



G.A. HAUSER

EXCHANGE
OF HEARTS

Exchange of Hearts

G.A. Hauser

*(Based on the characters of Heart
of Steele)*

EXCHANGE OF HEARTS
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Original release date 2010

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First The G.A. Hauser Collection LLC
publication:February 2017



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Why on earth am I nervous?

After all, the guest they were expecting was a nineteen-year-old exchange student from Lombardy, Italy. She was due any minute. No big deal.

Rick Steele's two younger sisters, Connie and Rhonda, had made up the daybed in their room for Elia Gianni. It was as if they had a new doll to dress up or a playmate to whisper secrets to in the night.

Still, he was a little envious. He knew when his sisters were younger and had sleepovers the giggling never stopped until the early hours of the morning. What did he expect from an immature thirteen-year-old and a Goth fifteen-year-old? *Not a lot.*

At nineteen, on summer break from Ohio State University, Rick was the man in the family. His mother, Jenny, had called him that ever since his dad had left her for another woman. A much younger woman. Rick hated his dad and felt sorry for his mother. He did the best he could to help out, but he was in Columbus most of the time now.

His mom called his father, "Dick-the-dead-beat". Dick lived in Arizona with some peroxide-blond-tattoo-covered druggie, leaving Rick, his two sisters, and mother to fend for themselves in Dayton.

Rick had no idea why his mother agreed to house an exchange student from the Rotary Club. Yes, his mom was very civic-minded and was involved in every women's business group Ohio offered, but she always seemed overwhelmed with too much to do. Being a full-time mom/dad and paying all the bills, working two jobs—one as a teacher, one as a tutor—Jenny had no free time on her hands.

Perhaps it was peer pressure from her teacher friends, or maybe it was Rhonda's idea. Rhonda with the dyed pink hair, black fingernail polish, and nose ring. Wasn't it Rhonda who brought home all the brochures from Kettering High School? Whatever the reason, everyone in the house seemed thrilled to have someone as exotic as an Italian

native in their modest, three-bedroom, middle-class American home.

His sisters were still whispering about it in the bedroom they shared.

Rick stood by the doorway to see what they were up to. Pillow fluffing.

“Rick,” Connie said, “she’s coming any minute.”

“I know. Geez, take a chill pill.”

“She’s so pretty.” Rhonda held a folder which included Elia’s tiny wallet-sized photograph. “Look.” She held it up as if Rick hadn’t already seen it. “I want her to teach me to speak Italian. It would be so cool.”

Yes, Elia was gorgeous. Long, thick, brown, hair, dark eyes, chiseled features, full lips. But Rick had no interest in women, so it didn’t make a difference to him. He might talk a little with Elia at dinner, but otherwise would mind his own business.

“What time did Mom say the flight arrived?” Rick checked his watch.

“Around six. She’s picking her up at the Dayton Airport.” Rhonda snapped her fingers. “Crap, I was supposed to get the grill going.”

“I’ll help.” Rick followed both his sisters into the kitchen. Seeing Rhonda’s midriff that exposed her “muffin-top” roll, Rick cringed and wondered what poor Elia would think of them. Some typical American family. An AWOL dad, a pink-haired, chubby Goth with more piercings than a loose-leaf binder, and a thirteen-year-old who still collected made in China plastic toy animals with eyes that were too big for their heads.

Rick exited the house through the sliding glass door to the deck in the backyard. The hot, humid June air slapped him in the face, a contrast to the cool air conditioning inside. They had an above ground swimming pool that was fifteen feet wide by thirty feet long and four feet deep, surrounded by an elevated deck.

His attention was drawn back to his sisters when Connie removed the metal grate and Rhonda shook the bag of charcoal into the bowl.

Rick heard a car door closing from the front of the house. "Is that them?"

"I don't know." Rhonda pushed the sooty charcoals into a mini hill in the center of the bowl.

"I'll check." Walking around the outside of the house, Rick saw his mother's Mazda parked in the driveway and trunk was open, obscuring the view of her and their new exchange student.

His mother was talking non-stop and sounded either upset or nervous. Rick knew his mother was slightly neurotic but hoped she wasn't freaking out the poor girl.

Rick was about to say hello or offer to help with luggage when he stopped short. *Holy shit!*

"Rick," his mother said as if she had been running out of air from all her chatter. "This is Elia!"

The way his mother said "Elia" and pointed in panic, Rick felt his stomach churn.

"Hello." Elia had a very thick accent, and held out his, yes, *his* hand in greeting.

"Hi." Rick clasped the offered hand and went into meltdown. No. Elia Gianni was not a girl. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But his photo had made him look like one.

"I know there's been a mistake." Jenny appeared about to have a coronary. "But I suppose it's all right. I do think the girls will be disappointed though. Rick, open the door, dear."

Rick headed to the front of their house. The summer air had the scent of jasmine and his mother's lilies, which were planted everywhere along the house, the garage, and around the shed.

"Come in. My name is Rick." Rick propped the door open for Elia.

"*Grazie*, Rick."

Elia held a small carry-on suitcase, hoisting it over the step and doorframe. He wore skin tight black slacks and a black short sleeve t-shirt. Rick almost came at the sight of his tight ass. "How was the flight?"

"Long." Elia smiled and dimples appeared. Rick imagined licking them.

"I should make a call and let someone know," Jenny said

"Mom. Calm down." Rick hated when his mother went manic.

"Mom?" Rhonda called as she and Connie raced in. The minute they saw Elia they stopped short.

"You're a guy," Connie said.

"Yes. I am a guy." Elia's eyes shined over his perfect smile. "There is a mistake. I know not why they think I am a girl."

"Mom," Rick said, "don't worry about it." *If you think I'm letting this guy leave, you're nuts.*

"Let me call the Rotary exchange program. I have to at least tell them." She waved her hands in a gesture of confusion and left the room.

