

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

IT TAKES TWO

Alexa Milne

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

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By Alexa Milne

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

Two men dance bare-footed on a chequered marble floor. They are dressed in dark trousers, white shirts and wear braces. The taller man has his hand placed lightly on the other man's back. Their heads almost meet but their bodies are tantalisingly just apart, as if they don't want to be too close.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I have been living in stolen moments. It's been weeks since the first time he grabbed my hand and pulled me to the dance floor, my father's expectations and the ledgers of our failing family restaurant forgotten. After everyone leaves for the night, he's been teaching me how to dance. It was a lark at first, a welcome distraction from, well... everything. Lately though, something is different. We move as one being now. The feel of him, my hand pressed on the small of his back, the heat of his face inches away from mine... it's all I think about, having him in my arms. I count the hours, the minutes till I can brush my fingers over his shoulders and feel his breath on my chin. Does he feel the same way?

This could be historical or contemporary—wherever the picture takes you. I hope there is an HEA for these two, and I am dying to know what happens when they finally kiss! Oh, and if it works for a tango lesson or two to devolve into sexy times (clothes torn off/open and cum splattered all over the marble floor), I won't protest.

Sincerely,

Penny

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: infidelity, angst, dancing, friendship, accountant, bartender/waiter, student, wedding

Word Count: 22,756

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“Lucca, are you listening to me?”

She was right. I wasn't listening to her; I was watching him. He seemed to glide between the tables, talking to the customers, picking up empty plates and pouring wine. The way he moved fascinated me, how he curved his body, tucking in his behind and arching his back to avoid hitting anything. It was like I'd never seen him before, and now I couldn't stop seeing him. Last night, lying alone in bed, every time I'd closed my eyes I'd seen him, those blue eyes shining and his lips a hair's breadth away from mine. I'd come so close last night, so close to total and utter disaster.

“Lucca!”

I pulled myself back to the real world. “Sorry, Savvy, you were talking about the flowers. I'm sure white carnations and yellow rose buds will look lovely.”

“Sometimes I wonder if you're bothered about this wedding at all.” She pouted, but there was still a twinkle in her eyes. She leant forward and smiled at me. She had a great smile; it had been one of the first things I'd noticed about her. “Look, you know I didn't want all this fuss, but Dad wants to throw his money around, and I, at least, want to make sure that it's not totally over the top. I think Dad would have got us thrones if he could. At least we won't have the pictures all over some magazine with the logo for Dad's restaurants in every shot!” She ran her fingers through her short blonde hair, pushing it back, away from the front of her brown eyes. We made a good team and we were good friends. She was fun to be with and she took me out of myself and forced me to be sociable.

We sighed simultaneously. “I don't know, Lucca, why does everything have to be so bloody complicated? It's hard keeping everyone satisfied; I know you didn't want a lot of fuss either.”

She knew me well; I'd never been a party animal and I had few close friends. It took me a long time to trust people; perhaps that was why I made such a good accountant. We'd met at university during our second year. We

were friends first, and then one night, we both got a bit tipsy and somehow ended up in bed together. I'd never been one for one night stands. I'd had a few other girlfriends but nothing had lasted, so Savvy and I sort of fell into a relationship, which worked for us both. Now, ten years down the line, we were weeks away from our thirtieth birthdays and from our wedding. We'd been at a family party, looking at the photographs from my cousin's recent nuptials when Savvy had jokingly said, "You know, Lucca once told me that if we got to thirty and hadn't found anyone else, we should get married."

"Then it's about time he asked." My papa had always liked Savvy. Then Mama had waded in. "Yes Lucca, your papa's right; organising a wedding takes time." And I found myself asking if she wanted to marry me. I'm not sure which of us was more surprised when she said yes. We've never even lived together; I was going to move into her house on the outskirts of Leeds after the wedding—or at least that was the plan. I hadn't put my flat up for sale yet. I argued things would turn around and that we could make more money renting it out. Maybe that should have told us something, but here we were, discussing flowers.

I looked across to the bar. "I wonder how many glasses Papa has polished over the years. Whenever I think of him, I see him there behind the bar or wandering between the tables. Losing this place has been hard for him to come to terms with."

"I know, but Dad will give him a fair price, and he'll be able to retire at last. Your Mama will definitely be pleased." I nodded, knowing she was right. I'd looked after the books for a while, and the restaurant simply wasn't making enough money any more. People didn't want to pay more when there were fast food outlets around, like those owned by Savannah's father. Pile it up and sell it cheap was a philosophy that worked.

"Can I get you anything else, Sir?" I jumped at the sound of his surprisingly deep voice. I looked straight up into those bright blue eyes. My stomach lurched, and I felt the blush beginning to develop on my cheeks. Was he doing it on purpose? The way he said 'Sir' in that glorious Italian accent went straight to my cock. Last night I'd held him in my arms, my hand spread across the small of his back, our bodies moving in unison. When we'd started the lessons, it had been bit of a laugh. I was completely awful, but he had such patience. We fitted together so well, with him being smaller and slighter than me. But when he led, showing me the moves, it became obvious he had a powerful physique hidden under those clothes. His hands were strong when they held mine and his

arms well-muscled, which I suppose allowed him to carry around heavy plates, as well as steer me in the right direction. He kept telling me off for looking at him, pushing my head back with his hand but I couldn't help myself. I became fascinated by such little things, like his long eyelashes and the dimple on his chin.

“Would Sir like a pudding, or a coffee perhaps?”

I pulled myself together and met his gaze. “No, thank you, Tony, we're finished here.” I managed to keep my tone on an even keel as if nothing had happened the night before, as if I hadn't pulled him close, or felt his erection pressing into my hip and then come within a whisker of kissing him. “If you could just clear the table, please?”

“Certainly, Sir, it would be my pleasure.” There was just the hint of a smile at the corner of his mouth, and I fought back a blush again, grateful my lower half was hidden under the table. At some point, the lessons had come to mean more than a good laugh. I'd found myself looking forward to seeing him. Those hours became the most important in my week. He flirted with me and I found myself flirting back, loving the praise and the attention he gave me. I'd considered asking him out, just for a drink, nothing more, so I could spend time with him other than at night in the dark. I wanted to know more about him. Where was he from? How did he learn to dance? I had a big list of questions. Whenever I'd asked him anything, he'd shaken his finger at me. “Now is not the time for chatting, Signor Romano; we have work to do if we're going to turn you into a dancer.”

Did he deliberately brush his hand against mine as he took my plate? I looked at Savvy, but she hadn't noticed. I tried to concentrate as she continued to talk about her day at work, but my eye was constantly drawn elsewhere. I saw another customer write something on a napkin and slip it into Tony's pocket.

“Looks like Tony has pulled again,” Savvy said chuckling. “I swear he could charm the birds from the trees.”

“Sorry?” I asked, confused.

“Tony, the waiter, you know, dark and handsome; I think that man has just given him his number. Your dad will be sad to let him go. He's such a flirt, and your papa says he's great with the customers. I'd ask Dad to give him a job when this place closes but his talents would be wasted in one of his businesses.

He's so cute and such a good flirt with the women as well as the men. I bet he's never short of offers from either."

I felt myself tense. "I can't say I've given it much thought. Each to their own I suppose." I had no right to feel the surge of jealousy coursing through my veins. I was with my fiancée. I needed to pull myself together and stop having these vague fantasies. He was simply flirting with me in the same way he flirted with everyone, just as Savvy had said. I wasn't special. For all I knew, he could be screwing a different person every night.

"It's a pity you didn't take him up on his offer to teach you to dance." She looked at me for a moment. Perhaps it was something in my face. "Are you alright? You seem to be completely distracted tonight. You're not coming down with something, are you?" She touched my forehead. "You do look a bit peaky."

That was it. I was determined now. Tonight, I'd tell him that I didn't need any more lessons.

"I'm fine, Savvy; stop fussing." I know I had no right to be irritated with her, and I immediately felt like a complete bastard. "I'm sorry; I guess I'm just tired, you know with work and the restaurant and everything."

When the last of the few customers were making their way out of the restaurant, I turned to Savvy again. "I'll order you a taxi. I've got to talk to Papa about the sale. Your father's been very generous."

"Call it a wedding present. He likes you and it'll do no harm to have an accountant in the family. And this place is in a good site. Leeds is next on his master plan, and this gives him a great location. You know it hasn't been the same here since Mario left. The food is alright but not good enough to get people to pay a reasonable price. These days it's all about cheap and cheerful and that's what Dad offers. It may not be gourmet but it's all about bums on seats."

"I'll come and wait outside with you." A few minutes later, I waved her goodbye and turned to go back into the restaurant. Tony was stacking chairs and tables, clearing a space on the marble floor. I went over to the bar.

"Papa, you look tired. I'll sort everything out for you. Go home to Mama; you know how she worries about you."

"You're a good boy, Lucca. Did you get things sorted with Savannah? The wedding isn't far away now. Your Mama is so excited; her baby boy married at

last and Savannah is such a lovely girl, not one of these flighty things you see on these TV programmes. She has a good head on her shoulders. She's good for you."

"I know, Papa; I know I'm very lucky to have her. Papa, we've got the paperwork for the sale. The solicitors have looked everything over, and Derek wants to do this as quickly as possible. The offer he's made is more than generous. I'll bring everything around to the house tomorrow." As I felt his arms go around me, I knew there were probably tears in his eyes.

"Tomorrow," he said, patting my back. "I know you're right."

I saw him to his car, locked up the kitchen and returned to find Tony waiting for me at the side of the room. I told myself I could end this. I had to end it. After all, he was only teaching me to dance. A few weeks ago Savvy had teased me about my two left feet and how I was going to show her up during our first dance together. Tony had taken my hand in front of them all and pulled me up towards him. He'd begun to take me around the small space at the bar, one foot at a time, showing me how to move in a few simple steps. I don't know how many times I stood on his feet that first time. "I'm sorry; I said I was rubbish."

"I will teach you to dance like Fred Astaire," he announced, just like that. Two days later, we started my secret lessons at the end of service. No one thought it was strange for me to be there; I often worked late and then came in for a meal and to see Papa. "Take your shoes and socks off," he told me. "If you are going to step on my feet, I'd rather you didn't break my toes."

He taught me the waltz first. I don't know how many times we both chanted 'one, two, side, together', but after a few lessons, I'd grasped the basics and was moving around the floor taking him with me. I don't know when I began to notice how good it felt to have him in my arms or how much time I spent counting the minutes until we could do it again. We hardly talked during each session beyond the basic instructions on the steps. I knew nothing about him beyond the fact that he worked in the restaurant a few evenings a week.

"You have learned to waltz very well, Lucca. I think your intended will be very pleased with you."

"Are you sure? Shouldn't I have some more lessons?" Was I begging? It felt like I was. "Sorry, that was presumptuous of me; you probably have somewhere else to be." Now I was digging, but it was so wonderful, being able to move around the floor and to take control. It made me feel strong and confident in a

way I'd never done before. I couldn't bear the idea of stopping. I needed my fix of this, and even more, I needed my fix of him, however dangerous and reckless that might be.

He looked at me, his eyes shining in the semi-darkness. "Alright then, I will teach you to tango." I couldn't have explained to anyone the excitement I felt at hearing those words. And so we'd started again with the basic steps of the dance.

"Now turn!"

I'd moved my head last night, suddenly, as he told me to do, stuck my chin out too far and caught his. He'd cupped my face. "Are you alright?" I had been until he'd touched me, until I felt his breath on my face, until I'd seen the concern in his eyes. He was millimetres away and the realisation hit me that, more than anything, I wanted to kiss him. I wanted to feel his lips on mine and I wanted it more than anything I'd ever wanted in my whole life.

"I'm sorry, I have to go. I've got an early meeting tomorrow. You can lock up, can't you?" I'd turned and run for my life, for my sanity, unable to deal with my feelings, but still I'd come back tonight. It was only right to tell him to his face. It was simple. All I needed to do was thank him and leave, then I would be safe again, wouldn't I?

