so dark if she stood in deep shade she’d be invisible. A set of perfect white teeth smiled and she welcomed them inside.

‘Rex said the one with the fewest clothes would be my step son, so I guess you’re Sebastian, and you’re Reginald?’

‘Right first time.’

‘I’m Fee. Fancy a cool drink after that ride? You’re very fit, the pair of you!’

‘Thanks, a drink would be great.’

The small entrance hall opened to a large lounge room with windows on each side. On the right a view across trees to the city and sea several kilometres away. Opposite, French doors were open onto a private pool and trees. Not another house to be seen. The furniture was old; not antiques but good second hand stuff built to last. Several leather armchairs, a rattan-backed sofa sprinkled with colourful cushions. Several bluish Afghan carpets adorned the varnished wooden floor and white walls were almost covered in paintings—abstract and representational, European and Indigenous.

‘Come through to the patio, it’s cooler.’

‘You’ve a shade cloth over it, that’s what we need. The water gets far too hot in summer. Can we swim?’

‘Of course.’

‘Need togs?’

‘No. Here are your drinks.’ She handed each a long glass filled with fruit juice, which they downed, then stripped and dived in.

‘Ah! Cool at last. I thought I was going to melt by the time we got here. Come and join us, Fee.’

‘I’m feeling shy.’

‘Of us? Two queers? I sure hope not. Hurry up or I’ll come and get you.’

Fee shrugged off her shift revealing a slim, boyish figure, and dived cleanly into the pool, swimming two lengths under water before surfacing.

‘You’re like a fish.’

‘Pisces is my sign.’

‘Mine too. Are you also left handed?’

‘Ambidextrous.’ She turned to Reginald with a shy smile. ‘Reginald, you haven’t said a word since you arrived. What are your interests?’

Once started on his passion Reginald chatted happily about the local flora and fauna until Rex arrived and joined them in the pool. By the time they reluctantly climbed out, Sebastian had learned that his great grand father was a Kanaka, kidnapped from the Pacific Islands and forced to work in the cane fields as an indentured labourer. Fee had been born in the bush two hundred kilometres north west of Camooweal. A scholarship to Brisbane Girls Grammar led to university where she majored in IT and learned to live among white people without becoming too depressed. She and Rex had met at university during an anti racist rally and, unable to discover anything important on which they disagreed, they moved in together; refusing to marry because they were unwilling to be part of a social system from which, despite academic and other successes, they both felt alienated.

‘We stay together because we want to, not because we’ve signed a contract,’ Rex said softly.

‘And we don’t want kids because there are quite enough already and the future doesn’t look too hot. But you’re already here,’ he said responding to Sebastian’s worried look. ‘So we’ve got the best possible arrangement. The joy of an intelligent son without the guilt of having bred.’

During dinner Sebastian’s solitary life was laid bare. Speaking distractedly as if he were talking about someone else, he told about his irritable mother of whom he was so ashamed, never inviting anyone home, his rebellious nudity and sexually promiscuous behaviour that had been encouraged by his mother, who made a healthy profit from exploiting it.

When questioned, he swore he had no idea where the money came from to buy the house or to sustain their life style, especially as Desolé was only the part time manager of a small employment agency.

Rex and Fee remained sympathetically silent, letting Sebastian choose his own pace to speak about Jack and the ‘guests’, the private hospital where they recovered and Sebastian’s health was tested monthly, and to wonder why, despite becoming friends, none of the young men had contacted him after leaving. Finally they learned about Guapo’s escape, Desolé’s pretence that he was with Mr. Farzdbuk, and the discovery of the porno magazines and Internet videos fed by hidden cameras.

‘If I hadn’t met Reginald at high school, and Mr. Noall hadn’t been so understanding, I’d be dead by now. I was a weird suicidal mess with a mad mother and no friends. Several times I bashed my head against a wall till I lost consciousness. Once I drank kitchen cleaner and couldn’t speak for weeks from throat burns, that’s why my voice is sort of husky.’

‘Sexy,’ murmured Reginald.

Sebastian grinned happily. ‘And then, by a pure fluke I learned I have a father after all, and he is the nicest teacher in school.’

‘I thought Con Achilles held that position.’

‘He’s a beaut guy and a good friend, but not father material. By the way, he knows all about me and the situation, and wants to help us. He’s in love with Guapo you see, and he can’t come back till it’s settled.’

‘You mean... Con’s gay?’

‘Yeah. He dumped his fiancé when he met Guapo.’

‘This is excellent news! He’s one tough guy! Just the muscle we might need.’

‘Reginald’s a force to be reckoned with too, you know.’

Reginald blushed.

‘He saved me from a bashing the other day. Nearly killed the blokes, and is staying with me from now on.’

Reginald blushed and stuttered. ‘Yeah, well...I didn’t tell you, Seb, but after what you said to Mum she reckons you’re a bad influence and told me I was never to speak to you again.’

‘So, what’re you doing here?’

‘When I said she could take a running jump she gave me an ultimatum; either stop being gay or get out. So I got out.’

His three listeners gazed in astonishment and Reginald’s bravado began to slip. He couldn’t stop a trembling lip so turned away to hide what he feared was his weakness.

Sebastian grabbed hold of Reginald’s shoulders and hugged him. ‘Reggie! That’s terrible! You should’ve told me! Where are your things?’

‘“I stormed out with only my school books.”’

‘No worries, you can have my clothes and we’d already decided you’d be staying with me.’

‘You haven’t got any clothes,’ Reginald said with a sad, wry smile.

‘Then you can have some of mine because from now on this is also your home, Reginald,’ Rex said softly. ‘You’re as welcome here as Sebastian, so that’s settled.’ He turned to Fee. ‘We now have two sons.’

‘Much better than one,’ she said with a huge grin. And there’s a double bed for you both in the spare room. So no worries.’

Reginald swallowed and managed a smile.

‘Right,’ said Fee brightly, ‘now it’s time to make a list of what we don’t know, and ideas for action. Rex, pencil and paper. Reginald, check his spelling.’

‘Yes, Ma-am.’

‘We need answers to these questions: What happened to the young men? Why were the heavies who beat up and imprisoned Guapo, in the van with Farzdbuk when they arrived at Sebastian’s place? What were they planning for him? Where is this hospital? Who runs it? Who were the people at the farmhouse when Sebastian and Guapo arrived there after their weekend hike? Why was Guapo instructed to have sex with one? What other activities are they involved in?’

‘Hang on! I’m getting behind.’

‘And you’re a librarian,’ laughed Reginald, astonished at his daring. It was a novel experience for him to treat adults as equals.

‘Does your mother have a mobile phone?’ Fee asked.

‘She bought one of the simplest models but still couldn’t work out how to use it; forgot to keep it charged, and hated being available every minute of the day to whoever felt like phoning; although she phones me any time she wants—so I turn mine off. That really bugs her. Also, she likes to think about things before answering and reckons on the phone people demand instant decisions and responses. We’ve a landline that goes to the answering machine so she can listen to callers and decide whether to respond.’

‘Must be hard for her boss and staff.’

‘Everyone emails her. When she’s home the Internet’s always on and when an email arrives a little alarm sounds. It’s efficient and it means she has a written record of everything.’

‘Sounds sensible,’ Fee nodded. ‘I also don’t like being available all the time, so I switch the phone off unless I want to use it. What sort of Internet connection?’

‘Satellite to router and ethernet to computer; wireless to mine.’

‘What are the seven monitors connected to?’

‘The computer.’

‘So either she records directly onto the computer, then cuts DVDs to send on, or the ones you saw are copies for herself, and she sends the videos directly over the internet. Where does she work?’

‘In an employment agency for young women, on James Cook highway. It’s called Gopher Girls.’

‘Got that, Rex?’

He nodded.

‘What employment does Desolé find for the young women, and where’s Farzdbuk’s hospital?’

‘No idea about the girls, but the hospital’s south about ten kilometres, then turn into the hills. I’ll draw you a map.’

‘What’s it called and why does he need a hospital?’

‘As far as I know it doesn’t have a name, we just call it Farzdbuk’s hospital, and why he has it I’ve no idea.’

‘Very suspicious.’

‘But they do a good job on the guys.’

‘After first damaging them,’ Reginald said bluntly.

‘Indeed!’ Rex agreed.

‘What’s your mother’s email address?’

‘DS at ourserver dot net. She reckons she’s part French and if you say D S like the French do, it means goddess.’

‘For years the largest Citroen was called the DS for that reason,’ Rex volunteered, but no one was listening as Fee had jumped to her feet.

‘Come with me.’ She led the way to her office where Reginald gasped.

‘Fee! All this electronic gear! What’s your job?’

‘I freelance for several banks; annoying hackers.’

‘D’you work for the cops too?’

‘And have them come one night and beat me up because I’m black so must be a dumb crook? No thanks.’

‘What’re you going to do?’

‘Create a fake, no-reply, untraceable email address, so I can send an attachment to Desolé that when opened will instruct her computer to send a copy of everything she uploads or downloads to my computer.’

‘A virus?’

‘Not really, it won’t harm her computer.’

‘Can I watch?’

‘Of course.’ Her hands flew over the keys and she sat back. ‘What do you reckon?’

‘Ever-young Cosmetics Ltd.’ Reginald read. ‘Dear Desolé Sanspere, we are delighted to inform you that you have been selected to take part in a six-month free trial of the entire range of our beauty care cosmetics. Simply open the attachment and follow the link to claim five hundred dollars worth of exclusive crèmes and lotions. Sincerely, Esmé d’Antin, Senior Executive Officer, The Phoebe Foundation of Beauty.’

‘Not bad,’ Sebastian laughed. ‘She uses tonnes of makeup. Does the link work?’

‘No, all she’ll get is a message telling her the address can’t be found.’ Fee smiled as she attached the link and pressed send. ‘Let’s hope she reads it soon.’

‘When will we know?’

‘When this computer starts beeping. That’ll mean she’s opened the link and there’s incoming information.’

‘How many computers have you?’

‘Two powerful ones for my work, a laptop for private.’

‘Sorry to interrupt,’ Rex broke in, ‘but it’s already dark and you don’t want to arrive home suspiciously late. Stick your bikes in the back of the wagon and I’ll drive you home. There’s no moon and you’ve no lights on your bikes.’

‘When can we come back?’

‘The welcome mat’s out twenty-four/seven. From today this house is yours. And the minute this is cleared up you’re both coming to live with us. School holidays start on Friday and we’ll work solidly on it then. OK?’

Sebastian gave Rex an impulsive hug, and Fee a kiss on the cheek then ran from the room before they could see his tears. It was all too good. Something was going to go wrong. Nothing good ever lasted. He was silent all the way home, leaving Reginald to talk quietly with Rex and agree to return on Saturday with Sebastian to stay for a few days, telling Desolé they'd be going camping.

Chapter Eleven

At school the following morning Sebastian told Con Achilles about their meeting with Rex and Fee, and invited him to the meeting the following Saturday morning. They decided to continue wrestling during the holidays at school because Con's place wasn't suitable. Con had already received eight emails from Guapo and was impatient to get the problem solved so they could be together again.

When she heard that Reginald's mother had kicked him out, Desolé was at first pleased, as that confirmed her dislike of Mrs. Blackthorn, however when she realised Reginald would be in the house permanently she became worried. His presence would create complications the following Monday when Farzdbuk came to take Sebastian away. The proposed camping expedition too was impossible. They wanted to stay away for a week and refused to listen to her argument in favour of going away for just a few days, followed by another few days the following week. She'd have to contact Jack. He'd know what to do. The boys couldn't, or wouldn't, even tell her where they were going. Just a vague mention of up the ranges to the lakes, then they'd see where the spirit moved. It really was too much!

Fee's computer had been busy. A few minutes after Rex returned from taking Reginald and Sebastian home, Desolé had opened the attachment. During the evening she received notifications of posts from several blog/chat sites devoted to discussing the prevention of the signs of ageing. Fee visited the sites, noting that Desolé asked those present if they'd heard of the Phoebe Beauty Foundation, but didn't confess her problem when no one had.

The following day Desolé sent an email to Jack, asking him to contact her urgently about Sebastian's proposed camping holiday. An email was received from 'F' confirming early Monday morning.

On Thursday, Fee's computer recorded the passwords and followed Desolé's visit to a secure Internet site to which she uploaded two ten minute video clips of Sebastian and Reginald making love. After guiltily watching them, Rex and Fee enjoyed the best sex they'd had for years.

Friday was spent searching the contents of the site to which Desolé had sent the videos. It was a virtual wholesale 'warehouse' where purveyors of porn could view excerpts and buy copies for resale. The selection was wide; from hard-core heterosexual couplings with extreme violence to vanilla gay and lesbian. No child porn.

The hospital was not to be found on the Internet, was not in any list of local or state government health services, nor listed under private hospitals. 'Google Maps' showed the roofs of one large and one smaller single storied buildings plus a couple of sheds in a clearing among trees, but no details were visible. She printed four copies of the road map.

The name Farzdbuk rang no bells anywhere, so was almost certainly a nom de guerre.

Jack Abacus also failed to register on any of the usual searches. Another fake name. The plot thickened. It was a case of no information being confirmation of shady dealings.

Sebastian had mentioned Guapo's suspicions about the luxury hotel at the northern end of the Esplanade, so Fee spent most of Friday in the park opposite, noting the unusual number of oriental business men arriving and departing as well as several girls who had to be prostitutes and a few handsome young men who stayed for an hour and then departed. She also noted someone being

taken away by a private ambulance with no exterior markings. She wrote down the make and registration number and returned home.

Success! The ambulance was registered to Arnold S Semble who had three bank accounts in his name with deposits varying from hundreds of thousands of dollars to mere hundreds as he made large withdrawals or deposits on an irregular basis. Where the money went to, or came from Fee had so far been unable to learn. Mr. Semble had made a dozen trips to China and Singapore in the past year. According to City Council records, he had a permit to renovate the derelict WWII hospital compound and use it as a postoperative recuperation and rehabilitation centre. At the moment, though, the work hadn't been started and it was uninhabited except for an occasional caretaker.