"I'm Connie, and this is Rhonda," Connie introduced as she and Rhonda stared at Elia.

Rick could tell laughter was close behind their shy smiles.

Connie grinned. "Well, we set up a bed in our room, but it looks like you'll be staying with Rick."

Rick's cock went thick in his shorts.

"Yes. It looks that way. I am so sorry. I feel terrible. I have no idea how this happen." Elia shook his head.

"Don't worry," Rick said. "Why don't I show you to my room? At least you can change your clothes. You can't wear long pants in this heat."

"Yes. *Grazie*. I am hot."

"Would you like to shower?" Rick wanted to be near him, sit with him, talk to him, sleep in the same bed with him. *My God, he's the most fantastic man I have ever seen. And that accent? Holy shit!*

“I don’t want to be trouble. Should we wait for your mother’s phone call?” Elia looked down at his polished black leather shoes nervously.

“No. Come on.” Rick took one of Elia’s two bags and led the way. He stopped at his room and turned on the light. “Hang out in here for now.” He put the suitcase on his queen-sized bed. “There’s a bathroom with a shower right there.” Rick pointed to another door in the hall. “And we have a pool, so you can even swim if you’d like.”

“You are very nice. Yes. I like to swim. But I am slightly tired from the flight.”

“Oh. Sorry. Be my guest.” Rick gestured to his bed.

“I can rest here?”

“Yes. If you need anything, just ask. We were going to have a barbeque for dinner out on the deck. But you can lie down for a little while.”

“Yes. I would like that.”

Rick caught a whiff of delicious cologne and masculine sweat as he passed Elia on his way to the door. “I’ll check on you soon.”

Elia held Rick still with a hand on each of his arms, then kissed Rick on both cheeks. “*Grazie.*”

Oh, my God. I’m going to die.

Rick froze until Elia released him. Was this some kind of Italian thing? Or was the attraction mutual?

Awkward silence followed.

Rick felt his mouth water as Elia stared at him. The contact had ceased between them, but Rick struggled to read anything concrete in Elia’s expression.

The pause became absurd.

“Uh.” Rick couldn’t believe how much he wanted to dig his hands into that luscious head of brown, wavy hair. He had sex with a guy in the dorms at OSU, but the attraction he felt for this Italian stud was consuming.

Elia laughed. It was soft, sensual, and sent the goose bumps rising on Rick’s arms.

“Yes?” Elia tilted his head.

The sound was so sexy, Rick felt his cock pulsate.

“Rick?” his mother called from the hall.

“Um.” Rick cleared his throat. “Mom wants me. Go shower, change, nap. Anything you, uh...desire. Okay?”

“Okay.” Elia repeated with an American inflection.

Mother-fucker! Rick was about to turn into liquid mush if he didn’t leave the room. He nodded like he was a lunatic, bobbing his head as he backed out and closed the door.

“Rick.” Jenny tugged Rick down the hall. “I spoke to the woman at the Rotary, and she said as long as we don’t object—”

“Object? Why would we object?”

“Well, we all thought we were getting a female exchange student.”

“Mom.” Rick had no way of telling his mother how much he wanted Elia to stay. He wasn’t out to her yet.

“Anyway,” she waved her hand in distraction, “I told them a promise was a promise. So we’ll keep him here. It’s not fair to the poor man to move him, or do anything to make him uncomfortable.”

“Yes. Exactly.” Rick felt more at ease.

“But he can’t stay with your sisters.”

“No.”

“Maybe we can push the daybed into—”

“Mom.”

“Yes?”

Rick felt his breath quicken and his heart race. “He can stay in my room.”

“There’s no room in there for the daybed. How are we—”

“Mom,” Rick said more sternly, “I have a queen bed. I don’t mind sharing it.”

She blinked.

Did I just admit I’m gay? Rick didn’t think he had. But his mother wasn’t making him feel very sure of himself at the moment.

“Maybe we can buy one of those air mattresses.”

“Mom.”

“Or your sisters can share your bed and you and Elia can—”

“Mom.”

“What?” She combed her fingers through her short brown hair as if she were exasperated.

“Let him stay in my room.”

“Did you make sure it’s okay with him?”

“I’ll talk to him.” Rick tried to escape. This was more information than he was ready to share with his mother. *If you think I’m coming out now, you’re nuts.*

She gripped his arm, stopping him and drew him close to whisper, “Are you sure you don’t mind? It’s a terrible inconvenience for both of you.”

“Like I said. I’ll run it past him. Meanwhile, he’s showering and resting.” *In my bed. But I’ll assume you know that.*

“Mom?” Rhonda appeared in the hall. “Should I light the grill?”

“Oh.” Jenny hurried behind Rhonda to the kitchen. “Let me think about how long Elia is going to rest. Where’s the chicken?”

“Marinating in the fridge.”

Once they left, Rick paused, looked back at his bedroom door, and imagined sleeping in the same bed as the fantastic man. “And I thought this year’s summer break would be dull if I didn’t work.”

Elia stripped off his warm travel outfit, then dug through his suitcase for shorts and a tank top. In just his briefs, his fresh clothing folded over his arm, he imagined a cool shower and a rest before dinner.

A wall of trophies caught his eye. Elia approached them to have a better look. Golden statues of men wearing American football uniforms, oblong balls in their grasps, in running poses, or frozen in the midst of a pass were on display. Each had the name *Richard E. Steele* engraved on them. Football. Baseball. *Soccer?* “No!” Elia set his clothing on the bed and picked up the soccer trophy. His

first love was soccer. AC Milan was his favorite team. But he had always heard Americans hated soccer.