He stood up and walked towards me. "I wasn't sure you'd want to continue after last night. Why did you leave? You were doing so well. You'd only stood on my toes once." He stood in front of me, barefoot as usual, wearing a crisp white shirt and black trousers held up by the dark blue braces he always wore when he was working. I tried to remember what I'd told him, but my thoughts were all over the place.

"I told you, I felt sick," I said. "I needed some air. Sorry, I shouldn't have left you to lock up. If you don't want to continue, we don't have to do this." No, that was wrong. I was supposed to be telling him it was over, I'd learned enough and I didn't need him anymore. But I couldn't say the words.

He shook his head, took my hand, and led me to the middle of the floor. I could tell he knew I was lying through my teeth. "We'd better get some more practice in then. We haven't got much more time together. Your father gave me my notice earlier. Why didn't you tell me you were selling the restaurant? I'll need to find a new job. I'll be sorry not to be working here anymore. I like the people. I like you."

Oh God, I felt my heart leap out of my chest, like in one of those cartoons. I needed to get myself under control, and quickly, but before I could do anything, he'd closed the space between us and taken up both my hands. "Dance with me, Lucca. Hold me in your arms and dance with me."

I stood, unsure of what to do next. I'd just have this last session and then end things, no harm done. "There's no music," I said, stuck to the spot. He began to hum the song we'd chosen to dance to, and we began to move totally in sync with each other, our heads together and our hips slightly apart as he'd taught me. We moved in a straight line across the floor then turned abruptly. "Good, you've really got that now." I grinned like a Cheshire cat; praise from him felt wonderful. He reached over the bar and put the music on. The sound filled the darkened room. I raised my arm again and spread my other hand on the small of his back. I felt him place his hands on my arms. Briefly, the stubble on his face grazed across mine as we stood almost cheek to cheek. I wanted to pull him towards me so our hips met, so I could press our bodies fully together, but he'd taught me right from the beginning that the tango wasn't the same. On the beat of the music I began once more to do the basic steps I'd mastered, turning when we reached the end of the room.

"I think it's time we tried something a little more ambitious. I'll lead you through some more difficult steps." We stopped, he moved his lower leg, twisting his body to and fro as he did each move, precisely placing his foot every time.

"Now you," he instructed. I followed as he did each step, slowly at first and then more quickly. When I looked up, he was staring at me. He spoke almost in a whisper; his voice was low and the tone did something to my insides. "I don't know who told you that you had two left feet. I guess you just needed the right teacher to bring the moves out of you. Your fiancée is going to be very impressed with how much you can do."

I knew it was wrong, but I didn't want to think or talk about Savannah at that moment. I could feel his breath on my face. I watched, fascinated, as his lips parted slightly. I wanted to run but my feet refused to move. I held my breath as he ran a finger down my cheek.

Could a man purr? I swear he did. "I could teach you so many things, Lucca." Then it happened, his lips touched mine. No other part of our bodies touched at all. His mouth felt so soft. I could feel his tongue pressing. I opened my mouth slightly and moaned when his tongue ran along my lower lip. If there

was anything else happening in the world at the moment, I didn't want to know. Surely the heat I was feeling had burnt everything else away anyway. Then his warmth was gone. Not sure my legs would hold me up, I grasped the chair by my side and sat down with a bump.

"I've wanted to do that from the moment I first saw you," he said, kneeling in front of me. My mouth opened and words came out. "I'm getting married. I'm not gay. I don't know why I did that." I felt his hand in mine.

"I think we both know there's something going on here. You kissed me back; I didn't imagine that, did I?"

"No, you didn't, but I can't do this." He reached out and kissed my hand. I felt his face graze my skin. It was so different to being kissed by Savannah. "Oh God, Tony; I shouldn't have done that." I felt my cock stir in my trousers. Shit, this was real; this time I wasn't dreaming it.

He took my face in his hands. "I'm going to leave now, Lucca. I will continue to teach you if that's what you want, but you must know I have feelings for you. This is more than just wanting to be in your arms." He released my face, stood up and placed my hand on the bulge at the front of his trousers. I knew mine was the same, hard and begging to escape. As if some force held it there, I couldn't pull my hand away. "I want you, Lucca, and I think you want me. I know your situation, but only you can decide what's right for you. I'll be here again in two days if you want to take this further, but I'm not prepared to play second fiddle." I watched him turn and walk away, more certain that he was taking the foundations of my whole world with him, than I was about anything else in my life.

The next day felt like it lasted forever. I had meeting after meeting with different people who needed me to show them the best way to avoid declaring income on which they didn't want to pay tax. For some, it meant the difference between keeping their businesses afloat and going under. I felt like I was helping them, but others simply wanted to keep their money for themselves. It was all perfectly legal and part of my job, but that didn't mean I had to like it. More than once, my mind drifted to our kiss, to the feel of him under my hand, to the daydream of what it would be like to wrap my fingers around his cock. My phone vibrated in my pocket. I expected the text to be from Savannah or my father; he could just about manage to use the phone I'd bought him now. I looked at the message a few times.

Meet me tonight at 10 at Club Argentine. I'll give your name to the doormen. Please.

It was the final “please” that got me. I immediately googled the club and found there was a tango exhibition there tonight. I could tell myself I was there to learn. I could see my parents earlier and allow Mama to stuff me with food, and go on there afterwards. I'd be safe in a club full of people, even if I was tempted, wouldn't I?

I chose my clothes carefully—my black suit, which I knew hugged my arse, my white shirt, and the red braces Savvy had bought me. I looked at my ties and put on the red one that matched. I could take it off after I'd seen my parents.

I shuffled the papers together into a pile and put them back in the folder. “That's it, Papa, that's everything completed. I'll take them to the solicitors tomorrow.” I pressed my hand over my father's fingers. This was the end of an era. “I know you'll miss the old place, but now you and Mama can have some time to enjoy yourselves rather than you working yourself to death.”

He sighed and patted my hand. “I know you're right, son. Now, eat and make your Mama happy. We thought Savannah might be here tonight.”

Mama placed the food on the table in front of us. “I wanted to show her my outfit. I finally found one today.”

“Hmmm, only after she'd dragged me all around Harrogate for the hundredth time.”

“Well, it's important, Giuseppe. I'm the mother of the groom. I don't want to let him down.”

“You could never let me down, Mama. You've been the best parents a son could hope for and I love you both. Mama, as always this lasagne is magnificent.”

Later, I made my excuses and left. As I drove back into Leeds, I questioned what the hell I was doing. I told myself I was just going to watch and learn. This was not a date; I wasn't going out with Tony. At most, it was a drink together.

I parked a little way away and walked the short distance to the club. The entrance was busy with people milling about. The posters on the wall outside

showed various dancers. I stopped in front of one poster which showed two men in hold. Was that what we looked like when I had Tony in my arms? I made my way to the front of the queue, and gave my name to the doormen. I was allowed in immediately and told to wait at the bar.

Perched on a stool, I ordered a drink and looked around. The place was nearly full by now. In the centre there was a large rectangular dance floor. I sensed him before I heard him; perhaps it was the smell of his cologne. "You came then," I turned to see Tony standing behind me. He wore the same black trousers and white shirt he worked in. His dark hair was slicked back. He looked like a gangster in some 1930s film. I almost expected him to be carrying a violin case or tossing a coin. As I scanned him from head to toe, I saw he even wore those black and white shoes like they did in the old movies.

"I came," I said quietly.

"I've got a table over here." I followed him to the edge of the dance floor and took the chair next to his. There was very little room to manoeuvre and our thighs touched. Neither of us moved them. "I brought you here to see what is possible. There are some great dancers performing tonight, both amateur and professional."

"I saw some of them on the posters outside. When did you learn to dance? I would have thought it was unusual these days, for a man to dance to your standard. You've worked for my father for ages, but I know so very little about you. I don't even know your full name." I could have looked at his employment records but I wanted him to tell me only what he wanted me to know. Was the idea of dancing with a mysterious stranger more alluring?

"My name is Anthony Matteo Jones."

"Jones!" I couldn't hide my surprise. There was another obvious change as well. "And what the hell, your accent? That's not Italian. I assumed that you were."

"My mother's Italian but my father's Welsh. I was born in Cardiff."

"But the accent?"

"Ciao, Signor," he said rolling the letter R. "You mean the Italian one all the customers love their waiters to have. You know that's what they want; it's what you seemed to want as well, so I kept using it. We don't have much of an accent at home, just a bit of a Welsh lilt. I came to Leeds when I was eighteen, and I've been here for nearly six years now. I can talk Yorkshire, ee by gum, as

well if you want. As for the dancing, my sister went to ballroom lessons and I followed her and found I wanted to join in.”

I grinned at his description. “*I watched my Sis go pitter pat, said I could do that, I could do that!*”

“Wow, you can sing. I’d never have figured you for a musicals fan. I know, it’s very *Chorus Line*. Being one of the few boys made me very popular; all the girls wanted to dance with me in competitions. It was a great way to meet women.”

Now I really was confused. “But you’re gay.”

“Oh, Lucca,” he said putting his hand on my thigh. “Why do people need labels?” Before I had chance to reply, the lights went down and the music started. A series of dancers performed to various Latin rhythms. They were beautiful, the men in their suits and the women in their dresses, as they swirled and stepped across the wooden floor. “These are people from the local dance club,” Tony told me. “For some of them, it’s the first time they’ve performed in public.”

“Do you go to the same club?” I asked just as the music stopped and the MC came out and said something in Spanish.

“You’ll love this,” Tony whispered in my ear. He took my hand and held it between our thighs as two men took centre stage on the dance floor. For the next five minutes, they danced together. I watched, mesmerised by each move they made, and each step they took. They moved together as one, hardly deviating from the spot. They flicked their legs and whirled around, one picking up the other, cheeks together and hip to hip. The steps were more intricate than anything I’d ever seen. Then, at the end of the dance, they kissed, and I know I stopped breathing as all around me people stood and cheered. I just stared until I felt Tony pull his hand from mine. “I have to go,” he said into my ear. “Wait here, you’ll see me soon.”

Gradually, the noise died down and the men left the stage. For a while music played and the audience got up to dance. I didn’t know how long I was supposed to wait. I needed a drink, but I was afraid to move lest I lose my spot.

“Your drink, Sir.” I looked up as a glass of wine was placed on my table. “Tony thought you might need one.”

As if by magic, the floor cleared and a spotlight hit the centre of the room. The music began again and two men appeared in the centre. Both wore similar

outfits, the usual black trousers but this time with red sashes around their waists. Instead of white shirts they wore black boleros with red trim leaving their chests bare. I could only see the taller man who was facing me when they began to move, legs intertwining in those oh-so-intricate patterns. And then I saw his face; the other dancer pressed him close then they pushed each other away and circled around like cats circling their prey. Their eyes hardly left each other as they seemingly fought against one another but then were drawn back together as if by some invisible thread. I heard a growl and felt my nails digging into my palms. Every nerve ending felt alive; adrenaline pumped through my veins. I wasn't sure if I wanted to fight or flee. Some of me felt I shouldn't be there, that this was too intimate, that I didn't belong, but more of me wanted to pull Tony away from the man who held him in his arms. He was mine, not his. I wanted him in my arms; I wanted to press my body against his; I wanted my hand on his chest; I wanted him! Shit! I wanted him! All around me the crowd erupted when the dance came to an end. I tried to see where he had gone, but lost him in the melee. I waited, unsure of anything. He'd taken everything in my world and stamped it underfoot as certainly as I'd watched him stamp his feet on the dance floor. The buzz from my phone brought me out of my head.