Three of Desolé's emails that evening seemed interesting. One to J: *Urgent. Come and convince Sebastian not to go camping.* Another to F: *Problem. Sebastian's friend is staying here permanently.* The third an hour later from F: *Both! First thing Monday morning.*

Reginald was not impressed by Jack when he arrived on Friday evening; an ageing slime ball in his opinion. Sebastian, having recently become friends with Rex and Con, now realised Jack was rather ordinary and common. It was Desolé's hysteria that persuaded the boys to postpone their camping trip until the following Tuesday to be available for Mr. Farzdbuk on Monday. Oozing relief, Desolé and Jack assured them the meeting would be greatly to their advantage if they played their cards right. They happily agreed to their going on day trips on Saturday and Sunday, as long as they returned home each night.

The following Saturday morning, Sebastian and Reginald arrived in time for breakfast at Rex and Fee's. Con arrived an hour later. A lengthy discussion about the possible dangers of Farzdbuk's Monday meeting with the boys, failed to convince them not to attend.

'Come on, Rex, what can he do?'

'Plenty if he brings heavies.'

'But why?'

'Who knows? That's why I'll be outside watching,' Con stated firmly. 'Have your mobile ready and speed dial me if you're worried. No need to say anything, I'll take any call as an SOS.'

'Excellent, Con. It'll be a weight off my mind.'

'Mine too, Rex. It's thanks to Sebastian that I'm now a complete human.' He grinned and ruffled Sebastian's hair.

Fee was congratulated on her research and they agreed the first priority was to check out Farzdbuk's hospital.

'OK, let's go, Rex said cheerfully taking his car keys and heading for the door.'

'Hold it!' Con said rather more sharply than he intended. 'If I'm going to be part of this enterprise, then once we've decided on a course of action and have left a place of safety, I'm in charge and you'll all do exactly as I say, no exceptions. Any objections?'

Silence.

'I'm not trying to be rude, but you guys have obviously no idea who or what you're up against.'

More silence.

'I've brought my video camera to record anything interesting.'

'I'll bring mine too.'

'Good, Rex. Now, have we a first aid kit? Drinking water? Mobile phones? Insect repellent? Do we all know each other's numbers? If we split up what's the procedure? Sebastian says the place is surrounded by scrubby forest; that means snakes and stones and lantana and thorn bushes. Rubber thongs, Sebastian and Reginald, are not the sort of footwear for a secret reconnaissance mission. Do any of you really want your legs scratched and bleeding? If you're forced to crawl on your belly, Sebastian, don't you think a shirt would help? And if we're trying to avoid standing out like dog's balls shouldn't we wear clothes that blend in? Your magenta and orange shift is delightful, Fee, ideal if we were lost at sea. Your turquoise Tank top, Reginald is equally outstanding.'

Another embarrassed silence and sheepish grins.

'I've two pairs of khaki overalls in the boot of my car, one each for the youngsters. Your trainers are fine, Reginald, but Sebastian, you'll have to borrow some stout shoes. Got any, Rex?'

'No problem. And I suppose Fee and I had better swap the fashion gear for something as downmarket as your baggy britches and jacket?'

'Exactly. You're grinning, Fee?'

'Mmm... only because I agree totally and feel stupid. What you say makes perfect sense, give us two minutes?'

Five minutes later they were sensibly dressed, splashed with insect repellent, and each carried a bottle of water and a bag of mixed dried fruit and nuts. Rex had found and replenished the first aid kit in the Holden.

'We'll take my wagon,' Rex said decisively. 'Sebastian in front with me as he knows the way, and...'

'What happens if the wagon breaks down, get's bogged, is vandalised or suffers some other calamity? We'll be stuck thirty k's from civilisation with a long walk home, possibly being chased by madmen with silenced handguns.'

Con wasn't joking and a chill settled over the five would-be sleuths.

'It's not a joke, is it?' Rex said quietly.

'Sure isn't! We know they're involved in prostitution, pornography, and the abduction of young men. All things worth killing for if they imagine they might be in danger. I can't stress enough the difficulties, or the need for caution.'

'I feel stupid.'

'Better stupid than dead, Rex. Now, am I in charge? Will you do exactly as I say if there's a problem, no questions or arguments?'

There was a grimness to his face and voice that sent a chill down his companions' spines.

'Yes, but I think it would be better if you stayed behind, Fee.'

'No way! Sexist pig! Con! Tell him I'm as good as any man.'

'She's as good as any man, Rex. However, it's an excellent idea to have someone manning the command post and as you're the least fit, it has to be you.'

'But...'

'If we suddenly need support, we have to know there's someone here who can get it to us. It might be equipment, transport... anything. If we split up and lose each other, you're the person who can tell us where the others are. We'll report in every hour on the hour.'

Rex looked nervously at his partner. 'I'm frightened to lose you.' His eyes were moist.

'You won't. There's tracking and hiding and subterfuge in my blood. I'll be extra careful and my Mazda's ready for you to use for back up if we need it.' She kissed her man sweetly and they hugged.

'We have no idea what emergency might arise. We need you here, Rex.'

Rex grudgingly agreed and the brave little band set out, Sebastian and Con in the Toyota, Reginald and Fee in the Holden.

Sebastian found the place easily enough, a simple farm gate between rough stone pillars on the left of the narrow unsealed road. Con drove past without slowing down and both cars stopped about a kilometre further on at a 'Y' junction.

They all got out and looked around like tourists.

'See anything as we drove past?'

'Nothing but the gate and a track,' Reginald replied. 'No traffic, no joggers, no animals... it's very quiet. Not much life of any description.'

'Old pineapple farming land. Poisonous after twenty years of sprays. Not good for anything except houses,' Rex reckoned.

'No good for houses either,' Reginald said dourly. 'Poison residues make people sick if they breathe the dust or eat food produced on it.'

‘Thanks, Reginald,’ Con grinned. ‘You’ll have noticed the swamp we passed; watch out for mosquitoes because there’s dengue and Ross River virus around here. Insect repellent helps, but keep alert.’

‘Thanks, Con. What now?’

‘We’ll take the left fork and look for somewhere to hide the vehicles, then go for a wander.’

Another five hundred metres and they were able to drive off the track into a small roadwork quarry where the cars would be invisible from passing traffic. After checking the mobile phone ring tones were turned to vibration, they crossed the track.

‘Where’s the hospital from here, Sebastian?’

‘The buildings are hidden from the road in...’ He consulted his map and Con’s compass before pointing. ‘That direction.’

A few metres away from the road they climbed through a rusty five strand barbed wire fence, and after fifteen minutes of silently pushing through lantana, bush lawyer and rough scrub, saw the outline of buildings through the trees.

Fee phoned Rex to tell him their progress.

‘Remember to keep out of sight,’ Con warned. ‘Fee and Sebastian go left, Reginald and I’ll go right. This is just a reconnoitre to get the lay of the land. Look for building entrances, tracks away from the buildings, note the number, size and possible function of all buildings and always be aware of your escape route in case you are seen and have to make a run for it. If you think you can make it, get to the car and take off, otherwise, lie low and call Rex and me to tell us what’s happening. We’ll do the same.’

An uneventful two hours later they met back at the cars and quietly returned the way they’d come.

Rex had lunch ready and afterwards recorded their findings in a folder. When everyone had finished he read it.

‘There’s no obvious security at the gate, but after the first bend there’s a weighted barrier padlocked in place that Sebastian agrees is always there when he goes for a check-up. All buildings are concrete block construction with corrugated iron roofs. The main building is large and looks well maintained. The entrance is rather grand with wide steps and stone balustrades leading up to a portico and wide glass doors.

‘Outside there’s a flourishing flowerbed and parking for a dozen cars. All windows are barred front and back. There’s a door at the rear of the main building, and another at the northern end leading under a covered way to smaller building in the same style. All windows are frosted glass, and barred. There are ventilators on the roof. Three other buildings seem to be a garage, a workshop, and a pump house with a back-up electricity generator.

‘There’s also a large, industrial sized incinerator with a high chimney, perhaps it also heats water, or was originally used to dispose of dangerous hospital waste. A modern improvement is an impressive array of solar electric panels on the roof. Presumably the batteries and other equipment for it will be in one of the sheds.

‘The place appears uninhabited, but there are indications of frequent vehicle traffic on the driveway. The buildings are located in a small clearing and although there are several excellent places to hide surveillance cameras, the distance to any useful monitoring spot is too far; we’ll have to rely on being physically present.’

Rex turned to Sebastian. ‘What’s it like inside?’

‘Neat and clean. The foyer’s like a real hospital. To the right are half a dozen private rooms with hospital beds and all the usual equipment. The left corridor is spotlessly clean with tiled floors, all polish and chrome and smelling of disinfectant. The surgery where I get my check-up is neat and clean and there’s a cupboard full of stuff like you see in the work area of pharmacies. Bottles and little boxes and all that stuff. Sorry I can’t compare it with other surgeries, Doctor Reins is the only doctor I’ve ever visited.’

‘Are there any nurses?’

‘Either Mark or Ashok. No one else.’

‘Guapo said there were only male nurses,’ Con said quietly.

‘Have you seen any other rooms that might have a medical purpose?’ Fee asked.

‘A couple of years ago I poked my head into one of the other rooms on the opposite side of the corridor. It was a real operating theatre, a huge overhead light, gas bottles, trays for instruments... just like the TV programs. Ashok was nervous when he found me. He’d forgotten to lock it and I promised not to mention I’d seen it. That’s about it, I’m sorry.’

‘Sorry? You’re been brilliant. We’re no longer flying blind. Time to head off again?’

With nods and nervous mutters of agreement they headed for the cars.

Back at the hospital that afternoon there was a large car parked in front of the main entrance. Fee and Sebastian had just concealed themselves when they heard more vehicles. A car sped up the drive and parked. A fat man in a suit and another in a white coat got out and spoke to a couple of men in white trousers and jackets who came out and waited on the steps. They all went inside. A minute later the same ambulance Fee had seen in the city arrived and disgorged two more men in white coats who removed a gurney from the back and wheeled it and its occupant up the steps and through the main entrance.

The driver returned, someone closed and locked the main doors, and the ambulance drove round to the garage.

‘Those two nurses are Mark and Ashok; the other two are Farzdbuk and Doctor Reins. I’ve never seen the guys from the ambulance,’ Sebastian whispered as Fee stopped filming.

After another hour when there was no other activity they slipped back through the scrub and made their way to the cars.

Meanwhile, Reginald and Con were observing the northern end of the building and videoed two men in white overalls walk across the covered way with an empty gurney, enter the building with the frosted glass barred windows and, after a great deal of shouting, return across to the surgery with a body on the gurney that didn’t move, but didn’t seem dead. The frosted glass building hadn’t been empty on their first visit after all; it had held either an ill person or a prisoner. And what had the shouting been about?

‘Curiouser and curiouser,’ Con whispered. ‘That building is a prison! I’ll stay watching until dark. You and Sebastian had better get off home before his mother becomes suspicious.’

‘Are you sure you’ll be all right?’

‘Sure. Now get along. I’ll ring in every hour to keep Rex up to date.’

Chapter Twelve

‘What’ll I wear?’

‘Whatever you like.’

‘Are you sure there’s no dress code?’

‘At the straight clubs there is, but not at Phallus Palace or Hole in One. No one would come if there was.’

‘Which one are we going to?’

‘Phallus. It’s the classiest and most guys are young. Rodney only performs at the ‘Hole’ midweek for old guys who reckon it’s too noisy at weekends.’

Desolé was not feeling generous, but common sense dictated she keep her son happy so she lent him her car and pressed fifty dollars into his hand on condition he didn’t drink or take drugs. That was no penance as he was so terrified of losing his self-control he had no plans to indulge in

anything stronger than water. Reginald felt the same for different reasons. He'd been on a health kick since starting to take karate seriously three years before, so intoxicants held no appeal to him either.

They found a parking spot about five hundred metres from the club in Lake Street and raced each other through the warm evening to a doorway at the bottom of a staircase. The doorman, in cut off jeans, too many rings through too many parts of his face, and an abbreviated tank top, waved them up and their money was swapped for a purple stamp of a phallus on the back of their hands.

Inside the noise was heart stopping rather than merely loud. The bass turned up enough to bring down the walls of Jericho. Most guys were in board shorts and tank tops, or jeans and no tops, so Sebastian's skimpy running shorts and naked everything else attracted a fair bit of positive attention, as did Reginald in nothing but Sebastian's pale blue Lycra wrestling gear that was stretched almost to transparency.

In vain, however, did their admirers ogle and ask for dances. Sebastian and Reginald had eyes only for each other, and the energetic combination of karate moves with Sebastian's extraordinary flexibility proved such a winner everyone stopped dancing to watch. Their innocent confusion when they realised they'd been dancing alone in the glare of a spotlight, drew spontaneous laughter and applause.

Unaware of the magnitude of the gesture in a gay club where genuine compliments are as rare as hens' teeth, they just grinned and escaped to the shadows where a middle-aged man as lean and tall as Reginald approached and, using sign language as it was impossible to hear, indicated they should follow.

Inside the relatively quiet office Reginald's father introduced himself to Sebastian and eyed both young men critically. 'Why'd you bother wearing clothes?'

Reginald grinned nervously. 'We had to walk half a kilometre from the car.'

His father sniffed and gazed reflectively at Sebastian. 'So, you're the young man my son has ditched his parents to live with?'

Sebastian could think of nothing to say. Mr. Blackthorn was giving mixed messages. He looked pleasant enough—almost handsome, but seemed angry. And Reginald was apparently too nervous to be any help.

Mr. Blackthorn changed tack and gave a wry smile. 'That's the first time anyone's been applauded for dancing in this place. Queers are so fucking jealous of each other they'd sooner stick a knife into someone than tell them they're good at anything. Mind you, it was probably your gear, or lack of it, that triggered it.' He reached into his desk and brought out some money. 'Here, the boss's son doesn't have to pay to get into this hell hole.'

Reginald accepted it gratefully. 'Thanks, Dad. Is Mum angry?'

'No idea, Son, I haven't been home since you left. You gave me the courage to get out permanently.'

'I had no idea... Where are you staying?'

'In Geraldine's flat in Whitfield.'

'Who's Geraldine?'

'The woman I've been more or less living with for the last five years. The woman I love.'

'You're joking! I had no idea. What's Mum doing?'

'Praying to her omnipotent god for help, I imagine. The house is rented so he'd better get a wriggle on as the rent's due next week. Anyway, here's my address and you've got my mobile number, so call me if you need anything. Now your mother's no longer in the way we can start to communicate. I just hope it isn't too late?' He looked questioningly at his son, who smiled shyly.