“He is fantastic.” Elia replaced the trophy. He investigated small framed photos. Rick in a cap and gown, graduating from high school, his sisters and mother with him. *No papa? No. Divorce? Yes. Most likely.*

He was so excited to take his first trip abroad, when this opportunity came he snapped it up. The United States. Ohio? No. Not New York. Not California. Yes, well, he could not be choosy. He went where he was assigned.

How did they think he was a woman? Didn't he check a box, *m or f? Silly people.*

Elia picked up Rick's photo to inspect again. Blond, blue-eyed, American hero. *Yes, you are what I imagine when I think of an American man.* He thought he heard someone outside his door so he set the photo back.

Once again he picked up his clothing from the bed, along with a small toiletry kit and approached the door.

When he opened it, Rick was there. Instantly Rick's cheeks grew rosy.

“I was just...uh, heading, uh...” Rick pointed back to the kitchen area.

“If you need something in your room, don't no go in because of me.”

Rick's gaze moved downwards.

Elia peered in the same direction at his briefs and naked legs. Immediately he looked back at Rick for a reaction.

Rick was lost. He said nothing, but kept staring.

“I play soccer too.” Elia hoped Rick was admiring his body

“Soccer.”

“Yes. Your sports trophies. I am so impressed.”

Rick chewed his bottom lip.

“Do you have a girlfriend?” Elia loved the way Rick kept staring below his waist. It was making him hot. *This handsome, fair-haired American man likes me?*

“No.”

“Good. I no have girlfriend either.”

Elia noticed Rhonda, the strange looking girl with the pink hair and bulging belly, making her way down the hall. "You need anything, Elia? There are plenty of towels in the bathroom for your shower. Help yourself."

Elia covered his crotch with his clothing. "Good. Yes."

"Rick?" Rhonda stared at her brother. "You okay?"

"Yes." Rick spun on his heels and walked away.

"I will shower now." Elia gestured to the door across the hall.

"Okay. Just let one of us know if you need anything."

"Grazie, yes, thank you." Elia smiled at her and closed himself into the bathroom, orienting himself with where things were.

You like me, pretty Rick? I hope so. Otherwise this exchange will be a boring ordeal.

Rick heard his mother and sisters in the kitchen talking. He couldn't make out the conversation, just the jumble of tones and inflection.

He stepped into his sisters' shared bedroom and looked at the tiny daybed they had made up with frills and lace. Next he picked up the folder on the dresser.

Elia most certainly appeared to be female in that tiny photo. But now that Rick knew he wasn't... *Growl! You sexy thing!*

"I can jack-off to this photo. Oh, yes, so easy now."

He heard his mom calling, "Rick? Shuck the corn, will ya?"

"Yeah, Ma." He shut the folder and left the room. The bathroom door opened and a cloud of steam wafted out from it, drawing Rick up short.

"I thought I could nap, but I no feel so bad now."

"I always heard it's best to try and get into the local time zone as quick as possible. Napping may screw it up."

"Yes. True. Perhaps a cup of espresso?"

Rick smiled. "Coffee. No espresso machine here."

"No? No espresso here?"

“I mean, in this house. We can get you one at a Starbucks or something.”

“No. No go to trouble.”

“Let me help you find some space in my closet for your clothing.”

“Yes.” Elia smiled.

Rick called down the hall to his mother, “I’ll be right there.”

“Okay!”

He entered his room and headed to his closet. After turning on a light, Rick took a handful of hangers off the rack and pushed his own suits and shirts into a tighter wedge, creating a gap.

“Here.” He handed Elia the hangers and then sat on his bed to watch him.

“Is enough. Perfect.” Elia began unpacking.

“Uh...” Rick wondered if he should come out to this guy. It was nerve-wracking to discuss sleeping arrangements with a foreigner you’d known all of five minutes. “Elia.”

“Yes, Rick.”

“Um. Because of this odd mix up, you know, with everyone thinking you’re a girl...”

Elia chuckled, continuing to hang up his wardrobe.

“Well, do you mind bunking in here?”

Elia spun around. “I cannot shove you out of your room. Is no right.”

“No.” Rick rubbed his face in agony. Without looking at Elia, he replied, “With me.”

Dead silence followed. Rick had no choice but to see how badly Elia reacted. He was standing still in his white shorts and polo shirt, looking like a runway model, a hanger in his hand and his face a mask, unreadable to Rick.

“Look,” Rick held up his hand, “I’m not gay or anything.”

“Not gay.”

About to confirm that fallacy, Rick opened his lips. *Jesus...was that disappointment in what I said? Okay, shoot me.*

Elia gestured with his hand, trying to urge Rick to go on.

Rick looked back at the door to his room, stood, and closed it. "Fuck."

"Fuck?" Elia appeared completely bewildered.

What am I supposed to do? If I tell you the truth and you're not gay, you'll run out of this house like it's on fire. If I say I'm not gay and we're in the same bed every night, I can't touch you if you are! Augh!

"I will sleep on floor. You no worry." Elia resumed hanging up his clothing.

"No." Rick closed the gap between them. "You will not sleep on the floor."

Once Elia hung up another shirt, he faced Rick. "I will no touch you. You no be afraid."

I want you to touch me! Rick hated this game. It was the same one he played with the guy he had screwed in college. *Are you? Aren't you? Will I repulse you? Will you be hot for me? I hate this shit!*

"Rick?"

Shaken out of his stupor, Rick opened the bedroom door to his mother. "Is Elia napping or should we start dinner?"

Rick stepped back, allowing her to see Elia.

"I no nap. I try stay up."

"Good. Rick, did you want to help out with the corn?"

"Yeah. Hang on. Oh, could you make a pot of coffee for him?"

She nodded and left.

They were alone again. Rick knew he had time for a more in depth discussion about sexual preference. *For Christ's sake, he's been here an hour.* "I'm going to help out in the kitchen."