*Next lesson, tomorrow, usual place, 11pm Sleep well, your
Tony xx*

My Tony. By the next day, it had got so bad that I was doodling his name on official papers. He was all I could think about. By the time I'd crawled into my bed last night, I must have looked at his message over a hundred times. I looked at it as I held my cock in my other hand and came so hard my whole body shook. This was so fucked up, but I knew I'd be there as he instructed. I didn't know what I wanted to happen, or perhaps I did, but I didn't want to put a name to it. Was I gay after all or bisexual? Could you get to nearly thirty and find that you fancied men? And did I fancy men or did I just fancy him? I know a few of us had messed around when we were in our teens, but a few quick handjobs didn't count, did they? Surely everyone did that. I'd slept with women. Alright, I'd only slept with Savannah since we officially became a couple, but I found her attractive; we were comfortable. Shit! We really were comfortable. I'd never wanted to kill anyone who touched her, and drag them off and claim her as my own like I did last night, watching Tony dancing with the other man. Oh God, it was no good. I was lost, and more than a little afraid that I didn't want to ever be found.

The evening seemed to go on forever. I put on an action film to take my mind off what was to come but found myself looking at Bruce Willis' vest in a whole new way. I began to look at every man on the screen, considering what I liked or didn't like about them, regardless of their acting ability. It was like I was giving myself some sort of gay test. When my phone sang out, I grabbed it quickly wanting it to be Tony.

"Oh, it's you," I said disappointed.

"And good evening to you too!"

"Sorry, I thought you might be someone else. What's up?"

"Aww, are you missing the gorgeous Savannah? Anyway, does anything have to be up? I am your best friend and your best man after all. You haven't called me for a couple of days. I just thought I'd check you're alright." I settled into the sofa and leaned back. I'd known Josh since we'd started secondary school and we'd stayed friends even after university had taken us to different places. Both of us had come back home, me from Manchester and him from Sheffield. "Sorry, mate, I've been a bit distracted lately. Dad's finally signed the papers to sell the restaurant to Savvy's father, and work's been a nightmare."

"Good job I called then, because you sound like you need a good night out. Friday, you, me and anyone else who's about. Definitely no women!"

He was my oldest friend and I'd trust him with my life. If there was anyone I could talk to about this thing with Tony, it was Josh. "How's Danny Boy?" I asked.

"Oh God, my brother is so loved up with Zach it makes you want to puke. He says I'm just jealous and maybe he's right. He's as happy as a pig in muck, whereas I'm still looking for Ms Right and now you're getting hitched as well. I'm going to be a sad old man left on the shelf. It's no good, I need to get pissed and drown my many sorrows. I'll see you in the Crown at seven on Friday, alright?"

"Looking forward to it. If you're there first, get the beers in."

"Will do."

The restaurant was in darkness when I arrived exactly at eleven. I parked around the back and let myself into the kitchen. The emergency light gave off a

faint glow in the corridor that connected the kitchen to the dining room. I opened the door and saw a candle light suddenly flicker and grow before me.

“You came then; I wasn’t sure you would.” The light from the candle flickered across his features, illuminating his cheek bones and creating stars in his eyes. He smiled, and I could see the white of his teeth. “Are you just going to stand there?” he asked.

“I don’t know what to do,” I said, placing my arms across my chest. He got to his feet and sauntered towards me. This time he wasn’t wearing his braces. Slowly he undid the buttons of his shirt and left it hanging open and then, when he reached me, he unfolded my arms and did the same to mine. He took hold of my right hand and pulled it gently then pressed my hand and his to my chest, bringing us together and began to sway then step backwards, sideways, forwards, not really going anywhere. I followed where he led as he hummed the music and put his head on my shoulder. There, in the light of one candle, we swayed together, our other arms loose at our sides. I closed my eyes and just let him take me wherever he wanted. “Keep dancing,” he said quietly. “Just follow me and close your eyes.”

After a couple of minutes, I felt his other hand move between us. He pulled down the zip of my jeans. I’m not sure who was most surprised, me that his hand was now on my cock, or him finding I wore nothing under my jeans. “Keep dancing,” he whispered again as he closed his fingers around me and began to stroke.

“Does that feel good?” he asked.

I only managed to get out one word. “Yes,” I whispered. His strokes increased in speed, but still we moved around the marble floor. I wasn’t sure how he could do it, but I didn’t care. My whole body seemed only to exist in two places, in the feel of his fingers around my hand and around my cock. I knew this wasn’t going to take much longer. I could feel my orgasm waiting in the wings, gathering speed. My cock was so hard that his touch was almost painful, but there was no way I wanted him to stop.

“I’m going to come,” I warned.

“Open your eyes,” he said. I did and looked straight into his. “This is me doing this. This is my hand stroking your cock. This is me making you come.” I couldn’t stop myself.

“Oh fuck!” And then it happened and my come coated his fingers. He arched his hips away from me but continued to milk me of everything I had. I

knew I must be dripping come all over the floor and even on my shoes but I didn't give a damn. I felt him use his fingers to wipe the head and then he tucked me back into my jeans. My knees buckled. "I need to sit down," I gasped. "Too much. I can't. Shit, that was so good. I've never felt anything..."

"Sit." He guided me to a chair. "I'll just get a cloth to clean up." I looked across and could see the flecks of white on the dark squares of the chequered floor. "You've a few drops on your shoes as well." He got down on his knees in front of me and ran a finger across my shoe. I swear, when he put that single digit in his mouth and groaned, my cock lurched upwards again, straining to get to either his finger or his mouth. Seconds later he'd retrieved a towel from the bar and wiped the floor. I noticed him tuck it into his belt, probably out of habit. I had no idea how much time had passed. He returned to kneel in front of me and took my hands. "I'm sorry you missed your lesson."

I'm not sure where the next words I spoke came from. "Come home with me, please. You haven't, I haven't..." He pressed a finger to my lips.

"There's no need. Tonight was for you. I wanted you to feel good. And no, I'm not going to come home with you, not tonight. I want to, but you're getting married in a few weeks, and I'm not that sort of man. I needed you to understand what you could have if you wanted, but if I went home with you tonight, I'd want everything from you, and I'd give you anything you desired. I'm going to leave. You've got a lot to think about, Lucca, and some big decisions to make."

He was right. Although I really had no idea what I truly wanted, there was one thing I was certain about; I wanted him more than I'd wanted anyone in the whole of my life.

I gave him a few minutes, and then I got to my feet. I had no idea where he lived, or who he lived with. He'd worked in the restaurant for a few months now, doing a few evening shifts a week. Before we'd started dancing, I hadn't even noticed him among the others who also worked there on and off. Now, at least, I had a name for him but not the one I was expecting. I hadn't intended to follow him, and believe me following a man on foot with a car wasn't an easy thing to do. It was around midnight on a Thursday evening so there weren't many people about as he walked up towards the University buildings. He kept walking for a few miles along the Headingley Road and then ducked into a side street and I lost him. The houses were mostly student lets around there, back-to-back houses that had been knocked through and usually accommodated several

students at a time. Did this mean Tony was a student? It struck me I hadn't even considered that he might do something else; I'd assumed he just waited on tables for a living. I wanted to smack myself in the face for my arrogance. I really did have no idea about him. Perhaps he just shared because it didn't cost as much, but working at night did give him the daytime to study. There was, of course a simple solution to all this; I could simply ask him. There was a lot I could ask him. I needed to do as Josh used to tell me. "Sort out your shit, Lucca." That had been his advice about Savannah. "Sort your shit out or you're going to lose her, and Savvy is too good to lose." So I had, and here I was back in it up to my neck. Well, there was one positive thing I could do. If the shit he'd encouraged me to sort hit the fan, I could, at least, blame him!

At dead on seven the next day, I pushed open the door to the bar and brushed the water droplets off my jacket. The Crown was like many another pub that had been transformed after the smoking ban. The old lounge area was now a restaurant, but the bar had kept its pool table and dart board and its old wooden floor. Josh was there already, watching Danny cueing up a shot while Zach did his best to put him off. I waved to them both and noticed Josh had got the beers in. He was taller than me and still mostly blonde, although less so than he had been as a teenager. He'd filled out as well from being the scrawny, spotty youth I'd first met, aged eleven. His brother Danny was a couple of years younger but had the same colouring. He and Zach had been together for five years now and had celebrated their civil partnership last year. Josh worked behind the scenes at the BBC studio in Leeds, helping to research and develop local news and other programmes. It meant he'd met a few people over the years and always had a story or two to tell. He got up when I got to the table, and we automatically hugged each other.

"It's good to see you. Seems like ages." It was in fact only a week since we'd last seen each other.

"How you feeling then?" he asked. "Getting nervous now as the big day approaches?"

"I'm fine, just busy, you know how it is. Met anyone famous this week?"

"No, not this week, but I've been acting as floor manager for a change, on the local news. Live is really a buzz. We lost the weather on Wednesday."

"Oh yeah, I think I remember that. She was waving her hands around and there was nothing but a green screen behind. She should have just drawn on a

map on a piece of paper and put some rain clouds on it—that'd be accurate for most days!"

"You're probably right; certainly would be for today. Anyway, how is the lovely Savannah? You really are a lucky bastard, you know. I've no idea what she sees in you, though." I've never been very good at lying to him or hiding anything from him, and I guess he saw the look cross my face. Truth was I wanted him to see it. I had to talk to someone; I was going to explode if I didn't.

"Are you sure you're okay? You sounded a bit funny last night. Not getting cold feet, are you? The wedding is only a few weeks away." I looked down at the table and bit my lip. What the hell did I say? I want to fuck one of the waiters at my dad's restaurant? I think I have feelings for another man? I think I may not be entirely straight after all? Some guy took my dick in his hand and I ended up coming all over the floor while we danced in each other's arms? Well, which would you chose? I looked over to where Danny was potting a ball, which he did easily. Despite the fact they were playing against each other, Zach's face was filled with pride. The look of love that passed between them didn't make me want to puke, instead it filled my heart with something completely and utterly soppy, like I'd just been given a basket full of puppies and kittens. Bloody hell I had it bad!

"Told you," Josh said, seeing the direction of my gaze. "Look at the pair of them. Makes you sick, soppy gits, the pair of them."

"It doesn't make me sick," I said quietly. "In fact, I quite envy them."

"Well, yeah, they've got each other and that's good, I'll give you that. Lucca, you would tell me if there was something wrong, wouldn't you? I'm getting vibes. Is there something you want to tell me?" I looked around the bar which was beginning to fill up with people falling out of their offices into a night out.

"Do you mind if we get out of here?"

"Okay," he said tentatively. "I've a few bottles of wine at home and we can pick up a curry or pizza or something."

"Thanks, a drink or two will help."

"So there is something?"

"Please, I can't do this here. At yours, alright?"

We got a taxi, picked up some food, and twenty or so minutes later we were sitting in Josh's third-floor flat overlooking the river. With the pizza on plates and the wine poured, we sat opposite each other in the big open plan kitchen/living room.

"So spill," Josh told me. I looked at him, not sure whether to tell him the full story or just the edited highlights. Either way, he was going to be pissed with me. He liked Savannah. I'd always been grateful that my two best friends had got on so well, because it had made things so much easier. I swallowed nearly half of the huge glass of wine, and then placed it back on the table. I could feel my heart thumping in my chest; it was so loud I thought Josh would be able to hear it as well.

"Fuck, Lucca, what the hell is this? I'm getting worried now. You're not ill or something, or is it Savvy, or your parents? You've got to give me something here because I'm filling in the gaps."

"No, it's nothing like that. Everyone else is alright. It's me; I've done something totally unforgivable. I should hate myself for doing it, but I can't."

Josh fixed me with an angry stare. "Who is she?" I swallowed hard.

"There is no she." I wanted him to get what I meant without me having to spell it out for him, but it was obviously so far out of left field that he just stared at me, an incomprehensible look on his face. "Then, if it's not another woman, what the hell is it?" he yelled.