'No, Dad, it isn't. And...thanks. But... I'm still not sure how you feel about me being gay; we've somehow never spoken about anything really important.'

'Being gay's not important, Reg. Being an independent man, *that's* important; and that's what you are so I'm proud of you! Now get on out there and enjoy yourselves. Rodney's on stage in a minute and I know you don't want to miss him.'

The lights dimmed as they returned to the dance floor, a spot played on the tiny stage and two burly bouncers carried in an average sized sports bag, placing it carefully in the spotlight before sauntering off.

The bag twitched and everyone laughed. A sudden tearing sound and it opened and Rodney, in overalls and boots unwound and stretched languorously. It seemed impossible that he had fitted in such a confined space. His stretches became sensuous and increasingly sexy as one of the bouncers returned to pick up the bag. Rodney attempted to stop him but he pulled it away, and with it the sleeves of Rodney's overalls. Apparently angry, Rodney hurled himself at the powerfully built man only to be tossed aside, minus the rest of his overalls which were now also in the hands of the bouncer.

In boots and Speedos Rodney looked superb and held everyone enthralled with his incredible flexibility until after rolling himself into a ball he stopped and twitched as though in trouble. It looked as if he'd tied himself in a knot and was unable to extricate himself; legs over his neck and arms behind his back.

The bouncer came on again, made a show of trying to untangle him, took off the boots and ripped off the trick Speedos that had been velcroed, not sewn, exposing a vulnerable but exquisitely formed anus. Tossing the boots and Speedos aside he picked up the tight bundle of flesh and carried it around for everyone to see, then tossed it high and let go. By the time he hit the floor Rodney was on his feet and everyone cheered and started clapping in unison.

This was the signal for Rodney's *pièce de résistance*. He did a perfect handstand, the bouncer took hold of one toe to keep him balanced, then, taking his entire weight on his right arm Rodney jerked himself off with his left hand, spraying cum into his own mouth for the grand finale.

Sebastian and Reginald joined him in the tiny dressing room a few minutes later and congratulated him. He was pleased, although he reckoned Sebastian had almost upstaged him in his outfit. He gave Reginald a hug and invited them back to his place. It was nearly midnight, they stank of smoke, were a bit sick of the too loud music and the increasingly spaced out and drunk or drugged guys hitting on them, so followed Rodney's car to his flat.

Rodney made them coffee and had them laughing with tales of the bizarre places and people where he'd stripped the previous week.

'Have you ever worked in the hotel at the north of the Esplanade?'

Rodney gave Reginald an odd look. 'Why do you ask?'

'We saw a few young guys going in and out and wondered if they were rent boys.'

'I'm not a rent boy. Nor a prostitute. I don't fuck or let myself get fucked. I'm a stripper, creative dancer and as pure as the driven snow.'

'Of course, that's obvious. But have you performed there?'

'As it happens, yes.' Rodney paused as he remembered. 'It was about six months ago. There was some sort of celebration. An old bloke had had an operation and threw a party for about a dozen men — Chinese, mostly, I think, but could have been Vietnamese or Filipino... I'm hopeless at that sort of thing. They and their boys seemed pleased with my display.'

'Boys?'

'They all had young guys sitting with them. Obviously rent boys and very young. No one over twenty. One kid could have been no more than twelve. Smart little cunt. Told me to fuck off when I suggested it was a dangerous occupation. Anyway, none of my business.'

'Who paid you?'

'A great fat lump. Fartboy or some equally repellent name.'

'Farzdbuk?'

'Probably. Why?'

'We think he's doing more than organising parties. Seems he's into other even less salubrious activities.'

'Do tell.'

'Don't know anything yet, but we'll keep you informed.'

'Do that and come and see me during the holidays, I'm awake and home most afternoons.'

‘Unless you’re at the swimming pool ogling young men.’

‘There’s been nothing worth ogling since you electrified the place with your pouch. Tell you what, join me next Wednesday on stage at the ‘Hole in One’. We’ll do a double act.

‘And give them all heart attacks?’ Reginald laughed.

‘What do you reckon?’ Sebastian turned to Reginald.

‘Go for it!’

‘We’ll come round to your place Wednesday afternoon to confirm, OK?’

‘Excellent.

The following morning they cycled again to Rex and Fee’s in time for breakfast, during which they regaled their audience with their night at the Phallus Palace and Rodney’s performance. Everyone was pleased about Reginald’s warming relationship with his father.

Con was already there, having stayed the night after reporting to Rex and Fee when he returned after darkness fell. He summarised for the boys.

‘After you guys left nothing happened for several hours. As the sun set I realised there was a light on a room in the left wing, about where Sebastian said he saw the operating theatre. Then the back door light came on and two guys came out carrying a heavy bundle which they took to the incinerator, dowsed it in kerosene and set alight, feeding the roaring flames for about half an hour with great logs of wood. It got really hot, even the steel chimney glowed red. After the first waft of kerosene, there was a brief smell of burning but then with the intense heat there was no smoke or smell, just a dull roar.

‘When the fire died down they raked through it to make sure it was all burned, then closed it down and returned to the building where another room was now lit. The large car with Farzdbuk and the doctor left, but the ambulance guys and the two nurses stayed. By midnight I realised there’d be nothing more to see so I came back.’

‘And they didn’t return whoever was in the stretcher to the other building — the prison?’

‘Nope.’

‘I feel sick.’

‘Hang on, Sebastian, don’t jump to conclusions. That person could be recuperating in the hospital part with the other fellow who was wheeled in on a gurney.’

‘Yes. But somehow...’

‘When are we going out there again?’

‘Straight after breakfast, Reginald,’ Fee said quietly. ‘But this time I’ll be staying home and Rex will go with you.’

They drove further along the track to conceal the cars in case someone had seen them in the disused quarry the day before. It was a much more cautious and nervous little band that again set off through the scrub. Something odd was happening in the hospital and it didn’t look good.

All was quiet when they settled in their positions. They could hear a radio announcer and music. At mid morning one of the ambulance men came out and hung washing on the line. It looked like the sort of green overalls worn in operating theatres. At noon the doctor drove up and went inside, staying for an hour before leaving in a hurry. The watchers retreated into the bush to eat their cut lunch and confer, deciding to stay until dark.

At sunset, Farzdbuk arrived with the doctor. They stayed for half an hour, then left, nodding their heads as they walked down the steps to the car as if pleased with themselves.

Half an hour later it was dark, the lights were on in two rooms only, a TV screen flickered and they crept carefully back through the scrub to the cars.

Con, who was staying with Rex and Fee until the problem was solved, drove the young men home in the Holden wagon, making a last ditch attempt to persuade them not to meet Farzdbuk the following morning. He stopped half a block away and they removed their bikes from the back.

‘OK, then. Promise me this. Have your mobiles set so one touch will ring me. Do it now and test it.’

They did, and it worked.

‘Test it again the minute you’re inside so we know it works.’

A few minutes later Con’s phone rang.

‘Good lads. It’s all working. I’ll be parked just down the road from your house from daybreak on. At the first sign of trouble, promise you will ring me!’

‘We promise. But you can’t get into the house, it’s a bit of a security fortress.’

‘They won’t do anything there, they’ll take you away and I’ll follow. Understood?’

‘Now you’re making me worried.’

‘Good. If I don’t hear from you within ten minutes of Farzdbuk arriving, I’ll assume you need help and will be ready. These are not pleasant men. They’re doing something bad, I can feel it. I want you to be frightened and take no risks. Promise?’

‘We promise.’

Desolé was clearly relieved to see them and didn’t risk asking them where they’d been or why they were so late. She seemed distracted and went to bed early, leaving them watching TV.

Neither felt like sex, they were too nervous, but didn’t dare speak about it in case they were overheard. Finally they fell asleep in each other’s arms, both secretly wishing they’d not been so foolhardy and listened to Rex.

The following morning, Desolé slept in so Sebastian and Reginald made their own breakfast and had just finished when they heard a vehicle enter the garage. Con had noted the car and its solitary inhabitant, relieved because the two young men could make mincemeat out of one fat old man. Sebastian peered down and was relieved to see it was only Farzdbuk squeezing his car beside Desolé’s before closing the garage doors. They were waiting by the pool when Farzdbuk let himself in and wandered out.

‘Thanks for seeing me,’ he wheezed. ‘In your holidays too.’

‘What do you want?’ Sebastian asked coolly.

‘I’ve a proposition to make.’

‘Go ahead.’

‘Come with me and I’ll show you.’

‘Where?’

‘To see a friend with a business proposition.’

‘No. We’re staying here. He can come to us.’

Farzdbuk’s eyes closed slightly, but he smiled and said simply, ‘Fair enough. I’ll tell him.’

Sebastian moved as if to get up.

‘Don’t get up, I can see myself out.’

‘Sebastian and Reginald waited till they heard the door to the garage slam shut before hugging themselves in relief. All that worry for nothing.’

But of course life is never that simple.

Having slammed the door to the basement garage, Farzdbuk quietly opened the foyer door to the street where a pair of shaven headed toughs with tattoos and boots and unpleasant faces were waiting. They followed Farzdbuk silently through the lounge, then with a commendable turn of speed hurtled out to the pool and dragged the young men to their feet, pinning their arms behind them. Shouts and struggles only lasted until the contents of the hypodermic Farzdbuk inexpertly squirted into their buttocks took hold, and then they slumped to the floor.

Mobile phones were kicked into the pool then the lifeless bodies were roughly manhandled down the stairs and dumped in the boot of Farzdbuk’s car, which backed quietly out of the garage and sped away. Con was relieved to see only one person in the car, and remained patiently waiting for a call.

The two heavies slipped out the front door and strolled nonchalantly back the way they'd come, concealed from Con's view by a dense hedge of calliandra bushes.

Chapter Thirteen

Con waited five minutes before calling Sebastian. No response. His phone was turned off. He tried Reginald's number. Same response—or lack of it. A creeping fear sent him bounding up to the front door on which he hammered loudly. He was just about to give up when Desolé arrived looking at least a thousand years old and deeply upset, as she ought to be having watched her son's abduction on a monitor. However, her wretched appearance was caused by fear for her own future, not her son's.

'Yes?' she asked weakly.

'Apologies for waking you, Mrs. Sanspere, but I need to speak to Sebastian; I'm his teacher and he has something of mine.'

'I'm so sorry, Mr.?'

'Achilles.'

'Mr. Achilles...' Desolé paused for a brief sob. 'Sebastian didn't come home last night. I've been worried sick all night. He was with his friend, Reginald Blackthorn. They went for a long bike ride in the country but never returned. I've been wondering if I should call the police. What do you think?'

She was good. Sickeningly so. 'Definitely call them. Do you know what direction they went?'

'I've no idea.' She began to weep.

Con turned to go. 'I'll speak to Reginald's parents and see if they know anything. They'll call you if anything happens.' He raced away before succumbing to the urge to plant his fist in her unlovely face.

'I'm on my way to Farzdbuk's hospital,' he barked into the phone. 'I've been a fool. Somehow they've got the boys! Desolé reckons they didn't come home last night, so she's up to her neck in it too. Join me and bring a weapon!'

Precious minutes were wasted going home to pick up the bag of tools with which he'd instructed Guapo in the noble art of self-defence. There was no sign of Farzdbuk on the road. Con drove straight past the hospital gates, parked in the disused quarry, grabbed his phone and bag and in record time arrived in a position where, although well concealed, he could see the front steps to the hospital and the walkway to the smaller building they now called the prison.

A Mazda sports car was parked in the main car park and Farzdbuk's vehicle was stationed beside the walkway. The car boot was open and the doors to the 'prison' were swinging shut. Quelling the urge to make a suicidal dash only to discover Sebastian and Reginald hadn't been brought there, he waited and watched for several long minutes until Farzdbuk came out, followed by one of the nurses. They closed and locked the doors, conferred briefly, then walked across to the hospital, locking that door behind them.

Ten minutes later a four-wheel-drive charged up, parked beside Farzdbuk's car and disgorged two men in jeans and t-shirts. Con thought they were the other nurses.

Nothing happened for the next fifteen minutes, then Rex joined him and they withdrew into deeper cover to confer.

'Fee telephoned Reginald's father to tell him our suspicions. He's ringing round his business acquaintances to see if he can dig up any dirt on this place and its owners as well as Dr. Reins. He was dreadfully upset, so he's an ally. Can't think of anyone else we can trust though.'

'The boss — Mr. Noall, offered any help we needed, get Fee to phone him and keep him up to date in case he knows anything about the fat guy, the doctor and the hospital.'

‘Will do.’

When he finished phoning Con decided it was quiet enough to do a little reconnaissance. Warning Rex to keep concealed, he was just about to cross to the ‘prison’ when a large car with tinted windows drew up to the front door and a sleekly dark gentleman emerged carrying a black bag. He stretched, looked around briefly then was welcomed by Farzdbuk who had come out to the front steps.

Con raced across the open ground to the back of the ‘prison’ just as the ambulance pulled up to the main entrance. The driver got out and helped a frail, oriental looking man descend from the rear, then two nurses came out and led him into the main building.

There seemed to be no possible alternative entrance to the prison. Made of strong concrete blocks; narrow bars on all windows; the rear door of the same solid wood reinforced with metal bars as the double doors that opened from the covered way. The simple hipped roof was corrugated iron with two whirly ventilators. No skylights and no way to get up there anyway. The walls were three metres high; there were neither handy trees nor a ladder. He squatted against the rear wall in despair until a text arrived from Rex telling him Reginald’s father was coming. Making a long detour back round through the bush in case someone was watching from a hospital window, Con rejoined Rex, who then set out to meet Mr. Blackthorn.

The sun rose higher, the heat was intense, even the cicadas had ceased their interminable shrieking. Quietness reigned. Suddenly a whine and the diesel generator clanked into life numbing the senses with its dull thud. Con was shocked. He must have fallen asleep! He hadn’t noticed anyone cross to the shed. What else hadn’t he noticed? Guilt at failing to protect the boys that morning ate at him as he watched the driver of the dark car stroll back to the hospital. By the time Rex returned with Mr. Blackthorn who was carrying a rifle and wearing a wicked looking knife strapped to his waist, Con was ready to make a suicide dash just to do something.

Rodney, who had come with Blackthorn misinterpreted Con’s desperate look.

‘Sorry to barge in, but Reginald’s a special friend so I wanted to help.’