"Good. I be there soon to help too."

"You're the guest. You relax."

"I like be a good guest."

At that soft smile, Rick melted. He gave Elia a wink and headed to the kitchen. *In my bed. Oh yes.*

“There’s the corn.” His mother pointed to a brown paper bag on the floor.

“Do you want me to peel them all?”

“Yes, please.”

He picked the bag up and went out to sit on the deck. Under the umbrella of the cast iron table and chair set, he began peeling the husks and silk off the sweet, homegrown Ohio corn.

Rhonda was poking at the hot coals while Connie kept her mother company in the kitchen making salad and apple pie.

“He’s adorable.”

Rick smiled but didn’t make eye contact with his sister. “You’re fifteen.”

“I can still look.”

“No. You can’t look until you’re eighteen,” Rick teased.

“Do you like him?”

Rick jerked his head up quickly. “What do you mean by that?”

She gave him a sly smile. “Never mind.”

Crap. He never fucking dated. Maybe his mother was in denial but his sisters weren’t completely stupid. “I like him.”

“Is he gay?”

“Jesus, Rhonda!” Rick took a paranoid glance at the sliding door.

“Still denying it?”

“Now? We have to discuss this now?” Rick broke into a cold sweat. He wanted to decide when and if this conversation occurred. And he sure as shit didn’t want to discuss this with his mother and sisters when a gorgeous Italian exchange student would be sleeping in his bed later.

The back door opened and Elia stepped out. His hair was drying in full, chocolate brown waves that framed his amazing sculpted cheekbones and square jaw.

“Can I help?”

“Sure.” Rick set a couple of ears of corn on the table in front of him.

“Where to put the...how you say?” Elia held up a piece of the husk.

Rick laughed. “In this bag.” He moved the brown paper sack between them. “Husks.”

“Husks.” Elia nodded, peeling back the silky covering on a large ear.

“You ever hear of corn-holing, Elia?” Rhonda stuck her tongue into her cheek.

“Get inside and see if Mom needs you,” Rick said, angry at her teasing.

She smiled wickedly and entered the house.

“What is corn-holing?” Elia stacked the trimmed corn on the pile.

Rick wanted to kill his sister. “It’s a stupid game. You throw beanbags into a hole cut in a piece of wood.” *Yeah, that’s what it is here in Ohio, anyway.*

“I no hear of it.” Elia chuckled.

“I wouldn’t think you would.”

Rhonda opened the slider. “Do you need sugar or cream in your coffee, Elia?”

“Cream. Yes. *Grazie*. Thank you.”

“Coming right up.”

When Rhonda vanished Elia said, “You have nice family.”

“Yes. They are for the most part.”

“Where is Father?”

“He left us a couple of years ago.”

“I’m sorry. You still close with him?”

“No. I never speak to him.” Rick took the last ear of corn out of the bag and peeled it. When he peeked at Elia, Elia was busy with his own task.

“Here you go.” Rhonda set a mug and a small spouted pitcher with milk on the table.

“Thank you.”

“My pleasure. Though how you can drink hot coffee in this heat is beyond me.”

“Here.” Rick pointed to the pile of corn. “What do you want me to do with it?”

“Mom’s going to boil it.”

Rick stood.

“Hang on. Let me get another bag.” Rhonda went back inside.

“What I can do to help?”

“Just relax.” Rick stayed Elia with a hand on his shoulder.

Rhonda returned with a plastic bag. Rick helped her fill it with the cleaned corn.

“Thanks.”

“Anything else I can do?” Rick asked.

“Not at the moment.”

Left alone with Elia again, Rick dropped into his chair. “What kind of things did you want to do while you were here visiting?”

“I no know. American things.” Elia smiled. “Like corn-holing.”

Rick’s cheeks went hot. “Fourth of July is next weekend, so we can see some fireworks.”

“Good.” Elia sipped his coffee.

“I wish there was some sightseeing to do around here. Do you like baseball?”

“I never see a game. I no understand it. But I would go.”

“The Cincinnati Reds play not far from here. I’ll get tickets.”

“*Buono.*”

Just staring at Elia was making Rick a perspiring mess. “Christ, it’s hot.” Rick pulled his shirt up over his head. The armpits and chest of his top were beginning to stain with his sweat. He tossed it over the back of his chair after he used it to wipe his face. Leaning his elbows on the table, Rick said, “Like Rhonda said, I don’t know how you can drink—” He stopped short. Elia was gaping at him.

Suddenly Rick felt naked. He cupped his hands over his nipples in paranoia. “What? Did I do something that’s lewd in Italy?”

“No! Oh, no! *Scusi. Per favore.* I am just enamored. You are, how you say? Well fit?”

“Enamored?” Rick’s cock swelled and throbbed down the leg of his shorts.

Elia rubbed his face and muttered something in Italian Rick could never hope to translate.

“Sorry. So sorry.” Elia stood, averting his eyes and waving his arms.

“Don’t go.” Rick hopped to his feet to stop Elia from leaving.

Elia’s gaze darted to the mound in Rick’s beige shorts. *Fuck! Why is this happening so quickly?*

The sliding door opened and Jenny emerged with a platter of marinated chicken parts. “Hello, boys. Going somewhere?”

They both sat down to their seats instantly.

“Do you like chicken, Elia?”

“Yes, Jenny.” Elia’s cheeks were still flushed.

“Good.” She glanced back at him while she placed the food on the hot grill. “You two look overheated. Either go inside or take a dip.”

“Dip?” Elia asked.

“The pool.” Rick thumbed over his shoulder at it.

“Ah.” Elia nodded.

“Did Rick have a chance to ask you if you mind sleeping in his room, Elia?” Jenny finished arranging the chicken like a mosaic pattern on the crowded grill, and wiped her forehead with the back of her hand.