I got up and walked to the windows that ran from floor to ceiling. It was dark now, but the lamp lights flickered in the water and I could see the lights in the city stretching ahead. I couldn't face him. "Do I have to spell it out?" I asked. "There is no other woman." I could almost hear the cogs in his brain working things out.

"Shit, Lucca. Are you trying to tell me there's—I can't believe I'm about to say this—another man? You've slept with some bloke?" All I could do was nod.

"What the hell! How? Sorry that's stupid. When? Who? Is it serious? Is this just a one-off thing? Like an experiment? Did you just get pissed or something? No-one took advantage of you, did they?"

I turned around. "No, I knew what I was doing. Will you just hear me out before having a go at me? I need to talk to someone about this. I don't know what to do."

“Okay, come and sit down and I’ll listen. Eat something before you drink anymore.” I noticed he’d nearly drained his glass. I managed a few bites of pizza, and then swallowed another mouthful of wine. “D’you remember the evening when we were all out at the restaurant and were talking about my two left feet?”

“Yeah, Tony the waiter grabbed you and made you do a few steps. I’m not sure I’ve ever seen anyone go quite that shade of puce.”

“Well, I’ve been having lessons from him. I didn’t want to show Savannah up, and Tony offered to teach me at the restaurant after work and...”

“But that was over a month ago now. Have you been having lessons ever since?”

“Yeah, sometimes two or three times a week. He taught me to waltz and now he’s teaching me to tango.”

“Oh, I see; I get the picture. Just the two of you, after hours, dancing, in each other’s arms. Is that how it was?”

“You have to hold the other person, and he was teaching me to lead, so I held him in my arms. He taught me, Josh. Tony taught me to dance, and it felt good having him there. Alright, perhaps it was being in the dark and doing it in secret, but I began to count the minutes until we’d be together again, and then I nearly kissed him.”

“So that’s all this is?” I watched him physically deflate as if he’d been holding his breath waiting for me to finish and now he believed everything was alright.

“No, there’s more; I went back the next day. It was all I could think about, Josh. I had to know. I had all these feelings and I had to know, so we kissed and it felt so right. Don’t ask me to explain; you just know. I was the one who didn’t want to stop, but he walked away.” I tried to work out what Josh was thinking. Anger, disgust, disbelief, I think they were all there. “Bloody hell, I only found out his full name this week or anything about him come to that, even though he’s worked for my father for ages. Then last night we met again and... well... things went a bit further.”

“How much further?” I was beginning to get a bit scared now as he ground the words out through gritted teeth but I couldn’t seem to help myself. “About the same distance we did that time when there were a few of us wanking each other off!”

“Yeah, but we were teenagers, not bloody thirty and about to get married!”

I thought I may as well tell him it all now. “I asked him to come home with me, but he wouldn’t. He told me I had to make up my mind and choose, but how do I do that? I love Savvy, but I get hard just thinking about him.” I saw him glance down. “No, not now, you pillock! What am I going to do, Josh? I need help.”

“I’ve a radical suggestion.”

“Oh yeah, I’m all ears,” I said, leaning forward on my knees.

“Stop seeing him. For Christ’s sake, Lucca, like you said, you’re getting married in a few weeks! Do you want to risk what you have with Savvy for some bloke you hardly know? He’s given you an out. He’s told you to make the decision, so make it. Put it down to experience, and get on with the rest of your life! And, above all else, say nothing to Savvy. Don’t ask for her forgiveness just to indulge your guilt. That’s it; that’s my advice.”

I thought about what he’d said for a while, and I knew he was right. I could text Tony and never see him again. The restaurant was going to change hands; he was going to have to get a new job. I could make a reasonable stab at a first dance with my new wife. It was all so simple. All I needed to do was stop seeing his face every time I closed my eyes, stop imagining his touch on my cheek, stop hearing his voice and stop remembering how it felt to come from the stroke of his hand. Above all else, I needed to forget how it felt to hold him in my arms. “I know you’re right...” I whispered.

“I hear a but.” He stopped. “Okay, let’s say you take this further—what? You’re going to tell him some story to get him to bed and then fuck him or he’s going to fuck you? Or maybe you’re going to leave Savvy and set up home with him. You’re going to tell your parents and your friends you’ve turned gay all of a sudden. Have you thought for a moment with anything other than your dick?”

“I know it’s a mess, Josh, but this isn’t all about my cock and where it goes. I have feelings for him.”

“What? Are you trying to tell me you’re in love with him or something?”

“No, of course not!” I sounded emphatic, but I wasn’t really certain of myself or how I felt. “I’m not even sure I love Savvy like that, or that she loves me. Let’s face it, Josh, we’ve never even lived together because she likes her space. Maybe we shouldn’t get married; maybe we should just be good friends.

It's not too late. I need to talk to her. What if we're making the biggest mistake of our lives?" I wanted him to agree with me; he was my friend, and I wanted him to put his arms around me and tell me everything was going to be alright, and he would help me sort things out and make decisions, and we'd always be friends. That's what we'd always done up until now. One look at his face, and I knew that someone had not only shifted the goalposts but changed the game. There was going to be no hug as he grabbed my arms and shook me. "You are an idiot; you have the most beautiful woman in the world willing to marry you and you're going to fuck it up over what, some bloke with a cute arse?"

I looked at him then, my best friend and my best man. His face was red, his eyes wide, his body full of pent up aggression. I needed to get out of there. I knew this was nothing to do with me fancying men or one man to be exact. I shook him off me and got up. "I'm going to go, Josh. I'm sorry we couldn't talk about this. I really am very sorry." He didn't stop me leaving. Once I was down at street level, I got out my phone and called the only person I suspected would know the answer to my question.

"Danny, it's Lucca. Just how long has your brother been in love with my girlfriend?"

Sometimes you shouldn't even try to work people out. Now I had this information, what was I going to do with it? So Josh had a thing for Savannah, it wasn't as if I could just say, 'Hey, Savvy, I don't think I want to marry you after all, but I've got you someone off the subs bench, and I hope that's okay while I go and explore my own sexuality!' I slammed my hand down on the table in front of me sending papers flying. "Fuck!" This was such a mess and there was no way out of it without someone getting hurt. I needed to see Tony no matter what he said about making my mind up. Deep in my heart, I think I'd already decided, regardless of what happened with him. It didn't take me long to find out exactly where he lived; I argued with myself that I did my father's accounts, so if I accidentally saw the address of one of his employees there was nothing wrong with that. The street wasn't far from the main road. I looked on Google Maps and then at the street view. Okay, I admit it was a bit stalkerish, but I didn't care. Looking at it, the house was undoubtedly one used for multiple-occupation so maybe he was some sort of student after all. I knew he wasn't working at the restaurant tonight, so I decided to just simply knock on his door. He could shut it in my face or let me in; I was prepared for either eventuality.

It was still light as I stood on the doorstep, my heart in my mouth and my stomach AWOL. I knocked on the door as the local church clock struck seven. I'd tried rehearsing what I was going to say but the words kept slipping from my mind or swapping themselves around until I may as well have been speaking some language known only to my brain. I'd been scared plenty of times in my life, but never like this. The door opened, and I was greeted by a short blonde girl in jeans and T-shirt.

"Oh, hi," I said lamely. *Why had I expected Tony to answer the door?* "Ummm, I'm looking for Tony Jones; he does live here, doesn't he?" The girl looked as if she didn't know what to say.

"It's okay, my name is Lucca Romano; Tony works at my father's restaurant in town. I needed to see him. Is he in? Could you let him know I'm here? I'll wait."

"Sure, he's upstairs in his room. I'll let him know." She shut the door and disappeared. I hopped from foot to foot and contemplated running back to my car more than once, then leaving as quickly as possible, but then he opened the door. He was wearing black jeans and a T-shirt with AC/DC emblazoned across it. He looked so different. His hair was all over the place and his blue eyes were full of confusion. And as for my heart, it made its own decision: I think I saw it jump out of my chest and nestle itself just next to his own.

"Lucca, what the hell are you doing here?" He held his ground and showed no sign of letting me in.

"Can we talk? Please? I didn't know what else to do." We were interrupted by someone leaving. I waited while Tony spoke to him and couldn't help wondering if he'd slept with him or maybe the girl. I know I had no right, but I had no control either.

"You'd better come up to my room then. I'm at the back, at the top of the first set of stairs." He closed the door behind us, and I followed him up. I was taken back to all those student houses I'd lived in; somehow they all seemed to smell the same. His door was open. He ushered me in and then closed it behind us. The room was clean but cluttered. There was a double bed, wardrobe and chest of drawers, a desk and a couple of chairs. A large window filled nearly the whole of the far wall, which made it seem more light and airy. Scattered all over the desk were papers and books surrounding a laptop.

"I was working," he said by way of explanation.

"I have no idea what you do." I was still standing, not sure of what to do. The only places to sit were on the chairs or the bed, and one chair was covered with clothes. Tony pulled the duvet cover straight.

"Sit on the bed; I'll get us a coffee, and then you can tell me why you're here." He closed the door, and I went over to his desk, curious to find out exactly what it was he was doing. The papers were full of graphs and complicated equations I didn't understand, even though I'd done 'A' level maths and spent my days working with figures. The texts on the shelf above the desk were all about colour science. I knew Leeds was a leading university in the field, because someone from school had gone there. I could see a few novels, mostly sci-fi, and other bits and pieces. To one side there was a photograph of Tony with people I assumed were his parents and his sister. He looked younger than he did now, but not that much younger, so I guessed it wasn't taken too long ago. I heard the footsteps on the stairs so sat down and waited.

"How did you find me?" he asked as he placed the mugs onto the small cabinet next to his bed. "I didn't tell you where I lived." I wasn't sure if he was angry with me, but he took the seat at his desk and turned it to face me.

"I looked up your address from the records at the restaurant. I know I shouldn't have, but I needed to see you."

"So, have you made your mind up?"

"Tony, it's not that simple."

"So, you're still getting married then?"

"Officially."

He got up from the chair and looked out of the window. I put down the coffee and followed him.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

I leaned my forehead against the back of his neck. "Tony, I can't just tell Savannah it's all off, just like that. You must understand." I couldn't help myself, and I kissed the back of his neck where small tendrils of dark hair curled uncontrolled by the usual gel.

"I shouldn't let you do that," he whispered. So I did it again and reached my arms around him. For what seemed like forever we both stood there, his hands on mine, my lips kissing the back of his neck. I felt his whole body sigh. "Why

do I do this to myself? I've always been a sucker for straight men in suits. Usually, I just look at them from afar and don't get involved, but from the moment I first let you hold me in your arms, I knew I was in trouble."

"You weren't the only one. For some reason, standing here, holding you, just feels right, more right than anything I've ever felt in my life. It's as if I've found the lost piece of a puzzle." He turned his head slightly so I could see his face.

"Please tell me you didn't just say that. You'll be talking Plato and split-aparts before we know it!"

"What?" I had no idea what he was on about. He turned fully to face me so our heads were only inches apart.

"Plato said that when the world began there were these happy creatures that weren't male or female but someone was jealous—I can't remember who exactly—and split them apart making them search forever for their other half. You sounded like that."

I leaned down and pressed our lips together, and at the same time reached my arms around him and pulled him in closer. I don't know if we were split apart or what, but I did know I'd never felt more right in my life, standing there, holding him, feeling his warm, wet lips on mine. I wanted to breathe him in, make him part of me. I pushed at his mouth, and he opened enough for me to run my tongue between his lips, then nip and suck on the bottom one. It was perfect, and I never wanted it to end. I could feel his erection pressing into mine; I reached lower to cup his arse in my hands. I wanted to lift him up, to feel him wrap his legs around my waist while still kissing me. Then I wanted to carry him to the bed, place him down, and fall on top of him. I just knew I needed to touch him, to feel his warm soft skin under my hand, my tongue, and my teeth. I wanted him to be mine; I needed him to be mine. I felt hands undoing the buttons of my shirt and broke the kiss. I couldn't take my eyes off his slim fingers as he undid each one and then slowly ran his hand down my chest. I didn't have much hair, just a smattering and a small dark treasure trail, which he traced with one finger. I was no gym bunny, and my six pack wasn't exactly obvious, but I was alright. I felt his lips and shivered.