Con stared blankly at the slim young man who looked too fragile to be of any use, nodded and shook the proffered hand, surprised by the strength of his grip.

Rex had just finished bringing them up to date when the door from the hospital opened and one of the nurses trotted across and unlocked the door to the prison. Con dashed forward and thrust himself through the door just as it was closing. The nurse, a lumpish fellow in his thirties, was too surprised to react and Con had a hand over his mouth and the point of a knife at his throat before he could yell.

‘Where are the boys?’ he snapped.

No response.

Con pressed the knife against his prisoner’s windpipe, drawing blood as it sank into the flesh. The nurse, eyes bulging in pain nodded to a doorway that was bolted on the outside. Keeping the fellow gagged Con told him to pull back the bolts and open the door. Reginald was lying trussed on a cot, gagged and motionless, but alive. The nurse, quivering in fear and pain untied Reginald who rubbed at his arms to restore circulation.

‘Where’s Sebastian?’ Con was curt; they didn’t have much time. The nurse would soon be missed.

‘I don’t know! When I woke I was here alone!’ Reginald was having a hard time controlling hysteria.

Con jabbed the knife deeper into the nurse’s throat. ‘If you make a noise I’ll slice through your windpipe and break every bone in your body. Where’s the other lad?’

No answer.

Con jammed the nurse’s index finger hard against the wall. There was a click as it snapped but the scream never came. Shock was shutting the man down. Another finger snapped. The nurse was deathly white and sweating, eyes bulging and veins swelling on his neck.

‘Where’s the other lad and what’s happening to him?’

It took two more broken fingers and the insertion of the knife a centimetre into the man's belly just below the navel to make the information less important than the pain.

Using the ropes that had tied up Reginald, Con made a noose round the fellow's neck, slung the end over a rafter and fixed it so he had to either stand on tiptoe or strangle. With three broken fingers he wouldn't be up to untying himself. Taking the nurse's keys he dragged Reginald out and back to where the others were waiting.

'Sebastian is in the hospital. The sick bloke who arrived in the ambulance is here for a kidney transplant and Sebastian is the donor. In the operating theatre there will be two nurses and two doctors. Farzdbuk will be in his office or hovering somewhere, he doesn't watch operations. The ambulance driver is in charge of the generator. We'll go straight to the theatre and rescue Sebastian. Mr. Blackthorn, you remain in the corridor and guard the door. If you see Farzdbuk or the ambulance driver, immobilise them, but I want them alive.'

Con reached into his bag and handed out three short, sharp daggers. 'Reginald and Rodney come with Rex and me. It's at least half an hour since the patient arrived, so we'd better hurry! I'll take Reins, Reginald take the other surgeon, Rex and Rodney, do what it takes to immobilise the two nurses. Kill if you have to.'

'But... Reginald's naked,' Rex said as if shocked.

'For fuck's sake, Rex! Get going!' Reginald hissed before racing across to the door, followed closely by Con who unlocked it and went through first, trying all the doors in the corridor as they went. The theatre was third on the right.

One doctor, robed and masked, was at the head of the operating table monitoring dials and switches and checking the vital statistics of an obviously anaesthetised patient who was lying on his side, covered with a green cloth with a hole where his kidney would be. The surgeon, who had his back to the door, was checking a tray of steaming instruments.

One nurse was watching the surgeon carefully, waiting for instructions; the other was bending over Sebastian, who was naked on his stomach, strapped to a smaller table. As the rescue party entered he was just removing a syringe from Sebastian's spine. Sebastian's eyes widened.

'Reggie!' he shouted. 'Thank goodness!'

The tableau froze.

'What the fuck are you doing in here? This is a sterile area. Get out!' barked Reins, the anaesthetist.

Before anyone had the wit to move Con stepped forward and tapped him on the nose with his knuckle-dusters. Blood spurted and Reins crashed to the floor. At the same moment Reginald let fly with a sharp kick to the back of the surgeon's knees, bringing him crashing to the ground. On the other side of the table Rodney was failing to restrain a nurse who had his fingers at Rodney's throat. Reginald stood on the neck of the surgeon who appeared to be trapped in the folds of his gown, leaned across the patient and grabbed the nurse's hair, dragging him screaming up beside the comatose patient.

'Tie this bastard up, Rodney,' Reginald said softly, smashing the nurse's head against the side of the operating table before returning to the semi-conscious surgeon, lashing his wrists together behind his back with bandages then tying him to a solid looking towel rail.

Meanwhile, Rex was holding the second nurse's head in the sink, crushing his windpipe.

Con handcuffed Reins to a wall bracket, assisted Rex to neutralise his nurse, and then ran out in search of Farzdbuk. They had been in the operating theatre fifty-four seconds.

The carpet in the foyer was stained with the blood of the ambulance driver who'd returned from the generator on hearing the shouts, and had his knee blown off by Blackthorn's rifle, the owner of which was sitting on Farzdbuk's belly, slamming his fist into the side of his head every time he moved.

Reginald staggered across the foyer carrying the limp body of Sebastian.

'Where're you going?' his father called.

'To look after Seb. His legs are paralysed. There are beds along here, I think. He's very cold... I ... I have to save him.'

Rex, Rodney and Con followed on Reginald's heels carrying blankets, returning moments later. 'He'll be fine. It's just the local anaesthetic. Reginald's making him tea and warming him. He's already showing some colour. Now for a little retribution.'

'You mean call the cops?'

'Well... Actually, I wondered if we might...'

 He took the others into a corner and whispered his plan.

The nods of agreement were tinged with doubt until Reginald came bursting into their conference.

'Sebastian's OK, just numb from the waist down. One thing he was clear about, one of these guys is Jack.'

Everyone looked blank.

'Jack's the guy who claimed to be Sebastian's friend and mentor...'

'Ah yes,' Con said softly. 'He's mentioned Jack a couple of times. Well, I've just the reward for him.' He turned round and called loudly, 'Jack!'

The ambulance driver looked up, dazed and pale from loss of blood despite desperately pressing on the artery.

'Here, let me carry you to the operating theatre, we need your kidney.'

Eyes wide with pain Jack whispered, 'No', then closed his eyes and slumped.

Rex felt his pulse. 'Dead, Con. Lost too much blood.'

'Ah. Shame. Sorry, Farzdbuk old chap, looks as if you're the back-up donor.'

'No!' Shrieked the fat man as Con and Reginald took a leg each and dragged him along the corridor to the operating theatre.

Thirty minutes later Farzdbuk was anaesthetised and naked on his belly with a blue mark above a kidney, the two doctors, looking somewhat battered, were back at their posts.

'How long will the operation take?'

'About five hours.'

'Well, get on with it, I'm hungry!'

'The theatre is no longer sterile.'

'That's a risk we're prepared to take, Dr. Reins.'

'And if we do as you ask we'll be free to go? You won't inform the police?'

'That's the agreement.'

'Hurry up or we'll lose him! He's already been under anaesthetic too long!' snapped the foreign surgeon in accented English.

Reins sighed and turned to monitoring dials and gauges to ensure the still sleeping patient didn't die before receiving his new kidney.

Despite a rapidly purpling bruised neck, the surgeon wielded his scalpel with dexterity, and the two patched up nurses assisted professionally, everyone spurred on by knives pressing through their clothes just above their own kidneys so that any unexpected move caused a little blood to flow.

All seemed to be progressing normally. Farzdbuk was moaning on his stomach with an expertly sewn up gash on his back. Although he'd felt no pain thanks to local anaesthesia, he was almost catatonic having been awake through the extraction of his kidney because the theatre wasn't set up for two people to be under general anaesthetic at one time. The surgeon was having his brow mopped, and there were about three hours to go when a buzzer sounded. Reins cursed, shoved something over the patient's nose, thumped on his chest, pushed another needle into a vein, turned a dial and everyone held their breath until the surgeon stopped working and took off his gloves.

Reins looked up and shrugged impotently.

'Well, that was a waste of time,' Con said irritably. 'We've missed lunch and now you've two bodies to dispose of. I hope you've plenty of wood for the incinerator.'

'How do you...'

'Shut it! Snapped Reins to the nurse before turning to Con. 'I guess you'll be on your way?'

'In a minute.'

‘You said we could go,’ Reins snapped.

And you shall, but we would prefer it if you didn’t operate on people again.’

‘I’ve already promised we won’t.’

‘I promise you won’t too.’ Rex’s voice was sad. ‘Con? Reginald?’

The two men grabbed the doctors from behind in a stranglehold and marched them to a solid, granite-topped bench where Rex was waiting with a type of cleaver.

‘No! No! You can’t!

‘What was going to happen to my son after you’d removed his kidney?’

Silence.

‘What happened to all the young men who stayed with Sebastian after your goons had roughed them up and imprisoned them?’

‘They’re not my goons. It’s nothing to do with me. It’s Arnold’s plan, not mine.’

‘Who’s Arnold?’

‘Semble,’ the distraught doctor whispered, nodding towards Farzdbuk, still strapped to the table. ‘He’s blackmailing me, forcing me to do it.’

‘Well, a sense of justice is forcing me do this,’ Rex said coldly raising his arm.

‘My hands! They’re my...’ Blood-curdling screams replaced whatever he’d intended to say as Rex shortened the fingers of his right hand by a few centimetres.

Reins was spared some of the horror, having fainted before the chopper fell on his.

‘That was a bit messy, Rex. You’ll never make a surgeon... all those chips of bone and stuff. I hope you guys know enough to tidy up the ends?’ Con smiled at the horrified nurses. ‘Well, we’re off.’

‘What’re you going to do with us?’

‘We have a video of everything. We know your names, having found your credit cards and driver’s licences in the changing room. Soon we’ll know more about you than you do. If you are still in Queensland at the end of the week we’ll take the video to the cops.’

Con turned at the door. ‘And keep fat-guts there alive, or you’ll be done for murder. I have more business to conduct with him and if he’s not around to do it with, I’ll consider it a breach of our contract. Clear?’

They nodded furiously.

‘Oh, I nearly forgot, your mate is strung up over in the prison. Better rescue him soon or your funeral pyre is going to last for days. Ciao.’

Wearily they collected Sebastian and their gear, phoned Fee to expect them in half an hour, piled into the ambulance, drove to the quarry, set the ambulance alight after ensuring the fire wouldn’t spread to the trees, then drove their cars quietly back to Rex’s place. The last six hours having taken more out of them than six normal days.

Fee had prepared a late lunch for everyone and was waiting nervously with Mr. Blackthorn's partner Geraldine, and Mrs. Noall, whose husband was swimming impatiently up and down the pool.

When Fee had telephoned and explained what was happening, Adam Noall had insisted they come to Rex’s house to show their support for whatever Rex and the others did to rescue Sebastian and Reginald, reminding Fee that he and his wife looked on Sebastian as the son they’d never managed to conceive, so were emotionally involved.

Geraldine wanted to wait with Fee. Having only recently gained sole rights to her lover she wanted to be near in case he needed anything. She was in her forties, wore no makeup, seemed devoid of pretension, and was obviously comfortable with her body, having stripped and joined Fee and Vera Noall in the pool soon after arriving. She knew Mrs. Noall through a volunteer group lobbying fruitlessly for a fair go for refugees, and was pleased to discover an instant pleasure in Fee’s sharp mind and engaging personality.

When the weary band of rescuers traipsed into the house, Sebastian was still wobbly, but refused to go to bed, insisting a swim would clear his head. After all, he pointed out, he'd done nothing except get angry. It was Rex, Con and the others who'd risked all for him. Reggie too had fought like a tiger as soon as he was freed. All the men were hot, tired and felt filthy, so stripped and joined Mr. Noall in the pool, promising to tell all after lunch.

An hour later, bellies full, they relaxed in the warm shade and, for the first time in three days let all tensions go.

Geraldine giggled.

'What's so funny?' Mr. Blackthorn asked.

'Nothing, darling. It's just the first time I've enjoyed a social occasion where everyone's naked. It's so... so liberating! I've never dared take off my clothes in front of strange men before.'

'We women have been brainwashed into thinking our bodies are never good enough and that makes us shy,' Mrs. Noall remarked sourly. 'Men are lucky. They're told from birth that because they're male, they're perfect.'

'Well, it's true, isn't it?' Con grinned.

'Today, yes. You are all beautiful and perfect.'

'And I assure you we have the same opinion of you women.'

Fee laughed. 'I can see Con is short for Con man. But enough mucking around! Tell all! And I mean all. No self-censoring because you think we lovely ladies are too weak-minded to cope.'

Rex carefully recounted everything relevant, from Guapo's escape to their arrival home that afternoon. His tale was greeted by a profound silence.

'You didn't kill anyone?' Mr. Noall asked abruptly.

'Not directly. The fellow getting the transplant died, but that wasn't our fault. Jack lost a kneecap when he was shot in self defence, and bled to death, but that's because the doctors and nurses were uncooperative. Farzdbuk lost a kidney and survived; two surgeons lost finger tips on their right hands, one nurse has a sore neck and a small puncture in his belly, the other two have cuts and abrasions and the task of cleaning up the mess, as well as the threat of disclosure hanging over them for the rest of their lives. None of them are going to go to the cops or sue us for damages.'

'You guarantee that?' Mr. Noall asked bluntly.

'I think so.'

'If they got together and found corrupt cops and lawyers, not a difficult task, they could make a case against you for the entire thing. It's your word against theirs.'

'We also have a video.'

'Showing what? Terrified male nurses and surgeons working under stress. Sebastian and Reginald could have staged their imprisonment. No. We need a foolproof alibi.'

'Such as?'

Adam Noall stood and tapped his chest proudly. 'I will swear that you have all been here the entire day with me. I'm a well known professional in this city, have a spotless record, and people take me seriously.' Lean and slightly cadaverous, the school Principal was fit for his age, but a naked sixty-four year old gentleman with a long and slightly sunburned scrotum dangling between thinning thighs, carried little gravitas and everyone grinned.

Mr. Noall suddenly laughed aloud. 'Do I look as ridiculous as I suddenly feel?'

'Sir, to me you look like a wise and good philosopher,' Sebastian said softly, and everyone smiled and nodded assent.

'Ah, Sebastian. Is it any wonder I love you,' Mr. Noall said delightedly.

'Adam, thank you,' Rex interrupted. 'Your trust and support mean a great deal to all of us, however I'm certain they won't be pursuing us.'

'How can you be so sure?'