“*Si.* Yes. Is no problem.”

“I feel terrible. We could try and get the twin mattress into the room and on the floor.”

“Mom.” *I want Elia in my bed. Shut up!* “It’s no big deal.”

Jenny addressed Elia directly. “You sure you don’t mind sleeping in the same bed as my son? It’s a terrible imposition on you.”

“No. No imposition.” Elia smiled.

“Are you sure? I think we can—”

“Mom.” *I’m about to slap her.* “He said it’s okay.”

“How awkward.” She set the platter on the table, put her hands on her hips, the tongs jutting out of one hand. “I had no idea you were a boy. You’d think they’d make that clearer—”

“Mom?” Rick was seriously going to kill her.

“All right,” she said. “As long as you’re both okay about it, I’ll drop it.”

“Drop it.” Rick shifted in his chair, now his legs were sweating and he knew the ass of his shorts was damp.

“Keep an eye on the chicken for a minute, will you, Rick?”

“Sure.” Rick rose up and took the tongs from her as she entered the house again. “I’m sweating like a pig. The minute this chicken’s done, I’m in the pool.” Rick dabbed at his face.

“Is hot. Italy summers are just like this.”

“Did you bring a swimsuit?” Rick pushed the chicken around the grill and it sputtered and sent smoke plumes into the humid air.

“Yes.”

“Good.” *You wet, in a bathing suit. Yes indeed.*

“It smells good. I am getting very hungry.”

Rick found Elia standing right next to him. “What type of meat do you like?”

A devilish grin appeared on Elia’s lips. “No matter. But I enjoy ‘meat’. Do you?”

Rick’s jaw dropped. “Are we talking about chicken?”

Elia shrugged with the same expression of impishness.

“Are you—” Before Rick got it out in the open, Rhonda stepped out on the deck.

“Man, it’s hot out here. Is the chicken done? Everything’s on the table.”

“Almost. I’m just turning it.” Rick felt both Rhonda and Elia staring at him. It was making him so nervous he began to run with perspiration from both the anxiety and the heat of the coals.

“Ew!” Rhonda said. “Don’t get your sweat on the food!”

As Rhonda rushed around for something to use to prevent the disaster of contamination she was obviously dreading, Rick saw Elia stripping off his own tank top.

Elia patted Rick's face with it.

"You don't have to do that, Elia," Rhonda said. "Let me get a towel from inside." She raced into the kitchen.

Rick closed his eyes and inhaled the fabric of Elia's shirt like an intoxicating drug.

"I smell good?" Elia purred. "Better than roast chicken?"

"God yes." Rick blinked and turned to Elia. "I'm joking." He panicked. "Ma? The food's done!"

"Put it on the platter!" Jenny called from inside.

"It had raw chicken on it!" Rick replied.

"Let me. Calm." Elia picked up the platter and entered the house.

When he was left alone on the patio, Rick backed away from the boiling grill, hid behind the brick wall of the house, and closed his eyes. The scent of Elia's shirt would be forever engrained in his memory.

"There is no way to eat without feeling like...pig?" Elia held up his greasy hands.

Jenny smiled. "Don't worry. We're all sticky."

Elia caught Rick's eye.

Inside the house it was much cooler, yet neither of them had put on their shirts.

"This corn. Is so sweet. You add something?" Elia held up the half-eaten ear.

"No. That's our local corn. It's as sweet as sugar." Rhonda took a few bites of her own.

"Very good. I am enjoying. This is very American meal."

"I can't imagine this being as good as the food you're used to," Rick said. "Cole slaw? Potato salad? Come on."

"No. Is good. I no lie." Elia licked his sticky finger and Connie handed him a paper napkin. "I make mess of myself."

"Don't worry." Connie smiled.

“Are you boys swimming later?” Jenny asked.

“Are you up for it?” Rick used his napkin to wipe his face.

“I feel second wind. That how you say?” Elia tried to dab his gooey hands.

“Yes.” Rick chuckled. “Let me take that.” He stood and removed Elia’s empty plate.

“*Grazie*. I mean, thank you.” Elia admired Rick’s sleek, muscular, nearly hairless build. He loved blond men. Especially ones as muscular and athletic as Rick.

“Here.” Rick handed him a wet cloth.

“Yes. Much easier.” Elia wiped his face and hands clean.

“Go relax,” Jenny said, “Let us wash up. Rick, get your bathing suit.”

“It’s not up to me, Ma.”

Elia connected to Rick’s sky blue eyes. *Mama mia. Devour me. Look at you. You are an American sportsman. My dream man.*

“Elia?” Rick asked. “You feel up to it?”

“*Si*. Yes. A dip would feel refreshing.”

“Go.” Jenny nudged Elia’s arm. “You boys get changed.”

Rick waited near the hall.

When Elia joined him, Rick headed to their bedroom. “It’s not a very deep pool. We wanted a built-in, but this was all we could afford.”

“Is lovely. No worry.” Elia entered the bedroom and rooted out his black swimsuit. “I need go to change?”

“Not unless you feel self-conscious.”

Elia took a minute to translate the last phrase. *I am embarrassed only if I get hard. What do I do?*

Rick kicked off his beige shorts, revealing a pair of blue briefs. When they too dropped down Rick’s long, muscular legs, Elia felt his body go haywire. He couldn’t tear his eyes away from Rick’s six-foot-two-inch, solid muscular build, not to mention the glimpse he got of a large, flaccid cock and low hanging balls.

Elia met Rick’s gaze in the mirror above the dresser. Caught staring, Elia felt his face burning in a blush. *He will*

beat me now. He will see I am gay and this macho-man will kill me.