"Can we take this to the bed?" I asked. "I want to see you too, and touch you."

"Yes, please. I'm just going to lock the door first. People have a habit of bursting in if you're not careful."

I took off my shirt and toed off my shoes then lay on my back on the bed. Grinning, he slowly removed his T-shirt and then lay on top of me. We kissed again. It was different kissing a man, the scrape of stubble somehow adding to the sensations. I opened up and felt Tony's tongue exploring my mouth. I couldn't stop my brain thinking about his cock being in the same place and how it would feel. I wanted to taste him. I wanted to give him all the pleasure I could. I rolled us over and sat up to look at him. I began to undo his belt and then the buttons on his jeans. I pressed my hand to the bulge and felt just how big he was. The last time I'd had another person's cock in my hand, I'd been thirteen. I looked at Tony, and he nodded. With one hand I pulled his black briefs down just enough and then freed his cock with the other. He was fairer than me; my skin had that olive Mediterranean tinge from having Italian ancestry; his had obviously been tempered by the Welsh genes. His hair was still dark but more brown than black, and he clearly kept himself trimmed down there. I found myself staring not sure what to do next.

"Are you alright?" he asked. "My cock hasn't scared you off, has it?"

"No, sorry, you know men; it's all about bigger or smaller, thicker or thinner."

"So?"

"You want to compare?" I asked. He grinned. "You've seen mine so show me yours." He reached up and undid my trousers. "A briefs man as well I see. Let's have a look then." I should have felt strange having a man with his hands in my pants pulling out my cock, but I wanted to show it to him. I wanted him to like it. His cock was now lying against his taut stomach muscles. I knew I was hard, and he exposed me easily.

"Hmm, looks good enough to eat," he said, lifting his own up to compare. "Pretty similar, I'd say; we might need a tape measure for a final decision." I couldn't stop myself. I fell forward and ground our cocks together while sucking his bottom lip, and then moved along to kiss along his collar bone. The friction between us was creating wonderful sensations, but I wanted more. I kissed down his chest, pulling myself back until I was level with his cock, now leaking with precome. I'd tasted my own spunk more than a few times over the years, but I wanted to taste him. I wanted to feel the weight of his cock on my tongue, to stretch my lips around him and to take him in as far as I could. I'd never had any desire to do this before, in my life, but the need hit me like a wave crashing on the beach; it was unstoppable.

I looked down at him. "I want to suck your cock but I've never... before... so." He reached up and pressed his hand to my cheek. "Just do what you want to do and go with the flow. There's no right way. It's best if you can get some suction on it though and breathe through your nose. A hand on the bottom of the shaft allows you to work on the head. They may deep throat all the time in porn, but that is something you have to learn to do."

"Can you do that?" I asked, wondering if my cock could get any harder.

He winked at me. "You'll have to wait and see, won't you?" He scrambled in the drawer next to the bed. "Here, this will help." He passed me the lube and I spread some on one hand then wrapped it around the base of his cock and began to pull up and down. I licked my lips, then opened my mouth and put them over the now swollen head. The taste wasn't unpleasant. I clamped my mouth all around and began to suck while running my tongue underneath and trying to maintain the rhythm of my hand. I hoped he was getting something from this; stroking I could do, as I'd had a lot of practice at that, but it was quite hard maintaining suction. When I heard him groan, it made my chest swell. "Oh fuck, that feels good. Can't be too noisy though," he warned. "People about, but don't stop."

I did as I was told, sucking as best I could. I loved the weight of his cock in my mouth and on my tongue. My rhythm improved, and I tentatively took hold of his balls with my other hand and squeezed.

"Shit! Keep that up, and I'm going to come down your throat within seconds!" I wanted that. I was determined to try. I squeezed again, and I recognised the tell-tale signs. His hands went to push me off, but I shook my head and waited.

"Coming," Tony cried as he began to empty himself into my mouth. I swallowed as much as I could but had to give up, and let the rest go over my face until I'd finally milked everything out of him. Grinning, I wiped my hand across my mouth.

"You look pleased with yourself," he said as I fell down next to him.

"I'll get better," I promised. I saw a dark cloud cross his face. I reached up and kissed him once again. "I promise I'm going to talk to Savannah. You must know this relationship matters to me, Tony. You matter to me. I'm laying everything on the line here, and I have to admit, I'm fucking terrified."

"Maybe this will make you feel more certain." He kissed down my chest, and my body rose in response, instinctively wanting to be closer to him. When I

felt his hand and mouth around my cock heaven really did become real. Expertly, he brought me to a shattering climax, and boy! I almost felt like he was trying to swallow me whole. He didn't spill a drop. It wasn't the first blow job I'd had; Savannah was good at them, but I'd felt nothing like this—my senses were totally overwhelmed. For a while, Tony lay with his head on my chest, and neither of us said anything. The parameters of my world had shifted, and I was no longer the same man, living the same life. Everything had changed, and all I wanted from him was more. I'm not sure how we managed to sleep, but we did, lying there in each other's arms.

Although it was still dark when I woke up, I was surprised to see it was nearly dawn, and that Tony was still lying in my arms. I pulled myself up a bit and kissed his forehead; he moved under my touch.

"I'm going to get going. I've got to get to work in a few hours, and I need to shower." Tony pulled himself up and sat on the edge of the bed watching me search for my clothes.

"Stop it," I said forcefully.

He looked up and smiled at me. "Stop what? I'm just sitting here."

"You know very well what."

"Well, it seems a shame to waste it." He looked down as his erection. "And you said you wanted the practice!" I needed the loo, but I couldn't resist the look in his eyes or the way he was gently stroking himself to full hardness. My mouth watered. I fell to my knees and wrapped my hand and then my mouth around him. "Oh yeah, that's it, hollow your cheeks and suck." He leant back on his hands and let me do all the work, but I had to admit I loved it. The feel of him in my hand and on my tongue was amazing, and the little groans he made sent shivers down my spine. It didn't take long until he was coming down my throat, moaning quietly so he didn't wake the rest of the house. I licked my lips, removing the few stray flecks of come that had escaped.

"I said I'd get better," I said triumphantly. "Now, I need the loo, and I'm going to have to leave. I've got early meetings this morning, and I stink of sex." I knew my own cock was hard in my trousers, but I had plans for dealing with that in my morning shower.

"I'll meet you downstairs and let you out," Tony said, grabbing a pair of jeans. "The bathroom is next door."

Five minutes later, we were kissing on the doorstep. The first rays of the sun were beginning to rise over the horizon. I felt like my life was starting anew just like the day; it was exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure.

“I’ll call you from the hotel later. I have to go to Manchester tonight as I’m auditing a firm over there first thing in the morning, and then tomorrow it’s the closing night of the restaurant so we’re all there for dinner.”

“I know, I’m working tomorrow night. I’ll miss the old place. I’ve enjoyed working there, and your papa has been good to me.”

“I won’t be able to talk to you tomorrow, everyone is going to be there, but I’m going to tell Savannah afterwards. I’ve already talked to Josh, my best man, but he didn’t exactly take it well. I’ve got to go.” I kissed him again and waved to him from the car. It was going to be a long couple of days.

Thirty-six hours later, I was standing in front of my mirror making sure I’d removed any stray hairs from my suit. I’d brushed my hair back and shaved more closely than usual. The three-piece suit was my best and almost black in colour. I chose a white shirt and a blue tie. My shoes shone so much I could see my face in them. It was going to be a big night for the family. From tonight, Romano’s would be no more, after nearly forty years of service. Tomorrow my parents were off to Australia to see my elder brother, Roberto, and his family. By the time they returned, the restaurant would be transformed into just another fast-food joint—Derek didn’t take much time over these things because, as he’d told me often enough, ‘time is money!’ They planned to be back in time for the wedding.

At six thirty I was waiting outside Josh’s apartment building. I had to speak to him first, to try to clear the air, or the evening could be even worse. I didn’t think he’d tell Savannah or my parents out of spite, but I didn’t want to take any chances. I had no idea if Savvy would be interested in him, and I certainly didn’t live in the land of the rom-com where everything would have ended happily with Savvy marrying Josh instead of me, or me marrying Tony, or even a joint wedding ceremony. I looked at myself in the rearview mirror. “You are going out of your tiny little mind,” I told myself. I saw him come out of the door and leant out of the window.

“Josh, I’ve come to give you a lift.” He looked at me, obviously unsure about what to do.

“Come on, don’t be stupid, we’ve known each other way too long to be like this. Please, I need to tell you something.”

He came over slowly and got into the passenger seat. “Haven’t you told me enough already?”

“I know you’re annoyed with me, but I’m going to do the right thing.” He turned to face me. “So you’re going ahead with the wedding then and forgetting this bloke.”

I have to admit being tempted then and there to lie, just for tonight, just so I could get through the evening and tell Savannah before him. That’s what I should have done, but I couldn’t lie again; it was time to stop running from the truth.

“No, I’m going to tell Savvy tonight that the wedding is off. That’s why I’m here, Josh. I’m not going to lie to you or her after tonight. I just need to get through this dinner for my parent’s sake. So please, I’m asking you to keep quiet so they can have a lovely last evening. I know you’re angry with me; but, although I love Savvy, I don’t think I’m the right person for her. I’m not in love with her; I’m not sure I ever was.”

“So do you love him?”

Did I? I longed to see him. I missed his smile, the touch of his hands, the feel of his skin, the taste of him, the smell of him, the way he fitted into my arms, the sensations he created in my body, the need I felt to be near him, the longing I had to bury myself deep inside him and to feel him come apart underneath me. “I think I’m beginning to. This isn’t just some mad fling, Josh. It sort of snuck up on me when I wasn’t looking. I told you I found myself counting every second until I was going to see him again, and I can do those sums in my head. I wanted to please him; I wanted to get the steps right because he praised me.”

“Shit, have you heard yourself?” He laughed for the first time since we’d spoken about Tony. “You sound like some Disney princess, and I thought Danny had it bad.”

“I do not!” Then I laughed as well. “Okay, maybe I do! Look, we’d better get off. There will be a few of us there tonight. Amy, her chief bridesmaid is coming, as well as Savvy’s father and his girlfriend. Danny and Zach are coming as well, aren’t they?”

“Yes, they are. I told him about Tony. I needed his input. He tried to persuade me that these things can happen at any age if the right person comes along.”

I didn't dare ask if Danny had succeeded. “Thanks, I know this hasn't been easy for you. I don't want to lose you, Josh.” Before I got too emotional, I put the car into gear and set off into the evening traffic.

“Danny actually said you'd always pinged his gaydar so he wasn't surprised.”

“You're lying; he said no such thing!” I wasn't sure how I felt about that piece of information or why it mattered to me. Had I really always had these tendencies and just needed someone to bring them out of me? I was even more confused now.

“Nah, I'm not, you ask him. He said he and Zach had always thought you might bat for their team. Zach thinks you're cute.”

“Zach is built like a bear and is just as hairy. He doesn't fancy me really, does he?” Now, I was even more worried about how this evening was going to go. I could feel Josh shaking beside me.

“You bastard, you had me going then. I'm already pissing my pants with nerves.” I saw him rub his hands together out of the corner of my eye.

“I think I may enjoy tonight after all,” he said gleefully.

The restaurant was packed; a lot of the customers were old friends of my parents. Papa spent half his time wandering around between tables, and Mama talked about going on holiday for the first time in ages.

“He's going to miss the place,” I said. “But you both deserve to have more time together. Roberto is going to be so pleased to see you, and you'll be able to spoil the babies.”

“Won't it be the first time you've seen them for real?” Savvy asked.

“Yes, and they are such beautiful bambinos. And when we return, we'll have your wedding to enjoy, and both my boys will be settled.”