'Because the place is a treasure trove of evidence for any competent forensic pathologist.'

'How do you mean?'

'I mean that Sebastian wasn't the first young man to be in that position.'

‘What?’ Mrs. Noall asked loudly. ‘What are you saying?’

‘There have been others.’

Mrs. Noall’s lips drew together and she nodded slowly. ‘There are so many questions. Why is there a well equipped hospital in the bush doing organ transplants? Who was the man who died? Who are the doctors? If you are correct, what about the families of the young men? Weren’t they missed?’ she looked ready to weep and turned to Fee for support.

Fee took Mrs. Noall’s hand and stroked it absentmindedly. ‘Vera,’ she said in a voice from which all emotion was drained, ‘the three most lucrative human enterprises on the planet today are trading in humans for slaves or their organs, trading in illicit drugs, and also legal ones marketed as pharmaceuticals, and trading military weaponry. A new, obscenely wealthy class of entrepreneurs has risen among our trading partners of the western Pacific, and they’re demanding the chance to buy replacement body parts when their own let them down. Some countries give their powerful citizens access to the organs of prisoners on death row, but most other governments aren’t so obliging. Farzdbuk saw a niche market when the airlines quadrupled flights from capitals of the western Pacific to Cairns. He bought a hotel at the northern end of the Esplanade and turned it into an up-market brothel, using local young men and girls recruited by Sebastian’s mother at her so-called ‘Employment Agency.’

‘No wonder I was never allowed to go there,’ Sebastian said. ‘How did you find out?’

‘I’m very nosy,’ Fee replied with a wink. ‘Then he took Dr. Reins as a partner and they bought the old army hospital, refurbished it, found a willing surgeon from the Philippines, and began offering organ transplants to wealthy foreigners. Donors were no problem in this city of vagrant youths from southern states seeking the easy life. Having selected a suitable candidate, preferably gay as they’re frequently running from families and persecution, and the police seldom take crimes against gays seriously, they’d abduct him, rough him up, ‘rescue’ him to make him grateful, then store him at a suitable place until needed, as they couldn’t be a hundred percent sure what day the client would arrive.

While waiting to donate his organ, the young man paid for his keep by unwittingly participating in porn videos with Sebastian. The patient would be taken to the hospital soon after arrival, and the young man would be taken to the promised job, in this case donating one of his organs. This meant that surgery could be performed the day he arrived in town, and after a short recuperation the recipient would be ready to fly home. Disposal of the donor bodies was a simple matter of cremation in the giant incinerator.’

‘No!’ Sebastian yelled, standing and staring in horror at Fee. ‘Do you mean that all those guys who stayed with us, guys I really liked, who became my friends, were cut up for their organs and then burnt? Is that what would have happened to Guapo if he hadn’t escaped?’

A chill descended.

‘Yes,’ Fee said quietly. ‘In my opinion, that is exactly what happened. That’s why none of them contacted you afterwards.’

‘And my mother was an essential part of that... that trade!’ Sebastian raced to the bathroom and his retching could be heard in the horrified silence.

‘That’s how his mother could afford the house,’ Rodney said softly. ‘I wondered, when I saw it.’

Sebastian returned and sank to the floor beside his father. ‘I should have asked more questions... I should have...’ He stopped and let the tears flow.

Rex put his arms around him, rocking gently. ‘There was nothing you could have done.’

‘But... weren’t they missed?’ Vera Noall asked in a horrified whisper.

‘Vera, several thousand young people go missing every year in Australia; hundreds are never seen again. Unless there’s a body no investigation is ever launched. And as I mentioned, many families of gay boys, especially the devoutly religious, are delighted when they disappear.’

Silence.

‘Con, you said you had more business to conduct with Farzdbuk, which is why you wanted him alive. What sort of business?’ Rex asked.

‘Ah yes.’ Con turned to Fee. ‘I was presuming on the skills of your lovely consort.’

‘Presume away, Con. What can I do for you?’

‘I was wondering about bank accounts and things, not only of the three nurses who are packing their bags at this minute I imagine, but also the unholy earnings of Farzdbuk. Do you think...?’

‘I certainly do! I was hoping someone would ask!’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Noall. ‘I think it is time for us to depart, my dear. We don’t want to fill our innocent ears with things we don’t understand but fully support, do we?’

‘We’ll be getting along too,’ Billy Blackthorn said, pulling Geraldine to her feet. ‘I’m available to assist in any way I can and will be in your debt forever, Con and Rex, for returning my son to me.’ He put his arm around Reginald’s shoulders. ‘I imagine you boys need a rest after your ordeal, but remember you’re both always welcome to stay with us at any time, day or night, for any reason or no reason.’

‘I hope you’ll both take us up on that soon,’ Geraldine said warmly. ‘Reginald is coming with us now to see where we live and rest a bit, will you come too, Sebastian?’

‘Thanks,’ Sebastian muttered, ‘but at the moment I’m too worked up to rest. I need to do something rough and physical to squeeze everything out of my system.’ He turned to Con. ‘Feel like wrestling?’

If Con was surprised he didn’t let on. ‘Sure. Is that OK, Boss?’

‘Of course! You have your own keys to the school and don’t need to ask.’ Mr. Noall patted Con’s bum as if to underline his support.

Sebastian took Reginald nervously aside. ‘Reggie, is it OK?’

‘Reginald grinned. ‘Very OK.’

‘You’re both sleeping here tonight?’ Rex asked.

‘For the foreseeable future, if that’s OK with you.’

‘Sebastian, my son, as Reginald just said, that’s very OK.’

As the departing guests reluctantly replaced their clothes, Sebastian pulled Reginald into a bedroom. His kisses had an edge of desperation. ‘You sure you don’t mind?’

‘Of course not, silly. I was hoping you’d say a private thank you to Con. He’s incredibly sexy and so well hung! It’s entirely thanks to him that you’re not a pile of ashes and I’m not a prisoner awaiting execution. He risked his life for us. When he burst into the room and smashed that guy’s fingers until he told him where you were, I thought it must be what it felt like to be rescued by Superman. And in case you think I’ll be jealous, I won’t. I don’t think I’m a jealous type. I want my boyfriend to do what he wants. That’s all.’

‘And when you burst naked into the operating theatre and took out the surgeon, then the nurse, then picked me up and carried me to safety, I felt like Lois Lane being rescued by Superman.’

‘Idiot. Also, I’ve never really spoken to Dad, so it’s a good opportunity to start fresh with him—convince him I’m not a fatuous wimp. How long will it take you to ‘thank’ Con?’

‘A couple of hours at most.’

They kissed and Reginald’s penis became painfully hard and impossible to conceal.

Sebastian gave it an affectionate tug, laughed and went to find Con.

Rex, who had come looking for them, also laughed at Reginald’s vain attempts to conceal his arousal. ‘Be proud, never embarrassed of a hard-on, Reggie. But as you’re leaving the house, you’d better help yourself to anything from my wardrobe.’

Impulsively, Reginald hugged his lover’s father then stood helplessly in the middle of the room, tears spilling onto the floor. Rex wrapped his arms around the distraught young man and stroked his head.

‘Rex. You saved Sebastian! You took out that nurse seconds before he sliced him with the scalpel. I was wasting my time on the surgeon. And if you hadn’t, I don’t know what I’d have....’ He shook his head as if to clear it. ‘I owe you my happiness. Thanks.’

‘No thanks necessary,’ Reginald sniffed. ‘We both love him.’

‘Good man. Now grab something to wear and take your father home.’

Sebastian and Con were heading out to the drive.

‘Con, Sebastian, haven’t you forgotten something?’

‘I don’t think so, Fee.’

‘Clothes?’

‘Sebastian hasn’t any, and mine are covered in blood. We’ll be in the car before anyone sees us. I’ll drop him back here in a couple of hours. OK?’

Fee’s laugh was deep and full. ‘Oh Con. It’s wonderful having you around; I haven’t felt so free with anyone for years. I’ll wash your overalls and have a meal waiting for you both when you return. Have fun.’

‘We will.’

Rodney had remained beside the pool and was feeling somewhat unnecessary when Billy Blackthorn came out looking for his son.

‘Rodney. How long have I known you? Three years? I knew you were a great and reliable performer, but never realised what a brave young man you are. Without you the whole operation would’ve gone belly up. I’ve no idea how I can thank you, but know that you’ve a friend for life in me and if you ever need anything, you’ve only to ask.’

‘Thanks, Billy, but I did very little.’

‘Without you we’d have been outnumbered! You look sad. Are you all right? Want to come home with us?’

‘No, thanks. Very nice of you but I like to think about things alone. And I’ve a gig at six o’clock; someone’s last day at work and they’re throwing a surprise party for her. I’m the surprise.’

Chapter Fourteen

Con pulled his car up close to the rear school entrance, checked no one was around, then led Sebastian to their lair under the stairs.

‘Don’t close the door, it’ll be cooler. Might even get a draught.’

They straightened the mat and faced each other. After a few minutes of desultory sparring Con stopped.

‘You don’t really want to wrestle, do you?’

‘I thought I did. I thought it would wipe away all the...’ Sebastian’s head drooped and tears splashed onto the mat.

Con wrapped his arms around the shuddering young man. When the tremors ceased he lowered them both to the floor, lay on his side with his arm under Sebastian’s head and gently stroked him, saying nothing.

‘I was terrified, Con,’ Sebastian whispered. ‘It was the worst day of my life! I didn’t know where Reggie was, and when they told me I’d be sliced up for body parts I freaked out.’

‘They told you?’

‘Yeah. Farzdbuk and Jack. They called me a black faggot slut and reckoned I’d helped Guapo to escape so I’d have to replace him, and Reggie would be donating his heart to someone who needed a new one. I screamed so much they shoved something so far into my mouth I began to choke. Luckily they wanted me alive so they loosened it. My throat still hurts. But...I thought Jack liked me!’

‘You didn’t tell us any of this back at Rex’s.’

‘I didn’t want anyone to think I was a wimp. But now I can’t get it out of my head. I’m going mad! I thought a good wrestle would clear things...but...’

‘No, at times like this we have to talk. To share things. That’s the only way.’

‘I already feel better having told you, but there’s still one problem.’

‘Go on.’

‘Reggie. I love him so much. He’s so noble and pure. Don’t laugh, he is. I’m frightened I’ll contaminate him. They were right; I’m a black faggot. A whore. Totally worthless!’

‘You’re not a faggot and you’re not black, you’re a beautiful golden brown. And you’re certainly not a whore. You were an innocent young man doing what they asked of you because you felt sorry for the guys. And that’s to your eternal credit! You’re the opposite of worthless. You’re a precious jewel worth more than everyone put together at that hospital!’

‘I’ve an evil mother who’s been selling me as a sex object since I was twelve, and this morning sold me for body parts. I’ve inherited half her genes, so I’ll end up like her and I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. Also, I’m a social misfit. Yes, I know we’ve been through this before and you tried to convince me I wasn’t, but let’s face it, I’m a crappy exhibitionist with no talent and it would be better for the world if you hadn’t rescued me. You say you like me, and Rex and Fee too. But none of you really know me. They just feel obliged now that I’ve dumped myself on their doorstep. I shouldn’t have told Rex he’s my father. I love Reggie, but I’m a gnawed off bone! Spiritually dirty. That’s what I feel, worthless and dirty... not good enough to lick Reggie’s feet. The best thing I can do is go away and stop annoying everyone.’

‘Do you think Rex and Fee are perfect? Reginald doesn’t think he’s perfect, I’m not perfect, no one is—not even Adam Noall! Why should you be?’

Silence.

‘Let’s take the genetic inheritance line. Who do you resemble physically? Which one of your parents is thoughtful and kind like you? Which one is liked by just about everyone they meet, as you are? Which parent can’t wait to take his clothes off and seldom wears clothes at home—just like you? Which one is intelligent, good at school, independent of spirit?’

‘Yeah, but...’

‘OK, tell me one way in which you resemble your mother.’

Silence.

‘I know,’ Con continued softly. ‘It doesn’t help, does it, that sort of rational argument? You feel depressed and worthless and words can’t penetrate the black shroud of your misery.’

Sebastian nodded.

‘OK, one more try; do you like me?’

‘Yes.’

‘And I like you, so I guess that makes me worthless too.’

Sebastian smiled sadly and a surge of relief washed over Con.

‘I also feel worthless because I’ve wasted my youth searching for a woman to share my life instead of a man. I can never experience the joy of making love to a young man and that makes me depressed.’

‘Twenty-seven isn’t old.’

‘It isn’t young.’

‘You’re one of the most worthwhile men I’ll ever meet. You saved Reginald and me. You are the sort of person I would most like to be.’

‘And you are exactly the sort of young man I wish I had known and fallen in love with when I was your age. Rex and Fee told me you are exactly the son they’d have ordered if they’d been asked. They’re over the moon that you’re going to live with them.’

‘Really?’

‘Really. Everyone chases after rainbows. The trick is to accept the hand you’ve been dealt and make the most of it.’

Sebastian reached across and stroked Con’s neatly trimmed chest. ‘You’ve been keeping up with the body image. You look great. Would you really have wanted to have sex with me?’

‘Are you serious? If I was Reggie you’d not be safe near me.’

‘Is it too late?’

‘What for?’

‘To shove a memory into your brain.’

When the meaning sank in Con smiled uncertainly. ‘Are you sure? What about Reginald?’

‘Reggie and I love each other. We’ll end up living together—no doubt about that. But we’re too young to do that yet. Twenty-five’s early enough to settle down to monogamy. Religions have it all wrong. We’re sexual animals and unless we experience sexuality when we’re young we’re going to be frustrated, nasty old men when we realise we’re too old and have wasted our youth. I don’t mean fucking everything that moves, but we have to know what sex is all about before we can make a rational choice about our future. I reckon if a good friend turns me on and he’s up for it, we should just do it. It’s no big deal and doesn’t make us lovers.’

‘I repeat. What about Reginald?’

‘He’s the one I love. With him sex is serious. With you it’d be no different from wrestling. Also, I’ve a feeling that...’

‘Yes?’

‘This will sound weird, but I’ve a feeling that...somehow it would purge me of my sense of being dirty. If someone as honest and good as you wants to be fucked by me, then perhaps I’m not so bad after all...’ Sebastian’s voice trailed away and he blushed, certain he’d simply confirmed his status as a worthless slut.