Rick tucked himself into his bathing suit and turned to face Elia. "Are you shy? Do you want me to leave?"

A drip of sweat ran down Elia's temple. But mixed with his infatuation was fear from a warning from his family back in Italy.

If they know you are gay, they will hate you. Americans are known for their violence. You just stay silent and do not tell them. Can you do that for four weeks, Elia? Or must you be out everywhere you go? Use your head, and not the one between your legs for a change.

"I...I no mind." He faced the wall and yanked down his shorts with his briefs. His cock sprang upwards instantly. Elia jumped into his swimsuit and shoved his hard dick under the fabric. Looking down at himself, he saw he was still exposed through the shiny black spandex. He covered his face and tried to calm down.

When he felt a touch on his shoulder, Elia spun around in panic, expecting to be leveled with a powerful athlete's punch.

"You okay? Look, buddy, if you're tired, just say so. Don't keep pushing yourself."

Inhaling deeply, Elia replied, "No. I keep going. Is only eight local time. I can no sleep now. It no make sense."

"You must be exhausted." Rick caressed Elia's hair.

The touch sent a mad rush of tingles over Elia's skin, directly to his dick, which began throbbing. Torn between attraction and terror, Elia whimpered before he could prevent it.

"Elia," Rick whispered affectionately.

"Maybe I am tired." His skin covered with chills when Rick said his name.

"Anything you want."

Elia finally found the courage to look into Rick's eyes. The sensation of warmth made Elia weak in the knees.

"Boys? The apple pie is ready. You want it now or after your swim?" Jenny said through the closed bedroom door.

Rick and Elia made more space between them. “After the swim, Ma.”

“Okay, dear. There are towels on the deck.”

“Thanks.” Rick tilted his head to the door. “A quick dip?”

“Yes.” Elia watched as Rick gave him a good once over, which Elia knew included his erection. No punch came. Instead, Rick smiled and headed into the hall.

As he made his way behind Rick down the hallway, Elia had to force himself not to stare at Rick’s ass or the way he moved. He wanted to rid himself of his hard cock before he met up with the women.

Grinning like a fiend, Rick led the way past his mom and sisters who were fussing with the pie and the rest of the dishes. *Nice hard-on, Elia. Very nice indeed.*

Rick had a feeling he was dealing with a man of his own ilk, or at least a bi-curious man. Either way, it was cause for celebration.

Let the fun begin!

There were six steps that led to the pool deck. Rick shallow dove into the water, then stood, wiping the water out of his eyes.

Elia jumped in and surfaced next to him. “Is warm water?”

Swimming to the side of the pool, Rick checked the thermometer. “It’s nearly eighty-eight degrees.”

“No!”

“Yes. The heat lately has made it very warm.”

“Is like bath!” Elia slicked back his hair. Wet, his mane was passed his shoulders.

“I know.” Rick picked up a neon green foam noodle and poked Elia with it.

Elia grabbed the opposite end and they played tug-of-war.

Using it like a rope, Rick advanced down the length and met up with Elia. He jerked the noodle free and wrapped it

around Elia's shoulders, drawing him closer under the water.

"I like pool." Elia's eyes were on fire.

"I wish we had the house to ourselves."

"Oh? Why? What we do if we did?"

Man! What would I do? Don't get me started.

This was flirting. No doubt. "I don't know. Maybe we could wrestle a little."

"Wrestle." Elia's white teeth showed as he laughed. "Why we can no wrestle now?"

Rick knew touching Elia would get him crazy, but it was too good of an invitation to pass up. He dropped under the water, looped his arms around Elia's thighs and bolted upwards, torpedoing him out of the water.

Elia's hilarity echoed off the wooden fencing that surrounded the pool and the back of the brick home.

They took turns dunking each other and rough-housing, gasping for breath from laughing so hard.

"Having fun?"

Rick jolted to a halt at the sight of Connie in her swimsuit watching. "We were until you came," Rick teased.

"Tough." She climbed in and said, "Man, it's like bathwater."

"See?" Elia pointed to Connie in agreement. "Water is warm."

Connie splashed Rick. "Don't stop on my account."

"Yeah, right." Rick peeked back at Elia who was trying to sink the noodle.

Jenny stood on the deck. "How's the water?"

A chorus of, "Warm!" followed.

"Oh well. There's no shade here. You complain when it's too cold and when it's too hot."

"Is fine." Elia waved his hand at her. "You come in?"

"No. I'm not showing my fat body in a swimsuit."

"You no fat," Elia replied. "American women too obsessed with skinny."

Rick studied Elia. *Hmm. Maybe you're not gay?*

“It’s nice of you to say, Elia, but I’ll pass. The pie is ready for you guys when you’re done in the pool.”

“Thanks, Mom.” Connie found a beach ball and threw it at Elia.

Rick watched as they volleyed it back and forth. He waded to the side of the pool and sat down, taking a break.

“You tired?” Elia held the ball and approached him.

“I should be asking you that.”

“I know. I think I will drop dead soon.”

“Come on.” Rick reached out to him.

“No. You guys are done?” Connie said.

“Yeah. Sorry, sis. Poor Elia’s running on overdrive.” He hauled Elia out of the water. “Are you staying in?”

“Yeah. I’ll float around. Toss me the raft.”

After he handed Elia a towel, Rick skid the raft over the surface of the water. “Catch ya later.”

He and Elia walked back to the house, wiping off the water as they went. They stood at the sliding door, rubbing down their legs.

“You wash first?” Elia asked.

I want to shower with you. “We have two showers. Three bathrooms, two with showers.”

“Good. We can shower same time.” Elia entered the house first with Rick close behind.

Yeah, that’s what I wish. “You have any room for apple pie?”

Elia rubbed his washboard abs. “No. Too much sweet corn and chicken.”