I looked at Savvy's face and caught Josh looking at me. He'd spent part of the evening watching Tony serving. Fortunately, he was working the other side of the room so he wasn't waiting on our table. Every so often I looked over and

caught him looking my way. His smile was enough to set off butterflies in my stomach.

Mama continued talking to Savvy. "Have you got your dress sorted yet? You've only got eight weeks before the wedding. I wish you'd let me help you, but I won't be back until just before the big day. I know it must be hard for you not having your own mother."

I put my hand on her arm. "Mama, it's alright. If Savvy needs help she'll ask. You know the bank keeps her very busy."

"Oh don't worry, Mrs. R., I'll find something off the peg. I'm easy to fit, and I don't believe in wasting money on something you're only going to wear once."

Her father's voice boomed across the table. "You can have whatever you want, my princess, and Gilly will help you look, won't you, my darling; she has such good taste."

Fortunately, Amy started talking about the bridesmaid's dress she'd worn as a child which broke a difficult moment. Savvy wasn't over-keen on her father's girlfriend, and she certainly wouldn't be taking fashion advice from her anytime soon.

"I'm just going to check on something in the kitchen," I said, needing an excuse to get away. I checked on the cake which was going to be presented and then waited in the small corridor for Tony to appear. When he came around the corner, I couldn't help myself. "Just let me put the plates down." He put them on the floor and pressed himself against me. "I haven't got long." I felt my cock harden as soon as he touched me. I kissed him. "I missed you so much last night. I wanted to dance with you. Is that stupid? I really missed having you in my arms. My tango has a long way to go until I'm good enough."

The kitchen door sprang open, and we jumped apart. "You'd better get back to your party," he said, unable to hide the hint of bitterness in his tone. I took his hand. "I'm going to tell her tonight, right." We heard a cough.

"People are wondering where you are." Josh said. "I thought I'd better come and find you, rather than Savvy or one of your parents, or even Derek."

"Sorry, Josh, this is Tony. Tony, this is Josh, my best friend." I was surprised how unembarrassed I felt at Josh catching us.

"I know; I've seen you working here." He looked down, and I realised we were still holding hands. I wanted to kiss Tony again. I wanted to kiss him in

front of Josh to show him how serious I was about this man, that this wasn't some mad experimental fling.

"It's alright, Lucca, you need to go, and I need to get the food for table fifteen. Ring me later." I squeezed his hand, watched him pick up the dishes and then disappear into the kitchen. I followed Josh back into the main room and fixed a smile on my face.

"I hope it's not the food," Josh said to the waiting party. "I found him in the toilets." He picked up a piece of pizza and pushed it nearly whole into his mouth. "I have to say it tastes good to me."

"You're disgusting," Danny said, and grabbed a piece himself. Soon everyone was eating and drinking again until the plates were cleared, and it was time for the cake. I nodded to Tony, who minutes later pushed the trolley carrying the cake into the room. "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" rang out around the restaurant as Papa blew out the candles. I gave Papa a knife, and he cut into the chocolate covered sponge cake. Pieces were handed out around the room along with bottles of champagne. Glasses were raised to toast the restaurant and its owner. It really was the end of an era.

"He's going to miss this place, isn't he?" Savvy said.

"Yeah, it's been his life for nearly forty years, but sometimes you need to face up to reality." I heard her sigh, and I put my arm around her. She'd been pretty quiet all evening, just talking in whispers with her friend Amy. "Are you alright?" I asked, not sure I really wanted to hear the answer.

"Yes, I'm fine." I thought she sounded anything but fine. "You are coming back to mine tonight, aren't you, Lucca?"

I took her hand. "I was planning to. You said there were things we needed to talk about." Suddenly, I felt nervous; I'd assumed she wanted to talk about the wedding, but perhaps—no, she couldn't know anything, could she?

She removed her hand from mine. "That's fine then," she said, before looking across the room. "Awww, look at them; your parents are so cute. I'm glad they're going to see your brother and his family; they'll love seeing their grandchildren for the first time."

"Yes, they will." Savvy still didn't look at me. Something was definitely up; we knew each other far too well for me not to notice. Did she know about Tony? I moved to where Josh was standing. "You haven't told her, have you?"

"No, I said I wouldn't. Why?"

“She’s just acting a bit strange is all. She’s been quiet all night. She can’t know; there’s no way she can know.”

“Well, she will soon, so what does it matter?” I nodded. This wasn’t going to be easy. People began to leave, and eventually, there was just our party left, other than the workers. “I’ll take Savannah home now,” I said to Papa while hugging him and then Mama. “I’m sorry I can’t take you to the airport tomorrow. Ring me when you get there, alright, and have a lovely time.”

On the drive home, we didn’t speak and the atmosphere was strained. I wasn’t sure what the hell was going on with Savvy but something definitely was, and I didn’t think it was going to be an easy night for either of us.

“That’s a large glass.” Savannah poured another glass of wine for herself and then sat down next to me on the gleaming white leather sofa. Everything in the room was in its place; the only thing that seemed out of place was me.

“Are you alright?” I asked. “You seem a bit tense.”

“I’m fine. I guess it’s just all the wedding stuff. It’s getting really near now, but it’ll be all worth it once it’s over. I guess everyone feels like this, don’t they?”

“I think so. Roberto got the jitters before he got married and now look at them with twins and a new life in Australia. He’s taken to it like a duck to water.”

“That’s good.” She leant against me and swallowed some wine. I didn’t say anything. I didn’t tell her I couldn’t marry her because I was seeing someone else. She seemed so fragile, vulnerable, and I’d never known her be like that about anything. I sat there in silence listening to her quiet breathing. This was all going wrong. What the hell did I do? I knew the right thing was to tell Tony I couldn’t see him. I owed it to Savvy. I could have a good life with her. Other people seemed to be happy. I didn’t have to see Tony again except that I wanted to see him. I couldn’t leave him just like that either. I wanted one night, and if that was the end, then I’d have to live with it and put it down to experience. He would then hate me as much as I hated myself. I could have one wonderful night and then leave the fantasies behind. I had to face reality. I couldn’t be gay, there were my parents and my friends. It was shallow of me, but this would be simpler. I could have one perfect night then tell him the truth. He’d hate me for lying and tell me to leave, but Savvy need never know.

“Are you staying?” she asked.

“No, I’ve got an early trip in the morning, an audit in Harrogate. I’ll ring you tomorrow.” I kissed her forehead and got up. She smiled, but the smile didn’t reach her eyes. “Sorry, I guess I’m tired. It’s been a big night and work is a bastard at the moment. Drive carefully. I love you.”

“I love you too.” And I did. I just hoped it was enough.

I got into the car and drove off. I felt like the complete shit I was, but it didn’t stop me ringing him because once you start lying...

“It’s me. I need to see you. I know it’s after midnight, but I can be at your house in forty minutes, then we can go to my place.”

“Did you tell her?”

“Yes, she knows and the wedding is off.” It was easy to say it. I knew it was wrong, but I needed this night with him. “I want to be with you tonight, and my place is a lot more private.”

“I’ll sit and look through the window. I haven’t been able to do anything since I watched you go. I need to see you too, Lucca; I haven’t been able to think about anything else. I’m so hard just thinking about you.”

My whole body shook, and my cock practically leapt up with excitement. “I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Drive carefully. I want you to get here in one piece.”

I’m not sure how we got to my flat without committing an act of public indecency. He looked so happy when he ran down the steps to my car, and then he kissed me. I put my hand to the back of his neck and pulled him in, thrusting my tongue into his mouth. He did the same, and all I wanted to do was get him out of his clothes there and then. Finally, we pulled apart; my mouth felt bruised. I pushed every other thought out of my head, except the one where I took this man to my bed.

“Hurry! I’m going to make you feel better than you’ve ever felt in your life.”

“That’s quite a boast,” I said. “I’m looking forward to you proving it.”

I put the car into gear and set off. The streets were quiet so I took a few risks, only slowing down for the speed cameras. We fell into my flat and continued the kiss we’d started in the lift. I picked him up. His legs wrapped around me as I carried him to my bedroom. I could feel his hard on pressing into me, and the sensation of his teeth biting into my neck. For a moment I

worried about the marks, but I couldn't tell him that. "Oh God, Tony, that feels so amazing."

"Well you're mine now so I'm making sure you remember this for days. I want you to remember this night when you're old and grey." I felt the buttons go on my shirt as he ripped it open, and they clattered onto the hardwood floor of the bedroom. I fumbled for the light, and he gripped me tighter. "I want to see you," I said. His head came up, and he looked around the room and then towards the bed. At the edge he let go, and I lowered him down. He slowly undid his buttons and removed his shirt. He was stunning, his chest perfectly smooth with just a small trail of hair leading down from his navel. I fell to my knees and began to undo his trousers, desperate to get to what was hidden inside. He must have been as desperate as me, because he lifted his hips, and I pulled everything down, removing his shoes and socks as well, to leave him completely naked. There was something so sexy about being almost fully dressed in front of someone with not a stitch on. I ran my hands down his chest feeling every hard muscle and every ridge. He felt so different from the women I'd slept with; there was no softness here, just a suggestion of strength. I touched his nipple and was surprised when he groaned. "Do you like that?" I asked.

"Yes, my nipples are sensitive." I'd never even considered it before. All of this was a complete learning curve. "D'you like this?" I asked as I took one nipple into my mouth and sucked gently. The nub hardened immediately, and I reached a hand to squeeze the other one. Tony began to squirm and moan and, if it was possible, I got harder. I loved how responsive he was and how good it made me feel. I kept up my assault for a full five minutes, sucking and licking and nipping at both nipples until he was leaking precome against my stomach. "If you keep doing that and rubbing yourself against me, I'm going to come; and I really want to do that with you inside me."

I didn't want this to end. "We have all night. I'm sure we can both rise to the occasion more than once."

"Better if you fuck me first, better for me. I can't wait, and you need to prepare me. D'you know what to do?"

"Yeah, I did some research," I had to admit. I'd also practised on myself with just a finger or two to see what it felt like. I knew not all men fucked, and I wasn't sure if I ever would; but if this was going to be our one and only time, I wanted to do it right and make Tony feel good. He sat up and looked at me. "We don't have to if you don't want to."

"I'm just a bit nervous, that's all. I've never done this before. I don't want to hurt you."

He looked at me with an intensity that threatened to take my breath away. "A little hurt is a good thing; it makes you feel alive. We need a condom and some lube."

"In the drawer." I reached over and took them out with shaking hands. He took hold of them. "Come on, get up here." He edged up the bed on his back then spread his legs apart. "Kneel between my legs and cover your fingers in lube then push in one at a time." I was still trembling as he pulled his knees up. Now I could see his hole; his cock was rigid, lying on his stomach. I covered a finger in lube and pushed against him. "Just push, and don't worry, I've done this a few times before." Suddenly I felt jealous of every man who'd ever done this. I pushed harder than I intended and found I was fully inside. I moved in and out, fascinated by how it appeared and disappeared. "You still feel tight."

"I'm good, put in another one." I squirted the lube and pushed in the second finger. The sound he made went straight to my cock as he bucked off the bed and pushed down on me. "Oh yeah, just a bit further, there, just there. Can you feel it? Oh God, that's so good. Put in another. Fuck me Lucca, fuck me harder." I pushed in another finger and he met every thrust. Precome leaked from his cock all over his stomach, and I ran the fingers of my other hand through it and down his hard shaft.

"Fuck me, please." I pulled my fingers out and rolled the condom down my cock. I rubbed more lube on and then lined myself up. "Do it," he said. "Fuck me. Just do it, Lucca. Make me come with you inside me. Make me feel it tomorrow."

I pushed in slowly, but it was like he was sucking me in until, finally, I was buried balls deep. "It feels so good," I said.

"Then fuck me. Show me what you're made of." I pulled back out and slammed back in.