‘Makes sense. And it might stop me constantly wondering what it would have been like to have sex with a teenager. Get rid of my self-pitying demons.’

‘Seriously?’

‘I don’t know. Introspection’s never been my strong point. But we could give it a go if you really want to...for yourself, though! Not as a reward for me saving you. That’d be really gross.’

Sebastian gazed at Con seriously for five long seconds. ‘It’d be a reward for me.’

Con frowned, got to his feet and went out to the car, returning with a bottle that he placed on the mat between them.

‘This is extra virgin olive oil I use to massage aching muscles after wrestling with you. It might come in useful if you’re serious.’ He lay back beside Sebastian and relaxed, determined to cast every foolish thought from his head and enjoy the moment.

Sebastian resumed his stroking of Con’s chest, working his way down the firm belly to the groin, admiring the result, which he stroked, then kissed.

‘Tastes sort of sexy.’

‘Does it?’

‘Want to taste?’

‘My tongue’s not long enough.’

Sebastian slid up and kissed Con’s slightly parted lips.

‘Mmm. And what does yours taste like?’

They kissed and fondled until Sebastian was certain he’d ejaculate. Pushing Con onto his back, he lifted his legs onto his shoulders, splashed a little oil where it mattered most, then pushed gently. To his astonishment Con responded as if they’d been partners for years—which in a way they had. The experience was in another realm altogether from the awkward couplings he’d struggled through in the past with the young men to whom he’d played host. This was the first time he’d experienced such exquisite pleasure, and judging by Con’s grunts of delight he felt something similar. Sweaty and exhilarated, they recovered their breath lying side by side on the mat, Con’s arm under Sebastian’s neck, Sebastian impatient to initiate Reggie into these new delights.

‘I feel clean and pure, as if all my wickedness has been expelled into you.’ Sebastian laughed happily. ‘

Such romantic imagery. Sure you aren’t a poet?’

They laughed and cuddled.

‘And you? Are your demons exorcised?’

Con grinned self-consciously. ‘While you were stroking me I had a realistic vision of myself when I was your age. A total mess of insecurities; much worse than you. I remembered all the fears that plagued me. What would I do? Would I fail? What did the future hold? Would I ever get a decent body? So many fears for the future that I hated the present. I discovered this afternoon that I’m very pleased I’m not young again and don’t give a stuff that I didn’t know I was gay until

recently. I wouldn't have been able to do anything about it anyway. The up side is I learned what it is to be with a woman, and that makes my conviction I'm now on the right track all the stronger.'

'Guapo's a lucky guy.'

'We're four lucky men.'

They freshened up in the tiny basin, turned out the light and stepped into the corridor.

'Ah. There you are. Feeling better?' Mr. Noall was standing by the door to the quadrangle.

'Oh hi, Adam. Yes, we've both decided we're able to live with our pasts. Were you waiting for us?'

'No, no. Vera saw you arrive and suggested I make sure you were both bearing up after the terrible day, and offer any assistance you might need.'

Con gave a wry smile. 'You've been here all the time, haven't you?'

Mr. Noall nodded sheepishly.

'And you've been watching.'

'Not intentionally, but you left the door wide open and when I realised you were discussing personal things I decided not to interrupt. But as you know, other teachers sometimes come into school and as you were clearly visible from the doors here, I stayed to ensure you were undisturbed.'

'And you heard and saw everything from less than three metres away.'

'Everything.'

'And?'

Mr. Noall had dropped his eyes as if penitent. Reaching out he took Sebastian's left hand and Con's right and brought them to his lips for a brief kiss. When he looked up his eyes were moist.

'And I have been in the presence of great beauty.' The elderly man let the young men's hands fall, turned, and disappeared into his study.

Con and Sebastian let themselves out and drove away.

'Well, well. How interesting. It seems that dear old Adam is what I'd have been like in thirty years if I hadn't met you and Guapo.'

'You mean?'

'It explains why they have no children; why he's in love with you; why he told Sprague and Charles to get into bed together; why he virtually encouraged us to wrestle naked and fully approves of you and Reginald.'

'The poor man!'

'Not necessarily. He loves Vera and she loves him enough to let him do what he wants. He's an excellent Principal and well respected, if not always understood. I reckon he's one of those rare people who make the most of their lives, doesn't waste energy or happiness thinking about what might have been, and doesn't resent the good fortune of others.'

'He's a great guy.'

They pulled into Rex and Fee's driveway.

'I need a swim.'

'Me too.'

After letting themselves into the house they made straight for the pool. Sebastian stopped at the doors leading out to the enclosure and signalled Con to be silent. A few paces to the left, Rex and Fee were so engrossed in an athletic coupling on the edge of the pool they failed to notice two naked men sidle in and squat just inside the door.

Sebastian was entranced. Placing his lips close to Con's ear he whispered, 'Now I understand what Mr. Noall meant when he said he'd been in the presence of beauty. They're beautiful! Dad looks like a sleek brown seal and Fee like a lithe black cat.'

'Take a look at those cojones!' Con whispered.

Sebastian suppressed a giggle. With every thrust they swung out then slammed back with a soft thwack. Fee was on her knees facing the pool, back arched, mouth glued to Rex's, which accounted

for their muted groans of pleasure. Rex was grasping her breasts in his hands, thumbs caressing nipples, thrusting with such force it seemed he was trying to propel them both into the water.

A continuous wail of pleasure from Fee made a duet with Rex's guttural growls of release, after which they remained locked together whispering endearments, then both slithered into the water, surfacing on the other side of the pool to gaze in surprise at their audience.

'An excellent show.' Con said affably.

'Yeah! That was beautiful. Someone should make a sculpture of you two in orgasm.'

Rex and Fee looked at each other and laughed.

'I suppose I should feel embarrassed.' Rex said cheerfully.

'No way! You're both great! Makes me proud to be your son. You're sexy.'

Con and Sebastian joined the others in the pool until they heard a car turn into the driveway.

'That'll be Reggie.' Unable to suppress his excitement, Sebastian raced out and clasped Reggie in a hug. Mr. Blackthorn tooted, waved, backed out and drove away.

'Reggie! Thank goodness you're back, are you OK?'

'Never better. It's astonishing what a sane father who genuinely cares about me does for the spirit. And you? Did you two have fun? Have you sorted....everything?'

'Yes, and yes. We're both officially sane and well, according to Mr. Noall.'

'Did he come and watch you wrestle?'

'We didn't see him till we were leaving.'

After a brief swim they ate a light meal and sprawled in the lounge while Rex and Fee outlined the next stage in the saga.

'We want to ensure that Farzdbuk and his nasty schemes are shut down forever. Those two surgeons won't be practising again, but he can easily find others. His sole motive is money, so money is his Achilles heel.' Fee grinned at Con. 'As you know, Rex took the credit cards and drivers licences and all other personal information from everyone at the hospital, and I've been investigating their finances this afternoon. It'll take me a few days to find all the accounts, passwords etc, but when I do I'll be able to shift the bulk of the money into a series of accounts here and there until it becomes untraceable, and then it'll be yours, Sebastian. I also want to make sure your mother doesn't profit. The house you've been living in belongs to Farzdbuk, as does her business, the ranch you went to with Guapo, a few apartments in Cairns, the hotel and his own house.'

'Transferring ownership and disposing of them will be tricky, but before too long you should be benefitting from the proceeds of those sales.'

'But the money was gained by abusing and killing young men! I don't want it.'

'If Fee manages to get hold of it, and that's a big if, then you can do with it whatever you like,' Rex said quietly. 'Give it to the government so they can waste it on self-advertising and bureaucracy. Start a charity for homeless youth. Throw it in the sea... never rush into things.'

'What about Desolé,' Con asked.'

'I think we should visit her this evening so Fee can check out the contents of her computer and remove all those videos of Sebastian and the others before she realises her circumstances have seriously changed.'

Rex laughed and glanced at his son.

Sebastian read his father's face correctly. 'You've been watching them.' He sounded amused, not accusatory.

'Only one or two. You and Reggie are sexy; turned us on, didn't it Fee.'

She smiled sweetly. 'Yes dear, especially when they tied themselves together with the red ribbon. But you're embarrassing the boys.'

'Am I?'

'Not me,' Sebastian declared with a laugh, 'I'm beyond embarrassing.' He turned to Reginald. 'Reggie? Are you embarrassed?'

'Can I see it? Then I'll tell you.'

‘Now?’

‘How long is it? Is there time?’

‘It’s only seven thirty. Con?’

‘Sure, you’ve made me curious.’

‘Are you sure, Reginald?’ Fee was worried.

‘Very.’

‘Be it on your own head.’

The quality was good, the picture clear and the lovemaking sweet and sexy. When it was over Con gazed down at his groin and chuckled. ‘Look what you two did to me!’

Rex whistled. ‘Fuck, Con! No wonder your girlfriend ran away!’

‘Frighteningly impressive,’ Fee giggled.

‘It’s even more impressive when you grab hold of it; it’s so thick my fingers don’t touch my thumb. Try it, Reggie.’

In the ensuing silence Sebastian realised what he’d said. ‘Oops, sorry Con. Sort of let the cat out of the bag there.’

Con reclined back in his chair and grinned, not in the least perturbed. All his life he’d been shy of exposing himself; felt self-conscious undressing in public, thought his body was either too large or too short, his face not manly enough, his cock too fat. But Sebastian and Guapo had begun the liberation, completed by living for the last few days with Rex and Fee. Naked all day, he’d discovered the joy of liberation. He understood that a spontaneous erection is a normal and wondrous thing, not to be dismissed as exhibitionism. Freed of childhood religious constraints he felt as if released from chains. Like Lady Chatterley’s Gamekeeper who, when his naked body and erection were admired and fondled by his lover, experienced such a rush of liberation and joy that he gambolled naked in the rain having discovered to his astonishment that sex could be a joy, not a guilty release of frustration.

‘Well, Reginald?’ Rex asked. ‘Are you embarrassed at seeing yourself in flagrante delicto?’

Reginald grinned. ‘I’m certainly not embarrassed! I look much better than I realised. All this time I’ve been thinking I was a scrawny stick insect, now I fancy myself.’

‘You great lug, I’ve been telling you for ages that you’re sexy!’ Sebastian grabbed Reginald threw him on the floor, landed on top and plonked a noisy kiss on his lips. ‘Now, see if your hand can wrap right around Con’s monster.’

Reginald looked up to Con. ‘May I?’

‘Be my guest.’

He grasped his maths teacher’s erection firmly. ‘You’ve small hands, Seb. My fingers meet. Hang on, it’s getting thicker!’ He took another grip but had to admit that now even his larger hand was too small.

‘Can I try?’ Fee asked sweetly.

Con laughed.

Fee wrapped both her hands round it. ‘It feels silky, hard and hot. It’d be like giving birth to have that inside me. Most interesting, Thanks. Come on Rex, your turn.’

Rex blushed, leaned forward and lightly tapped the monumental piece of flesh.

‘Wimp! Grasp the nettle!’

Smiling slightly, Rex wrapped his hand around it, nodded knowingly, then wrapped his other hand around his own arm. ‘It’s not especially long, but it’s as thick as my forearm. So impressive I feel awed as if in the presence of a god. How does one make obeisance to such a natural wonder?’

‘You have to kiss it, Papa.’

‘I gather you already have?’

Sebastian grinned evilly. ‘Come on, prove you’re a man.’

Rex knelt in front of Con and kissed the shining knob before rising and giving man’s most sensitive piece of flesh a sharp flick with his index finger.

Con yelped and sat forward, staring in disbelief as his magnificence shrank and retreated into the protecting sheath of its foreskin.

Rex shook his head sadly. 'I guess it wasn't a god after all. And here I was ready to start a cult.'
Fee put her arms impulsively round his neck. 'Darling! Now I love you more than ever!'
'And why is that, my treasure?'

'Because you've shown you're a complete man.'

'Complete?'

'You understand that sexuality is something to enjoy, laugh about and have fun with. Labels such as heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual, exhibitionist...are meaningless and only inhibit freedom and pleasure. You're truly liberated and if we had more time I'd make use of that magnificent contraption sprouting between your delicious thighs. But, unfortunately it's time to go.'

'Do we have to dress?'

'We'll have to cross the road at Sebastian's place, Con.'

'No we won't,' Sebastian said excitedly. 'We can park in the garage driveway and cut the engine. I can open the doors with my palm print and we'll let the car coast down silently. That way the car will be off the road and won't be noticed. It's a quiet area riddled with prowling security services because all the oldies live in fear someone's going to rape them and steal their ill-gotten gains. Once in the garage we can enter the house by the internal stairs. If she hears us Mum will just think we're Farzdbuk.'

Twenty minutes later, Rex's Holden drifted silently into the basement garage of Desolé's house, and parked beside her Audi. They crept up the stairs and breezed into the lounge, standing in a half circle between the television and their surprised hostess who took one look and began to scream, whether at the sight of four large and fit naked men and one nude black woman, or the apparent resurrection of her son, was unclear. Whatever the reason, she screamed and remained screaming until Con grabbed her from behind and shoved his hand over her mouth, holding her until the others had switched the TV off and arranged themselves decoratively over the luxurious armchairs.

'What's the matter, Mum? I thought you'd be pleased to see me. I've brought four friends to meet you. You already know Reggie, my boyfriend, and Rex, my father. This is Phoebe, his spouse and my stepmother, and this is Con, my wrestling and maths teacher.'

Desolé's mouth was hanging wide in shock. Sebastian stepped forward and slapped her hard.

'Close your mouth, Mum, you look demented as well as old and ugly.'

Eyes wide she stuttered but you're...'

'Dead? No, sorry. Things went a bit belly up for poor old Farzdbuk and he ended up where I was supposed to be. Before that, however, he took the trouble to tell me that as it was my fault Guapo escaped, he was going chuck you onto the streets and find someone else to take over this place. However, to save your skin and comfortable life, you offered me, your beloved son, and Reggie to be butchered instead. Was he telling the truth?'

'No! No! I thought he was simply going to use you both as...' her voice trailed off as she realised she was only digging a bigger hole for herself.

'As what, mother dear? Prostitutes? Slaves? Come on, speak up.'

Strange animal like noises were issuing from Desolé's throat.

'What's that? You thought he wouldn't cut out our kidneys and hearts until we'd been fucked to death in his brothel?'

Desolé was muttering incoherently.