“Gotcha.” Rick winked. He removed fresh clothing from his drawers as Elia did the same from his suitcase. “I’ll meet you.”

“Okay.” Elia smiled.

Rick made his way to his mother’s bathroom, the one connected to her bedroom. He took off his wet suit and started the water in the shower. *You and I sleeping in the same bed? And you don’t think I’m going to try something, Mr. Gianni? Think again.*

“Have some pie.”

“Oh God, Ma, I’m still stuffed.” Rick found his mom and Rhonda watching television in the den. A ceiling fan spun to keep the air conditioning circulating.

“Where’s Connie?” Jenny asked.

“In the pool.” Rick sat on the sofa, propping his feet up on the coffee table.

Rhonda said, “She’ll be mosquito food soon.”

It was nearing nine thirty and just starting to get dark outside.

“Hello?”

“In here, Elia,” Rick replied.

Elia poked his head in.

“Do you want some pie, Elia?” Jenny asked.

“No. Thank you.”

Rick patted the spot on the sofa next to him.

Elia dropped down heavily. “I am catching up to myself.”

“What?” Rhonda laughed.

“Tired.” Elia yawned. “What is local time?” He checked his watch and moaned. “Oh, is very late in Italy. Yes?”

“Two thirty in Italy?” Rick didn’t think this man could be any more adorable than he was at that moment. His wet hair was slicked back behind his ears and a dark growth of beard had begun to show on his jaw. Luscious.

“Go to bed, Elia,” Jenny said sweetly. “You don’t have to force yourself to stay up.”

“Good to get in local time. I must or I’ll be up at bad hour in the morning.” He yawned again.

“Come here.” Rick had to do it, mother and sister in the room or not. He looped his arm around Elia’s shoulder and encouraged him to rest on his chest.

“I sleep here, you watch.” Elia cuddled against him.

“If you do, I’ll carry you to bed.” Rick checked his mom and sister’s expressions, just in case. They were smiling. *Good. Hey, I’m just being nice to the exchange student. Okay?*

The dampness from Elia's hair soaked Rick's t-shirt. He inhaled the shampoo from it and rubbed Elia's arm gently. Within five minutes he felt Elia's breathing deepen to slumber.

Jenny whispered, "He's out like a light, Rick."

Rhonda laughed.

"Poor guy." Jenny said. "Get him to bed, son."

The sound of the back sliding door open and closing preceded Connie stepping into the room. "Man, the mosquitoes are bad this year."

"Shh!" Jenny put her finger to her lips and pointed to Elia.

Connie spun around. "Man, how cute is that?"

"Come on, buddy." Rick shifted on the sofa.

Elia stirred.

Rick stood and helped Elia to stand, holding him around his waist. "Goodnight."

"Are you going to bed too, Rick?" Jenny asked.

"Yeah, I'm beat. See ya for breakfast."

"You sure you don't mind sharing your bed?"

Rick heard Rhonda's choke of sarcasm and ignored it. "No. It's fine. Goodnight."

As he practically carried Elia down the hall he heard Rhonda say, "Don't they make the cutest couple?"

Rick wanted to kill her.

Christ! Let me out myself when I'm ready? Sheesh!

"Come on, baby." He sat Elia on the bed and tugged his shirt off over his head.

Elia mumbled something in Italian. Rick knew he was out of it. He toppled Elia over and unzipped his shorts, sliding them down his legs. With some effort, Rick had him under the light sheets and sleeping again.

Once he had washed up, Rick locked his bedroom door, then removed everything but his briefs as he stared at this amazing man in his bed. *Damn!*

He crawled in and hummed in bliss. "Christ, you smell good." He took a deep inhale of Elia into his lungs,

snuffling his clean skin and hair. "Fuck. I'm hard as a rock. Wake up and be gay, will ya?"

Rick took his cock out of his briefs and jerked it a couple of times. "I can come just looking at you. Are you gay? Bi-curious? What?"

Ya got hard when you stared at me when we were in our bathing suits. So? Tell me! What should I do?

He knew how tired Elia was. He'd had a long day of traveling. Didn't they have time to experiment later? Tomorrow?

Rick groaned in longing and propped up his head to stare, all the while playing with himself as he eyed this fabulous man.

Elia felt movement next to him. It was very dim in the room but not totally black. He took a minute to remember where he was. *Yes. In Ohio, America.*

The bed shook.

Elia opened his eyes. Rick was lying right beside him, on his back, on top of the sheets, with his cock exposed, masturbating. Stifling a choke of shock in his throat, Elia shifted on the pillow for a better look.

Rick stopped what he was doing and appeared petrified when their eyes met. "Shit."

"Is okay."

"I thought you were asleep. Shit."

"Why you not hear when I say is okay?"

"Because I'm embarrassed." Rick dragged the sheet to cover his crotch when the head of his dick poked out of his briefs.

"Embarrassed? We are men. We do what men do."

"I'm sorry. I know how tired you are."

"How I get in bed? You carry me?" Elia touched the thick blond hair on the side of Rick's head. "Rick?"

"Yes." Rick's breathing became raspy and he appeared to be trying not to pant.

"Is okay I touch you? Like this?" Elia petted Rick's hair again.

“Yes.”

“I like the color. Blond and blue. Always my favorite.”

“In...” Rick inhaled deeply. “In a man?”

Elia had to trust him. And in his gut he knew. Just knew.

“Yes. Men. I like men. You hit me?”

“I’ll hit on you.” Rick smiled.

Elia chuckled. “You like men too?”

“Yes, I do. A whole lot.”

“You like me?” Elia cupped Rick’s head with the same hand he had been caressing him with.

“You’re incredibly hot.”

“I find you hot too.”

They paused, staring at each other.