"That's it," Tony said. "Keep doing that. You're a natural." I didn't care if he was lying or not; I couldn't stop myself. I pushed back in again and again until sweat was beginning to pour off me. I did everything I could not to come too soon, but it was just too much. I'd never felt so alive in my life, and I could feel that tingling sensation at the bottom of my spine and the pulling up of my balls. "I'm close," I said. He took hold of his cock and began to rub himself. It didn't take more than a few strokes, and then I could feel his arse contracting

around me. Jizz splashed across his chest, and I couldn't contain myself any longer as I pumped into the condom.

“Oh fuck, Tony, that's...” I had no words to explain it or how I felt. I wanted to cry and scream and shout his name. Sex had never felt like this, every sense overwhelmed, just existing there in the moment. I wanted the feeling to go on forever; I didn't want to leave him, to disconnect. For those glorious minutes, I'd been part of him; and I didn't want to let go, not yet. I had to pull myself together. I'd lied to him, and I'd lied to her. I was a complete shit, and I knew it; but, for those few minutes, I'd have done anything, lied to anyone. Maybe it would all work out; maybe he wouldn't hate me. I fell down over him and pressed my face into his neck, still breathing heavily. I needed to hear him tell me it was good. I wanted it to be the best he'd ever had. After a few minutes I slipped out of him and removed the condom, letting it fall to the side of the bed. He knew what I was asking when I looked at him.

“That was amazing.”

“Was I alright?”

“Yes, you were alright. I will definitely feel that tomorrow as I sit in my lab. Look at us; we're covered in my come.” I ran a finger through and tasted it. “Tastes different to mine. I'm sure that you could tell me all about the chemistry of why.”

“They say it depends on what you eat, but I'm not sure I believe that.”

“I'll just get a towel and wipe us off,” I said.

When I came back, he was snoring. I wiped his chest and then went around to the other side of the bed and snuggled in behind him. I didn't want the morning to come. I knew he was going to be angry with me, but I couldn't regret it. I wanted there to be a way to sort this out, but that was just wishful thinking, wasn't it? Just another lie.

I stood under the shower and let the water flow over me, washing away my sins. If only it was so simple. This was such a mess. I'd wanted him to join me in the shower so I could keep him for just a little bit longer.

“No, you're already running late and so am I. We've got all the time in the world to do that again and more. I'll make you some coffee and then get back to my place and shower there. I've an hour or so to get to the lab.”

I shaved and washed my hair and then got dressed. The bedroom was empty so, as I could smell coffee, I guessed that he was already in the kitchen. I looked around puzzled; where was my phone? I searched the pocket of my jacket from last night. Damn! I must have left it in the car when I phoned last night. Fear seared through my brain and I rushed to the kitchen; he was waiting for me when I got there, my phone in his hand. One look at him and I knew it was all over.

Hi hun, will call later. Going wedding dress shopping with Amy. Kiss kiss.

“You didn’t tell her! You fucking didn’t tell her! You lied to me to get me into bed.”

I moved a couple of steps towards him. “I can explain.” Who was I trying to kid?

“You just wanted to fuck me, didn’t you? What was I? Your little gay experiment before you went off and got married and had two-point-four children?” If he’d put a dagger through my heart, it would have been less painful than seeing the hurt and anger on his face. “And I fell for your lies. I never fucking learn. You’re just like him with his ‘Oh yes, I’m going to leave her’ promises. I thought you were different. Why am I so stupid? Here, you’d better answer her.” The phone hit my chest, but I managed to juggle rather than drop it.

“I will tell her. I just couldn’t last night. I prom...”

“No, don’t do that. Don’t promise. I don’t care anymore. I’m going to leave here, and you’re not going to contact me. If you do, I’ll get a new phone or something. I can’t do this, not again.” He wiped his eyes. “No, I’m not going to shed tears over you. I’m worth more than this; more than being some married man’s bit on the side.”

Alright, I know I was guilty as charged, but you know, I wasn’t the only one. “You do know that you’re not so innocent in all this either. You knew I was engaged. I could argue that you led me on. You’ve no more right to the moral high ground than I have; after all, Tony, it takes two to tango!”

He walked towards the door and then turned and looked at me. “We could have been good together, Lucca. You may have a point, but you didn’t exactly fight me off, did you? I give you and Savannah less than a year; she deserves better than you, too.”

“Tony, I’m sorry. I never meant to hurt you.” My heart was breaking, but I had no idea what to do about it. When he closed the door, my legs gave way and I collapsed into a heap on the floor.

The next few weeks passed in a blur of work and whisky. I tried to phone him to begin with, but he did as he threatened, and I gave up. Several times I found myself driving to his house in the hope of just catching a glimpse of him, but each time I turned around before I got there. It should have been the happiest time of my life. Every so often I’d pull myself together enough to try to pretend everything was alright as the wedding got closer and closer. It was pathetic. I was pathetic. I looked in the mirror. There were bags under my eyes; my skin looked sallow because a diet of pizza and whisky didn’t give you a healthy glow. I needed to shave. I needed to pull myself together and stop wallowing in my own mess. I picked up my singing phone.

“Lucca, why aren’t you at work?”

“Morning, Josh. I’ve taken a day off. I am allowed to do that, you know.” You’d be right in thinking our relationship was somewhat strained at the moment.

“Right, get yourself and the flat sorted. Savannah and Amy are coming around to yours tonight with me. We’re going to have a civilised dinner, and then, afterwards, Amy and I will leave, and you are going to tell her because even if he wants nothing more to do with you—and I can’t say I blame him—you still can’t marry her. Amy says Savvy is as moody as hell as well.”

I wanted to be angry with him but I was too tired. “So you and Amy have been talking then?”

“I rang her to invite her tonight. If you don’t tell her, I’m going to.” He sounded like he meant it. I knew that he was right.

“Alright, alright, I know I can’t go on like this. It’s not fair on either of us. I just feel like such a despicable shit.”

“That’s because you are a despicable shit. There’s no way you’ll come out of this smelling of roses. You’re lucky Danny and I are still speaking to you. You’ve been a shit to her and to Tony.”

I slumped on the bed. “I know. You don’t have to tell me; marrying Savvy would be disastrous for both of us. I’ll see you later. What time?”

“I told Amy I’d pick her and Savannah up at six forty-five and that will get us there about seven thirty. Get in some wine and we can have a Chinese or a curry or something. Just sort yourself out. It’s time to grow up, Lucca, and face the music. I’ll see you later.”

I spent the next few hours tidying up the flat, and it needed it. I washed all the bedding, cleaned the floors and hoovered the carpets until the place smelt one hundred percent better and every surface was clean and sparkling. The activity was good for me; seeing the flat without the film of dust, grease and pizza boxes made me feel a bit better about everything. I hoped Savvy would forgive me; that she’d see it was for the best, that marriage would ruin both our lives. I wasn’t sure whether I was going to tell her about Tony. Yes, I was still a coward. As he wasn’t around, it didn’t matter, but if she wanted a reason... Would she be happier knowing there was someone else, or not? I tried to work out how I’d feel, listing pros and cons, but it didn’t help.

When the buzzer made a noise, I jumped a mile. Okay, show time!

In the end, the evening was pleasant, with everyone on their best behaviour. Josh told far too many bad jokes, and Amy had a wealth of stories, about both the children she taught and the staff she worked with, that kept us amused. Of course, Josh and I could recount a few of our own. We ate Chinese and drank too much wine, and it seemed almost surreal that I was going to tell all. The one thing none of us talked about was the wedding. Truth was, I’d missed this, just talking about anything and everything as friends rather than people who were tying themselves to each other for life.

“I need the loo,” I said.

“Me too,” Josh slurred.

“Just as well I have two then, isn’t it?”

We got up together. “And I thought it was women who went to the loo in pairs. We’ll start cleaning away.” Amy began picking up plates and cartons. “And do make sure you’re done up before you come back into the room!”

I headed to my bedroom expecting Josh to go to the main bathroom but he followed me in. “I really do need to go, Josh.”

“I know but I wanted to make sure you haven’t changed your mind. I meant it, Lucca. I will tell her if you don’t, and I’ll tell her everything. You need to do this for yourself as well. You only get one life, so get it right. I’m still your friend despite the fact that you’re a complete and utter plonker.” I hugged him

and, without speaking, went into the en-suite. He was still there when I came out. "Thought I'd just wait; I couldn't be bothered to go to the bathroom." I made my way back to the main room, padding barefoot on the wooden floors but stopped when I heard Amy and Savvy talking. They say you should never listen because you never hear anything good about yourself, but I listened anyway.

"You have to tell him, Savvy."

"I know but he's going to be so hurt."

"But you don't want to get married to anyone, do you? It's not even about him. Why the hell you said yes to him I don't know. You should never have let it get this far."

"I know, I know, but it seemed like a nice idea at the time. Dad kept going on and I love Lucca; I really do love him. He's kind and he treats me well."

"That would be fine if you were sixty or a puppy; but you're thirty, with your whole life ahead of you, and they might still give you that promotion as well. You know you wanted it, and it's a chance for a new life."

I couldn't listen any longer. I turned when I heard Josh behind me.

"Are you okay?" He must have seen my face. "Yeah, I need to talk to Savannah now. Would you take Amy for a walk around the block or something?"

"Sure. Are you going to be alright?" Having heard what I had, I figured at least Savvy wouldn't exactly be devastated; telling her the truth would get both of us off the hook.

We went back into the room. "Amy, would you mind just stepping out with Josh for a while? I just need to talk to Savvy." I saw them look at each other.

"Go on, Amy. It'll be fine."

"We'll just go for a walk around the block then," Josh said. I waited until they had left the flat and then turned to Savvy.

"Sit down, Savvy, I've got something I need to tell you." I took the seat next to her on the sofa. "I think you know what I'm going to say, so I'm just going to say it. I can't marry you; it's nothing to do with you, it's me. I'm not what you need. I know the wedding is only three weeks away, and I'll pay for anything that needs sorting but..."

“You heard me talking to Amy, didn’t you? Trust you to try and take the blame. I said you were too good for me.”

I laughed, knowing the truth. “No, Savvy, you deserve better than me. Things aren’t that simple, and you need to know the truth. You think I’m this really nice guy, but I’m not. I’ve been living a lie. I should have told you weeks ago, not three weeks before we’re due to be married.”

“Does it matter now? And better three weeks than three days or three minutes. I’d considered leaving you at the altar; then everyone would be sorry for you and blame me.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.” She nodded solemnly. I looked at her and couldn’t help myself, I started to laugh. “You were really planning to leave me on the day?” She started laughing too. “I know—like some bad Hollywood movie. I thought I might do a *Runaway Bride* and wear trainers under my dress.” We were both now laughing with tears falling down our faces. “Oh God, how did we get to this?” she asked. “You were saying something about living a lie. I’ve got to say, I am a little intrigued by that statement.”

I pulled myself up. “I’m just going to say this right out loud. There was someone else.”

“Is that it? You had an affair with some woman? You said there *was* someone, so I guess it’s over now.”

I took a deep breath. “Yes, it was a few weeks ago, but he left me when I didn’t tell you about him. I was going to, but I chickened out.”

Now she did stare at me open mouthed. Finally, I’d shocked her. “You said he. You had an affair with a man? Sorry, I’m having trouble getting my head around this. I had no idea. I can’t believe you managed to keep this from me.”

“No, me neither.”

“And have you always known you were—what? Bisexual? Have there been other men I don’t know about?”

“No, not really; I mean I’ve never been against it, in theory, but there hasn’t been anyone else, not until Tony.”

“Tony? Tony from your dad’s restaurant?” I nodded. “Well, I have to say it’s a better reason for cancelling a wedding than being offered a job in Hong Kong.” She looked at me as if she was seeing me in a whole new way. “You’re

not bullshitting me here, are you? Really? I mean, I did wonder occasionally whether there were other women, but I'd never have guessed that." She shook her head from side to side. Finally, she smiled again. "Oh God, we're such a pathetic pair of idiots."