'Mrs. Sanspere,' Fee cut in sweetly, 'would you mind if I had a look around your house? Sebastian's told me so much about it and as we'll be moving in when we've got rid of you, I want to work out where all our stuff will go.'

'No! No!' was all Desolé managed to whimper before Con slammed his hand over her mouth again.

'Come on, I'll take you on a tour,' Sebastian said cheerfully, then turned back to Con. 'The old hag might try to escape so you'd better strip her. That was the method she used to keep our guests prisoner, wasn't it, Mother dear?'

Sebastian led the others to Desolé's quarters and secret room where they packed up everything that could possibly have any bearing on their investigations, then carried it all back to the lounge where a naked and distinctly unappetising old woman sat shivering in fear of Con who was standing with his legs apart directly in front of her, his groin at her eye level.

'What do you mean you don't want me to fuck you? You wanted Rex seventeen years ago. You must be pretty desperate by now. Come on, just a quick blow-job then.'

Tears were streaming down Desolé's face and she stared in wide-eyed supplication at her son. 'Sebastian, please stop this. I don't know what I've done wrong, I've always loved you, I...'

'You've always treated me as a commodity, mother. Conniving with Jack, who, by the way, is dead, to set up the cameras and sell videos of me and the guys to porn merchants. Actually, I didn't mind that. In fact I enjoyed some things, but getting me to act as a prison therapist for young men who'd been kidnapped so their organs could be used in transplants was a bit rich. However, that doesn't compare to donating my kidneys to Farzdbuk so you can stay on here.' Sebastian shook his head. 'Can't forgive that, sorry.'

He leaned forward as if to give her a kiss, but spat in her face instead.

Rex took his place. 'I forgive you for raping me because I've inherited a wonderful son, so you didn't do too badly there. But I can never forgive you for selling his body to save your wrinkled skin. For that I curse you!' One by one the other three filed past and spat.

Rigid with shock, Desolé was gagged, then led downstairs and bundled unceremoniously into the rear of the wagon together with her computers. Sebastian opened the garage doors and they drove in silence to Farzdbuk's Hospital, turned into the gateway and stopped. Con dragged the protesting woman out and pushed her along the rough track towards the main building. The others all followed. Rounding a corner they saw lights.

'I guess by now Farzdbuk is beginning to comprehend the scale of his fall from grace,' Rex said quietly.

'Yes. The nurses will be long gone, but the surgeons will be there nursing their wounds and keeping Farzdbuk alive for the next few days.' Con slapped Desolé roughly on the bum. 'Fuck you're bony! Well, old witch, up those steps and through those doors is your only hope of survival. Your dear friend Farzdbuk is in there recovering from the removal of his kidney, so you'd better be nice to him. Off you go!' impelled by a shove that set her staggering, Desolé limped along the stony driveway; moonlight reflecting off her pale flesh. Her whimpering could be heard all the way up the steps to the front door where she knocked. The sound was loud in the still night air.

'Mission accomplished, I reckon,' Rex said cheerfully, let's go in case they come out with six-shooters looking for us.'

They made their way back to the car and drove sedately home.

'Staying the night, Con?'

'Love to, but Sebastian and Reginald have the spare bed.'

'It's a King-size, plenty of room for three,' Fee said as if surprised he thought it a problem.

'Reggie?' Sebastian asked.

'Suits me,' Reginald replied. 'But my turn first.'

Con looked from one to the other. 'Hey! I'm not just a commodity.'

Reginald took his hand. 'Sorry, Mr. Achilles, but tonight you are.'

Rex roared with laughter. 'Wait till I tell them about this in the staff room!'

Chapter Fifteen

Fee was already working when Rex finally dragged himself from bed and prepared breakfast. Ten minutes later he heard laughter from his son and the other two, and his chest filled with a feeling of such gratitude and happiness he wondered if a heart attack was imminent. Despite his

success as a librarian-teacher, love for his ridiculously intelligent spouse, and their pleasant home and easy life, there had always lurked an emptiness he'd been unable to rationalise. That vacancy had been well and truly filled by Sebastian. But that wasn't all. Con, Reginald and Rodney had also insinuated their alien and wonderful world into his dry and academic life. He felt re-born, revitalised, impatient for every new revelation, every new sensation, and couldn't help wondering what had happened in the king-size bed the previous night.

As it turned out, nothing happened except talk and sleep. They reviewed everything that had happened that day—recalling and reliving, discussing and questioning events so extraordinary they already seemed like an impossible dream. Then Sebastian turned his head to the right and kissed Con before turning onto his left side, wrapping Reginald in his arms, kissing him, and following the others into the dreamless sleep of those who fear nothing; not regaining consciousness till they heard Rex preparing breakfast.

They raced out to the pool for a morning swim to clear the dregs of sleep.

The food was served beside the pool.

Fee arrived with sparkling eyes, a huge grin and perfect teeth so white they blinded. 'I can do it, thanks to Desolé's computer,' she announced proudly. 'It's a little beauty and she's kept a record of all passwords and details of every transaction made over the last decade. I didn't want to use my computers because of the chance of having stuff traced back to me, but fortunately, Desolé's has loads of storage and is very fast. It was easy to trace and hack into Farzdbuk's accounts and I've already cleared the three largest, their funds are now on a computer located in the Caribbean. After breakfast they're off to Spain, and then to a server in Honduras. I have to check on some dodgy credit card transactions for a bank this morning, so I'll have to go in to town, but when that's settled I'll get working on the real estate. Will you guys be OK without me?'

Sebastian raced around and gave his stepmother a kiss on both cheeks. 'You're a wonder woman, Fee, consider me your slave for the foreseeable future.'

'Sweetheart, I have since the minute we met. I'm just waiting till the next slave market in Port Douglas to make a tidy profit.'

Sebastian and Reginald cycled away; Reginald responding to a call from his father, and Sebastian wanted to see Rodney to thank him properly. After waving goodbye to Reginald he decided to first go to his old house for a preliminary sort out of everything he wanted to keep.

Con and Rex had a swim then lay in the sun beside the pool.

'I'm impossibly grateful to you for saving Sebastian,' Rex said, failing to keep the emotion from his voice. 'I don't know how to thank you. What's remarkable is that we've been teaching in the same school for three years, yet I've spoken to you only a few times and never realised what a fine man you are.'

'Thought I was just a muscle-bound jerk who thinks wrestling and violence are essential elements in a young lad's education?'

'Well, everyone knows all mathematicians are mad. And you thought I was just another dried up, boring, wimpish School Librarian and English teacher.'

'Something like that. Certainly not the adventurous type—until you dropped your tweeds and swam starkers with Sebastian at the school pool. That made me sit up.'

'I've always been a little nervous of you. You looked a bit wild. Instead, you're one of the most sensitive, brave, caring people I'm ever likely to meet.'

'You forgot intelligent.'

'Yeah, that too. Beau, fort, intelligent et grand, as the French say.'

'And you're a cute exhibitionist with a great body. You're also brave, caring and all the other sensitive new-age-guy things. Luckily, your wimpish nature allowed you to be raped, and so a wonderful child was born. So you're good for something.'

'Have you and Sebastian had sex?'

‘Ask him!’ Con sounded curt. ‘What I will tell you is that any happiness I have in the future will be thanks to him. It was his insistence on wrestling naked that opened my eyes to the joy of nudity. It was his interest in me, and his intelligent curiosity that made me question my sexual orientation and prevented my embarking on a disastrous marriage. And it was Sebastian who introduced me to Guapo, with whom I hope to share my life.’

‘I didn’t realise. I’m really sorry to have asked. It’s just that he seems to be both in awe and in love with you and I don’t know how to react. I know nothing about being gay.’

‘There’s nothing to know.’

‘But... what do gays want? Need?’

‘Oh... you mean the gay agenda. That’s easy. Gays want to have loving parents, an education, a job they enjoy, a pleasant place to live, a boyfriend or two, sex and, most of all perhaps, they hope to find someone to mutually love and cherish in a permanent relationship; all without being vilified, bullied, abused and terrorised.’

Rex was silent for a minute. ‘I’m incredibly stupid, aren’t I?’

‘No, it’s the first time you’ve been confronted with the problem.’

‘It isn’t really. When I asked Fee what Indigenous people want, she said almost exactly the same things. My grandfather was a Kanaka, kidnapped to work on the cane fields, and he said the same thing. Those of us with a permanent tan know only too well what a bigoted, racist country this is, but we forget all the others who are equally badly treated. I know Australia isn’t much worse than other countries in its intolerance, but we always hope it will be better. Perhaps that’s impossible. Humans have to have underdogs to kick so they’ll feel better.’

‘Yep. At the moment it’s kick anyone who looks like an Arab. I’ve had my share of being told to fuck off back to the desert. That’s probably why I’m such a belligerent prick always ready for a fight.’ Con stretched. ‘I seem to have stuffed up my back, lying too long in one position last night so I wouldn’t roll over on the kids and they’d think I was going to rape them.’

‘Want a massage?’

‘Definitely, if you’re up to it.’

Rex fetched a bottle of liniment he used on himself after jogging and gently kneaded Con’s spine before beginning a general massage starting from the shoulders and arriving at the firm buttocks. Bravely he pressed and kneaded, spreading the cheeks and pressing them together again. The sensation was erotic and he got an erection. Embarrassed, he stopped.

‘Well, that’s the limit of my expertise.’

Con rolled over, exposing an erection as hard as his masseur’s. ‘That was wonderful. Thanks. I feel a million dollars.’

Rex stared at Con’s hard-on. ‘I can’t believe I kissed that thing last evening.’

‘Why not? It was fun.’

‘Yes, it was. Fee’s always telling me I should be less uptight about sex; treat it as fun. But it seems a bit strange that I’ve kissed a penis, but never kissed a man on the lips. What’s it like?’

‘Try it and see.’

Rex leaned forward and pressed his lips lightly against Con’s. It felt rather pleasant, a dry and sensuous brushing of lips. He sat back up.

‘Different from a woman. Your lips are hard and dry. I like that. But I don’t like the beard bristles.’

‘That’s what I like. I never admitted it to myself before, but I used to get bored sick kissing women. Now I can’t get enough of kissing beautiful men.’

‘Does that include me?’

‘Of course. And you kiss very nicely. What’s good about having sex with men is you can always tell how well you’re doing by the size of the erection you arouse. With women you’ve no idea.’

Rex laughed, gave Con’s cock a friendly tug and was about to stand when he was grabbed round the waist, dragged down to lie on top of a bristly chest, and kissed with all the passion Con could muster. Rex struggled briefly, then found himself relaxing. Con stroked his back and buttocks and pressed their bodies together, pleasantly surprised when Rex’s tongue fluttered into his mouth,

followed by a shuddering, rapid thrusting, and a great groan of release as Rex ejaculated. When his heart stopped pounding he heaved himself off, sat on the grass and looked at Con.

‘Should I feel embarrassed?’

‘Do you?’

‘No, I feel great.’

‘That’s exactly how you should feel.’

‘And what about your own...?’

‘Keep watching and you’ll discover.’

‘You don’t mind?’

‘Au contraire. It’s much more fun with someone watching.’

Rex grinned sheepishly. ‘Yeah. I knew you and Sebastian were watching Fee and me screw yesterday, but pretended I didn’t because it made it more exciting.’

‘Most men are like that. It accounts for gang rapes. Watching or being watched while fucking is the ultimate turn on for guys—straight and gay.’

‘So I’m normal?’

‘Perfectly.’

Sebastian was nervous as he approached the house. What if Farzdbuk had ordered his goons to watch the place and grab him? They were still on the loose with as much to lose as their master. He stared at the house for several minutes from the shelter of a hedge, panic rising in his chest and throat until he could bear it no longer and cycled away, tailbone tickling as if the bats of hell were overtaking him. He arrived at Rodney’s apartment gasping for breath, hammered on the door and didn’t relax until it was locked behind him.

‘Panic attack?’ Rodney asked kindly.

‘How did you know?’

‘I used to get them a lot when I ran away from home. It was bloody dangerous alone on the streets of Brisbane. Knowing what I know now I’d never do it again. And after what you went through yesterday I’m surprised you’re not a cot case. You’re tough.’

‘Thanks. And so are you. I didn’t thank you properly yesterday for coming to our rescue. Con said that without you to immobilise the other nurse they might have been overwhelmed.’

Rodney smiled. ‘Thanks, but I doubt it. Reginald was like an avenging angel. He and Con could have taken out the entire hospital alone. They’re awesome. Its a pity Con has a boyfriend, I could really go for him.’

‘Yeah. He’s something else.’

‘Where’s Reginald?’

‘Visiting his father.’

‘Are you still OK to perform tomorrow night?’

‘Sure, but I’m not interested in stripping. I never wear clothes so can’t feel sexy by slowly taking them off. I’ll just do a dance/gymnastics thing, if that’s OK?’

‘It will be, the older guys at the ‘Hole in One’ are always a good audience, but you can show me if you like.’

‘Don’t laugh.’

‘As if.’

In Rodney’s practice room Sebastian stood entranced between the enormous mirrors. ‘Fuck! It’s a turn on to see yourself like this! Is this how you get your acts so perfect?’

‘Thanks. I aim to please. OK, strut your stuff.’

Conquering an unusual initial shyness, Sebastian’s moves became more fluid and when he completed the sequences he’d been practising in his head ever since he’d agreed to perform, Rodney was entranced.

‘Sebastian, that will floor them. I’m going on first because to appear after that would be disastrous. What do you say to putting on a double act some time?’

‘Are you serious?’

‘Sure am. If Reginald agrees.’

‘Oh, he’ll agree. He’s not jealous. He knows I love only him. He understands that for me sex with others is just fun and only serious if it’s with him. He also trusts me to practice safe sex.’

Reginald arrived back only seconds after Sebastian puffed up the hill. They raced inside, dived into the pool, then swapped news over a healthy lunch prepared by Rex and Con, neither of whom seemed able to stop smiling.

Everyone wanted to come and watch him perform the following night at the ‘Hole in One’, but he made them promise not to. Only Reginald was allowed because he’d feel stupid if it was a flop. Rex was astonished that Sebastian had even considered going inside his old home without back up, and Con offered to take him and Reginald there to sort out his gear that afternoon. Mr. Blackthorn had wanted to buy Reginald a car, but he declined as he preferred to keep fit on his bike and could only see problems with parking and maintenance, but he’d agreed to assist at his father’s office the following week to replace a secretary who was sick.