"Aren't we? Can you still get the job? You deserve it, and it would be a new start."

"I don't know. Can you still get Tony back? I said he was cute."

"I've no idea if he'll have me back now. I let him down; I lied to him and to you." I looked at her again. "Why aren't you yelling at me?"

"Doesn't seem to be any point now, does there?" She poured more wine into our glasses. "Let's get pissed instead. Telling each other is the easy part; telling our parents is going to be the worst bit. At least yours are half-way around the world; Dad is going to throw a wobbler when he finds out, and then he'll tell me you weren't good enough for me after all. Thank goodness he didn't get the magazines involved like he wanted. We're going to have to write to over a hundred people."

"Shit! Couldn't we just send out the same e-mail?" I leaned my head on her shoulder. "I'm so glad we can be friends. I'd hate to lose you."

She hugged me and patted my back. "We should never have been anything else really. Shall we phone those two and let them know we haven't killed each other?"

"I suppose so. It's just nice having the two of us here without the big secrets. I'll text them. "

"And then we're going to have to work out how to get you and Tony back together."

"What?"

"Well, you like him, don't you?"

I nodded. "I think I might more than like him."

She sat up and grabbed my arms. "Well then, Lucca Romano, Operation Get-Tony-Back begins tonight."

The first thing we needed to do was find out if Tony was working anywhere new. I checked the restaurant records, but there'd been no request for

references, so I struck out there from the beginning. I know I could have simply gone to his house and knocked on his door, but I thought he'd just slam it in my face or get someone else to answer or, even worse, call the police to say I was a mad stalker.

"I could write to him," I suggested over coffee two weeks later.

"Or send him some flowers or a cuddly toy with a sweet message." I looked at her. It had taken a while but we'd finally sorted out cancelling the wedding. Her father had gone ape-shit, and my parents didn't understand. Of course, I hadn't told them the whole truth, not yet. "Too creepy?" she questioned.

"Just a bit."

"I could go and see him and tell him the wedding is off; surely he'd believe me," she said. I put my hand on hers. "You really are too good for me, Savvy."

"I know, but I've only got a few days; and then I've got to go to Hong Kong for a couple of weeks, to meet the people I'm working with and find somewhere to live."

"Is Derek speaking to you yet?"

"Yeah, he sulked for a bit, but, after I told him I'd called it off, he said that he'd never thought you were good enough for me anyway, so that's alright, isn't it?"

The café door opened, and we looked up. Amy and Josh came quickly towards us and sat down. "Ask us where we were last night," Josh said. His eyes were wide, and I couldn't help noticing he was still holding Amy's hand. She was practically jumping up and down in her seat.

"Okay, where were you last night?"

"We went to *Club Argentine*, you know the place just off the Headrow? Amy wanted to go dancing and they had this cabaret on with ballroom dancers. They were really amazing; I might take up dancing myself."

"And?" I said, gesturing for him to get on with it.

"Tony was there, serving behind the bar, but not only that, he performed as well. He and this bloke did an Argentine Tango that was—well, Amy was practically in a pool on the floor."

She fanned herself with her hand. "Bloody hell, he is so hot. The look on his face and how he moved, muscles rippling across his bare chest; I'll tell you, for nothing, the man has quite a few fans."

"I know; he took me there once." I was trying not to get over excited. If he was working there, I could see him somewhere neutral and, hopefully, he might talk to me.

"Anyway, we thought if we all went there tonight with you, he would believe you about not getting married and then maybe he'd let you talk to him. What d'you think?" The pair of them looked terribly pleased with themselves.

"He might not be working there tonight," I said.

"Oh he is," Amy said, bouncing once more. "We asked someone if he was performing tonight, and he is. We need a plan, and I need a new dress. We're going to go out to dinner tonight, and then we're going to go dancing!"

I will admit I had a couple of glasses of wine over dinner. I was so nervous, I ate very little. I'd dressed carefully, choosing my black silk three-piece suit and white shirt with pale blue braces and tie. I'd treated myself to a new pair of shoes, which were described as perfect for dancing. My hair was slicked back, and I'd groomed every inch of myself.

"Wow, I think I may have made a mistake not marrying you after all," Savvy said when I met her outside the restaurant. "Isn't it weird to think that this time next week, we would have been married?"

"Very, and you look lovely yourself. Shall we go in or wait for Amy and Josh?"

"Let's go in. Am I right in thinking that something is going on there? Has Josh said anything to you?"

"I think he has some hopes." I too had noticed Josh paying attention to Amy, and a quick phone call to Danny had confirmed my suspicions. I was glad he'd found someone other than Savannah, especially now she was leaving the country. They were already sitting at the bar when we entered. For the next two hours, I tried not to think about what I was going to say to Tony. Naturally, I hardly thought about anything else. I had my script worked out; I'd sat on the edge of my bed and looked into the mirror and said the words over and over again. Of course, all this depended on Tony giving me a chance to say them. All the way to the club, my legs felt like jelly; my mouth was so dry I thought I wouldn't be able to speak anyway. I'd only had a couple of glasses of wine, just enough for Dutch courage; there was no way I wanted to be slurring my words during what could be the most important speech of my life. We were early so

there was only a small queue, and we got in quite quickly. Josh and Amy went to the bar to get drinks, while Savvy and I found a dark corner where I could stay hidden. I looked across but couldn't see Tony anywhere.

"He's not here," I said. "What if he doesn't turn up? What am I going to do then?"

"You just come back here every night until you see him, so stop panicking. He might be getting drinks or changing a barrel or anything. The night is yet young."

Amy and Josh returned, and we sat and talked for a while. My eyes rarely left the bar, and then, fifteen minutes later, I saw him. I must have been like one of those gundogs pointing their noses towards their target, because the others stopped what they were saying and looked at me. "You might want to put your tongue in and be a little less obvious," Josh said. "Your eyes are practically out on stalks." I didn't like to tell him that another part of my anatomy had also risen to the occasion. God, he looked so good, smiling at the customers at the bar and shaking a cocktail for one. His dark hair was slicked back once more, and, like me, he wore a white shirt with his red braces. When he glanced in our direction, I hid behind Savvy. "I think it's a bit dark over here for him to see you," she said laughing. "I have to say he's looking drop-dead gorgeous tonight, probably with a cherry on the top."

"I know," I managed to croak out. "What am I going to do? I can't just go to the bar while he's working."

"It's alright," Amy said putting her hand on my arm. "We asked if he was performing tonight, and he is, so you could try to talk to him when he's finished. You'll have the perfect chance, then, to ask him to dance with you."

"Oh yes, that would be so romantic. You should have got him a flower or something. Don't they tango with roses in their teeth?" By now she and Amy were truly giggling, and Josh was rolling his eyes. I was looking around the room to see if there were any flowers on the tables. I was prepared to try anything at this point as long as he'd listen to me and let me hold him in my arms again.

There was general dancing for a while. Josh took to the floor with both Amy and Savvy, while I kept to the shadows and watched Tony from afar. After an hour he disappeared, and the dance floor was cleared. He reappeared with another man, and they performed their tango. The routine was different from the one done before but just as intricate and intense. He was beautiful; there

was no other word for it. Watching them was like witnessing two people making love fully clothed. The whole room watched in silence letting the music and dance take them over. When they'd finished, everyone rose to their feet and clapped and cheered. I moved slowly through the crowd to the edge of the dance floor, every part of my body shaking, hoping that I would get to the right position in time. When he turned away from the congratulations, we came face to face. He looked at me, obviously still burning with anger, and tried to push past me.

"I'm not doing this, Lucca. I told you before; I'm not going to be your bit on the side."

"Tony, wait, please, give me a minute. Things have changed." He rolled his eyes, and I knew he didn't believe me.

"The wedding is off. I'm not getting married."

"So you think that's it. That all you have to do is tell me you're not getting married, and I'll fall into your arms again. And anyway, how do I know you're not lying to me again?" The music started again, and it was hard to hear. I turned him around slightly and pointed to Savvy, Amy, and Josh sitting in the corner. They waved.

"Can we go somewhere a bit quieter so I can explain?" I said. "All I'm asking for is ten minutes of your time. Please, surely I deserve that much?"

"Alright, ten minutes, but that's it, and I'm not sure you should have that." I breathed out and followed him. I had this one chance; I just had to make sure I didn't balls it up. He took me to a small office near the entrance. "It's where we change before the performance," he explained. "Well, I'm listening. Why aren't you getting married then?"

I wanted to kiss him, but I didn't even dare take his hand. He leant against the desk arms crossed over his chest so I stood just inside the door, leaving a few feet between us.

"Savvy and I came to the conclusion we shouldn't get married."

"Great, so you didn't even tell her about me. Why does she think you're here then?"

"No, I did tell her about you. I was all set to tell her, and then I overheard her talking to Amy, that's Amy with Josh out there. She's been offered a big promotion by the bank she works for in Hong Kong, and she didn't know how to tell me, so I told her about you. I could have just kept quiet and said nothing.

It's true, because she'd called off the wedding anyway. That was two weeks ago; I've been trying to find you ever since. I didn't dare come to your house; I thought you might call the police or something."

"I might have done," Tony said, lowering his arms. I took a step nearer.

"I've missed you so much. I know I was stupid and weak, and I probably don't deserve a second chance, but how am I supposed to dance without you? There's this Tony-shaped space in my arms. This is all so new to me. I had these feelings—sorry *have*—these feelings for you, and you're a man, and that came as a bit of a shock. I'm only human, Tony, and I'm definitely not perfect."

"Well that's certainly true."

"I'm going to make mistakes. I'm going to say the wrong thing and do the wrong things. I've never been in a relationship with a man before, but I know this is right for me. I want us to be together. I'll tell anyone you want me to tell. I'll shout it from the bloody rooftops or put an ad in the *Yorkshire Post*. I'll change my Facebook status and put it on Twitter, whatever you want me to do, I'll do. You want me to get on my knees and beg?" I could see his body beginning to shake and there was a slight turn up at the edge of his mouth.

"Well, I have no problem with you being on your knees, although you do need a bit more practice."

I closed the distance between us. "Am I forgiven? Please say I'm forgiven. If I go out there and say I've ballsed this up those three are going to kill me. I swear Josh is taking bets; and Amy wants to know if you really swing both ways; or, at least, if you'll give her dancing lessons. Savvy is off to Hong Kong tomorrow. She says she'll give me references if you want. I'm just scared you might end up comparing notes." He put a finger on my mouth.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Lucca, please stop talking and kiss me!" I leaned in, and we connected once more. I felt his mouth open to mine, and I just let the taste of him hit my senses. My arms closed around him, and he was back where I wanted him to be. We kissed, changing angles and deepening the connection until our tongues tried to wrap themselves around each other in the same way as our bodies. I nipped and sucked on his bottom lip, and my hands found their way under his shirt. After a few minutes, we parted breathing heavily.

"I thought about what you said on that day, and you were right. This was just as much my fault as yours. Oh, and there's one more thing," he said, taking my hand and pulling me out of the office. I followed him, not letting go of his

hand until we got to the main room. He led me onto the floor and put me in position. I could see the other three smiling at me over my shoulder. He turned my face so I was looking at him. Now, as far as I was concerned, only the two of us existed.

“Just one more thing, you said?” I stood waiting.

“Hmmm, there’s still such a lot I need to teach you, Lucca.” He began to move. “But for now, just dance with me.”

The End

Author Bio

Originally from South Wales, Alexa has lived for over thirty years in the North West of England. Now retired, after a long career in teaching, she devotes her time to her obsessions.

Alexa began writing when her favourite character was killed in her favourite show. After producing a lot of fanfiction she ventured into original writing.

She is currently owned by a mad cat and spends her time writing about the men in her head, watching her favourite television programmes and usually crying over her favourite football team.

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