Fee had sorted the problem with the bank and was ready to deal with Farzdbuk’s property. All land and property transfers, being electronic, can be done over the Internet, however she needed Rex to make a few telephone calls and go to the Land Transfer Office. As a more or less white male he would have no problem, whereas a black woman would have them calling the cops to check her identity and police record. ‘But at least I’m not subjected to ‘virginity checks’ by male vigilantes like the women in Aceh and other parts of Indonesia,’ she said with a shake of the head.

Con’s phone rang. He checked it, let loose a shout of delight, raced out to the pool and chatted, returning almost immediately.

‘Guapo decided not to wait any longer. He’s at the airport now! I’m going to pick him up.’

‘He raced for his car.’

‘Con! Clothes,’ Rex called, tossing him a pair of shorts.

‘And bring him here for a meal tonight,’ Fee said firmly. You are now officially part of this family, so we want to meet Guapo and make him welcome too.’

Impulsively Con embraced her. ‘Thanks, Fee. That’s the nicest thing you could have said. My parents couldn’t wait to get rid of me.’ He laughed self-consciously. ‘But we might not stay long.’

‘We don’t expect you too. You’ve a lot a lovin’ to make up.’

‘Sorry, Sebastian. We’ll have to put off the visit to your place till tomorrow.’ He dragged the shorts on as he ran, leaped into his car and sped off.’

‘Well, Seb, looks as if it’s just you and me.’

‘No worries, you’re a lethal bodyguard.’

Rex shook his head. ‘Shouldn’t you wait till Con or I can go with you?’

‘Reggie’s a karate king and I can hold them while he kicks the shit out of them. Stop worrying.’

‘I can’t when it’s you. Just take care!’ Rex said nervously.

All seemed quiet at the house. Sebastian let Rex’s Wagon drift down into the garage, Reginald closed the door softly and they crept up the stairs to stand silently in the foyer. The place seemed empty, so they dropped their shorts and sandals and padded through to the lounge. Sebastian held up his hand and pointed. A man was sitting on the edge of the pool, back to them, feet in the water. Heavy set. Massive shoulders. Shaven head. T-shirt and shorts.

‘Get us another stubby, Chris?’

The voice came from the right, so there were two!

‘Get it yourself!’

Like a shadow, Reginald crossed to the kitchen. Sebastian followed and crouched behind the refrigerator, while Reginald concealed himself behind the door. The wait was nerve wracking. Perhaps the guys had their beers in an esky out on the terrace and weren’t coming inside? After what seemed like an age they heard the sound of a deck chair sliding on the pavers and someone grumbling as he crossed to the kitchen.

A sharp chop with the side of the hand to the base of his skull and Reginald's first victim crumpled, to be caught and lowered softly to the floor by Sebastian. Reginald grabbed a tea towel to jam into his mouth and another to tie it in place. The man was a giant and began to stir. With a bunched fist Sebastian slammed his knuckles into the fellow's left temple. His eyes opened, the eyeballs disappeared and he fell back, slamming his head on the floor.

Plastic bin liners twisted tightly, made excellent ties and by the time Chris called out asking what was keeping him, he was lying on his side with his hands behind his back, legs bent, feet lashed together and tied to a collar round his neck. They rolled him behind the bench out of sight of the doorway and waited.

Not so easy this time. The fellow was wary. He feigned an entry, stepping back in time to avoid Reginald's blow, grabbing his arm and attempting to tear it off. Fortunately he hadn't reckoned on Sebastian slamming into him from behind. He lurched forward, twisted in an attempt to avoid the granite bench top, but slammed his head nonetheless. Reginald winced in sympathy as the fellow dropped audibly onto the tiled floor, blood seeping from a gash in his forehead. Several more bin bags and two tea towels later he too was secure.

Reginald was grinning, Sebastian trembling with excitement. They stared at each other's groins in delighted astonishment.

'Fuck! What a turn on!'

'Yep, violence is the best aphrodisiac. Roman matrons used to wait in the dressing rooms for sweat and blood-soaked gladiators to return and fuck them silly.' Sebastian grabbed Reginald's hand and dragged him to the bedroom, threw himself onto the bed and pulled his lover on top. Mere seconds of writhing intimacy were enough to achieve noisy orgasms. They disentangled and lay on their sides staring into each other's eyes, fingers exploring in utter contentment.

'I love you.'

'I love you too.'

'You're so sexy!'

'Look at you! A grand edifice again already!'

Sebastian gazed down affectionately at his erection. 'It does that when I'm with you, and I've no idea what to do about it.'

'Your suffering is about to end; I've discovered the cure.' Reginald hoisted himself off the bed, went to a shelf where he'd seen a pump dispenser of skin lotion, massaged a wad onto Sebastian's erection, straddled his chest, worked another load of lotion where it would be most useful, then slowly lowered himself, stopping every centimetre, vainly attempting to hide the spasms of pain.

'Does it hurt?'

'Not in the slightest! Pain is all in the mind.'

'Ha! There was a young queer-boy from Deal, who said, 'Although pain isn't real, when I sit on Seb's prick, and it swells up real thick, I dislike what I fancy I feel.'

'Oh very smart.'

'I thought so. But you great lug, you don't have to. I love you anyway.'

'But I want to!'

'Why?'

'Modern thinking has it that the fuckee is the one with the power. He's in control. He has the other man's most precious possession inside him at his mercy. He controls the whole operation. I'm a control freak, Seb, I thought you realised. Soon I'll have you begging for it, willing to do anything to gain entry to my tunnel of love.' With a grunt of relief the remaining centimetres disappeared and he sank onto Sebastian's pelvis.

'Help! This is murder! But they say it gets easier. Anyway, young feller, I now have your entire shaft at my mercy. Are you ready for the thrill of a lifetime?' Without waiting for a response from his giggling boyfriend Reginald contracted his sphincter with all the force he could manage.

Sebastian bucked. 'Fuck! What'd you do? What've you got up there? A vice grip?'

'You see? Now do you understand who's the boss?'

'Yes, oh Lord and master.'

‘Are you ready for phase two?’

‘Yes, Master.’

‘Then stop giggling! I have to concentrate. And do you think you could soften up a bit? I reckon you’re deliberately swelling larger than ever just to test my resolve.’

Reginald tightened his sphincter again and Sebastian crowed with delight.

‘That’s so fantastic! Do it again! I could come just lying here while you do that.’

Reginald gazed down in adoration. ‘You are so beautiful.’

‘And you are so manly and handsome. Kiss me!’

Reginald leaned forward and the kiss was deep.

‘Now for the ride of our lives!’ and Reginald was away galloping gently while Sebastian stroked his chest, abs and thighs before tenderly manipulating his lover.

‘I’m coming!’

‘Me too!’

They lay side by side in the greatest contentment either had ever known.

‘I had no idea it would be like this.’

‘Neither did I,’ Reginald blurted, leaping from the bed and racing to the bathroom.

Sebastian nearly choked on laughter as gargantuan farts trumpeted into the toilet bowl.

‘Ah!’ Reginald wailed. It’s all gone! And I wanted to have your baby.’

‘Never mind, we’ll try again.’

When they finally roused themselves it was later than they’d realised so they raced around collecting all Sebastian’s clothes; a dozen pairs of shorts, three leather thong sandals, his laptop computer, I-pod, and stack of CDs and DVDs. By the time his school texts and a substantial library of real books were placed in the Holden alongside everything else he wanted to keep, the vehicle was almost full.

‘What’ll we do with the lads in the kitchen?’

‘Leave them to rot.’

‘Good idea, but we’d better check.’

It was fortunate they did; plastic is easy to shred and the prisoners would have been free in an hour. Finding no rope or even string in the house, they ripped the electric leads off the TV, video, toaster and every other appliance they could find to supplement the plastic bags.

‘I need a piss,’ one groaned

‘Not in here you don’t!’ They rolled the two trespassers across the lounge out to the garden.

‘There you are guys, piss all you like and when the sprinklers come on you’ll be washed clean. Lick your lips if you’re thirsty. Oops, you can’t with those nasty gags. Lean over the pool and suck, but don’t fall in.’

Rex and Fee’s relief when the boys returned was palpable. They’d been extremely nervous, but hadn’t phoned, not wanting their new son to feel checked up on. By the time the gear had been stacked in the back of the garage, Con and Guapo arrived and they all splashed in the pool till Fee brought out the meal, which they ate on their laps around the pool.

All evidence of the stress Guapo had been under had dissipated. He looked calm, relaxed and very handsome, smiling in delight while Con fussed around like a clucky hen.

After congratulating them for subduing the intruders, Con suggested they dump them at the hospital later that night.

And then it was Fee’s turn to tell. She and Rex had worked hard all day and were justifiably pleased with themselves. It was Rex who realised it would take far too long to sell Farzdbuk’s properties. Instead, Fee had hacked into three Big-Bank computers and arranged first mortgages. The cash had already been transferred to an off shore account, and the first lot moved on. Their part in the retribution of Farzdbuk and his henchmen was complete.

‘So... how did you do it and what exactly does it mean?’ Sebastian asked.

‘Normally, you have to apply to the mortgage and property assessments manager, then the place is inspected and valued professionally, papers filled in etc. Once it’s all signed off and approved, everything is entered into the central computer with approval numbers and other details. I simply

by-passed the first steps and inserted fake completed files in the computers, so it thinks everything has been done properly. From here on everything's automated, no human has a hand in it, so in a month's time Farzdbuk will be sent a bill for the interest on the money he's been lent.'

'How much?'

'We took out first mortgages worth nearly ten million dollars. At an interest rate of seven percent per annum, he'll have to find about fifty-eight thousand dollars a month to avoid losing the properties. With his income stream severely curtailed, this will be impossible and the banks will foreclose and sell the properties, making a nice profit, leaving poor old Farzdbuk with very little except his life and one kidney.'

'And that's too much!'

'Not at all. For people like him death would be more welcome than penury. This is the real torture.' Fee's grin was pleasantly sadistic.

Everyone agreed she was a genius, so they helped clean up the meal before settling in the lounge for coffee.

'I suppose I should report Mum missing?' Sebastian asked doubtfully. 'It'll seem suspicious if I don't.'

'I've been thinking about that,' Rex said. 'It's school holidays, you've been making bike trips with Reginald and staying with your father, so there's no reason you would have missed her for another week or so. You weren't close, so didn't bother with daily phone calls etc.'

'Yeah, seems the best.'

'It would be even better if the house was ransacked while you were away,' Guapo said thoughtfully. 'A red herring like that will take attention away from you when the cops eventually become involved.'

'I want to do the ransacking,' Reginald said with a malicious grin.

'We'll all have a go,' Con laughed, standing and leading the way to the cars.

'Clothes, gentlemen?' Fee asked.

They shook their heads.

'The naked warriors, that's us,' Sebastian laughed. 'Somehow everything feels more real if you're naked, especially wrestling, eh Con?'

'I'd say especially sex.' He grabbed Guapo and kissed him.

'Well, just take care not to have an accident; cops are not so understanding.'

Sebastian ran to Fee and kissed her three times on each cheek. 'Dearest Mummy, I love you as much as Daddy,' and with a shout of laughter he led the way to the cars.

'They're the two goons who were my gaolers!' Guapo hissed when he saw them lying on the grass. 'The same ones I escaped from the day I met you.' He turned to Con and kissed him, ignoring snorts of derision from the prisoners.

'We'd like to roll you into the pond, but being gentle souls we've decided to liberate you,' Sebastian said calmly. 'But first, a ride in a car.'

'They've soiled themselves! We're not putting those pissed and crapped on clothes in the wagon.' Reginald turned to Con. 'Got a knife?'

Grinning, Con produced a flick knife, tested the blade on the hairs of his arm and passed it across. Reginald carelessly slashed at his prisoners' clothes causing them to grunt and recoil in fear. It took a while and there was a fair bit of blood before they were naked. Guapo sluiced them with buckets of water and by the time they'd been rolled down the stairs to the garage they were dry enough, although somewhat battered and delirious. It took all four to heave them up into the back of the Holden, then they returned upstairs and quietly pulled the place apart, leaving it looking as if someone had been looking for treasure.

Sebastian surveyed the wrecked four-poster bed, the wires leading to the hidden cameras, the smashed French doors, the junk in the pool... and a great weight rose from his shoulders. The rest of the house was similarly trashed, but the most damage had occurred in Desolé's room. Her cosmetics

had been tossed everywhere, mirrors smashed, clothes trampled, shoes and hats broken. The others looked at Sebastian and were relieved to see a beatific smile on his lips as he dropped a small card.

‘What’s that?’ Reginald asked.

‘Farzdbuk’s business card that happens to have the address of his hospital scribbled on the back.’

‘Smart move. Print it yourself?’

Sebastian laughed. ‘Of course. Thanks for the help guys. Seeing this mess, and knowing I’ll never have to return is uplifting in the extreme.’ He shook his head and smiled again. ‘Perfect. Just perfect.’ He turned and led the way to the cars through the smashed internal security door, backed out and drove away, followed by Con and Guapo in their car.

It was well past midnight and there was only one light showing at Farzdbuk’s hospital. They parked the Holden, rolled their passengers out onto the stones, freed their feet, and sent them tottering towards the front door.

‘We should have killed them both,’ Con said with a sigh, taking a sip from the glass Rex had just handed him. ‘One day they’ll come looking for us.’

It was late, but no one was ready to leave the peace and companionship beside the pool.

‘And spend the rest of our lives behind bars,’ Rex grunted. ‘Forensics are too smart—we’d never have gotten away with it.’

‘Death is too good for them,’ Fee interrupted. ‘And they won’t trouble us again. They were working for cash, not revenge. Farzdbuk’s not going to be able to afford to eat, let alone pay hit men he’s so deep in debt. And he’s going to have difficulty explaining the disappearance of the old bloke who wanted Sebastian’s kidney, not to mention all the other strange happenings.’

‘So we relax and live happily ever after.’ Reginald grunted.

‘Indeed we will,’ Sebastian said softly, depositing a gentle kiss on his boyfriend’s brow.

Thanks for reading *Sebastian*. If you enjoyed it, there's a short story about him and Reginald in *Time to Think* an anthology of short stories, and he makes an important appearance in *Jarek*, a novel about alternatives to the way we educate and indoctrinate our kids with prejudices that destroy happiness.

Rigby Taylor