Then, as if cut free from a leash, Rick landed on top of Elia, pinning him to the bed. Elia opened his mouth for Rick’s kiss. The minute their tongues touched, Elia moaned and spread his legs wide in invitation.

Rick began humping him, sucking at his mouth and digging his hands into Elia’s hair.

The passion consumed Elia. He’d had sex with a few men, and once with a woman. But never had he been handled this aggressively by a big, strong American man. It was his fantasy come true.

Rick parted from his lips. “You are so gorgeous. Elia, I can’t get over you.”

“Or I you. You are such big sports hero.”

Rick gulped loudly. “Are you a virgin?”

“No. I no virgin.”

The reply made Rick writhe on Elia’s body and moan deeply. Elia chuckled. “That make you happy?”

“God, yeah.”

“You want fuck me?”

“Holy shit. You keep talking like that and I’ll cream.”

Elia broke up with laughter.

“Shh!” Rick tried to keep a straight face as he quieted him. “My family doesn’t know.”

“No!”

“Well, they may suspect, but...I haven’t told them.”

“Why no tell? You a man, not a boy.”

“Talk later.” Rick kissed him again.

That stiff tongue began fucking Elia’s mouth. He gripped Rick’s ass cheeks in both hands and jammed his cock up against Rick’s. “I need suck you,” Elia gasped between kisses.

“I’ll come. If you suck me, I’ll come.”

“You come twice then.”

Rick rolled off Elia quickly and threw his briefs over the side of the bed. Elia stripped as well, leaning up to admire Rick’s body. “So athletic.” He ran his hand from Rick’s jaw to his pubic hair. Rick stiffened on the bed and arched his back, his cock protruding like a long arced rod.

The minute Elia stroked Rick’s cock, Rick reached out to bring Elia’s mouth to his again. After the kiss, Elia laughed, “How do I suck if I kiss you, eh?”

“I can’t get enough of your mouth.”

Elia’s skin washed with chills. He met with Rick’s lips again and drew Rick’s tongue deeper inside his mouth, swirling his tongue around it, wanting to do the same to Rick’s cock.

Rick got the message and broke the kiss. “Suck it.”

Elia chuckled and worked his kisses down Rick’s neck, then chewed on one of his tiny pale nipples. Elia’s own cock was throbbing between his legs. He ran his hand over it and felt the sticky drops from the tip. Tracing his lips down Rick’s body to his treasure trail, Elia used his teeth and tongue to wind his way to the head of Rick’s cock. He held the base of Rick’s dick in his fingers and lapped at the oozing slit.

“Fuck.”

Elia wound his tongue around the mushroom shaped head to underneath, tickling the soft skin with the tip of his tongue.

“Oh, God.”

Enjoying Rick’s sensual reaction, Elia straddled Rick’s thighs and lowered down to take all of Rick’s cock into his mouth. He held it there, sucking and feeling it throb.

“Elia...Elia...”

“Mm...” Elia answered, closing his eyes and gathering up Rick’s balls in his free hand. *Yes, beautiful. Perfect. You taste divine.*

“Fuck!”

Rick began thrusting his cock into Elia’s mouth. Elia loved it. He repositioned himself to take Rick’s cock deeper into his throat and dug his fingers beneath Rick’s balls to the root of his dick.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck...”

Elia caressed Rick’s rim and sucked down to the base, wiggling his tongue all over the hardened shaft in his mouth.

Rick began jerking his body on the bed and Elia tasted a blast of pre-come.

Yes, that’s it, my beauty, that’s it.

“I’m coming. I’m coming...”

“Mmm!” Elia sucked fast and furious, massaging Rick’s heavy balls at the same time.

A stifled choke from Rick preceded the blast of come. Elia’s mouth filled with hot spunk. He moaned in ecstasy and swallowed him down. Another pulsating blast throbbed Rick’s cock, and Elia gulped another mouthful.

“Ahhgaaad, ahhh...”

Slowly Elia sat up, stroking Rick’s cock. Every time a dewy drop appeared he licked it off. “You are *delizioso*.”

“Christ, you give good head. Fuck. I can’t move.”

Elia curled on top of Rick’s chest. “You recover, my sweet.”

“Holy crap. I don’t think I’ve ever had a blowjob that good.”

“No! How can you say that? You so all-American-sports-boy. You can get anything.”

“Not like that I can’t. Whoa.”

“Blond hair. I so like.” Elia massaged Rick’s pubic bush. Rick laughed softly. “I’m wiped. Holy shit.”

“You sleep then.”

“Hell no. I’m satisfying you.”

“Is okay.”

“No, it ain’t.”

Rick rolled to his side and propped his head up on his hand so he could stare at Elia while he touched him. “Your turn to relax.”

Elia lay flat on the bed, splayed out.

Rick combed his fingers through Elia’s long silky hair.

“I sleep you do that.”

“Don’t worry.” Rick sucked at one of Elia’s dark, tiny nipples, nibbling the hard tip. As he lapped at it he pinched the other one between his fingers. When Elia hissed through his teeth, Rick felt his own dick respond.

Rick sat up, gazing down at Elia’s naked body. He wasn’t muscular but still the image of perfection with his narrow waist, dark alluring pubic hair, and mocha colored cock and balls. Elia had a lithe frame and refined features. A runway model, classic and smooth.

With his right hand Rick drew Elia’s balls upwards around the base of his cock, loving his soft, heavy sack and the globes which moved easily when he manipulated them. Elia spread his thighs, invitingly. Rick went for that invitation.

He crouched between them and pushed Elia’s legs open and backwards. When Elia’s ass was exposed, Rick dove in.

An Italian expletive followed.

Rick sat up. “Is this okay?”

Elia panted, “Never have no one done that.”

“No good?”

“No! Good!”

Rick smiled and lowered back down. He teased the puckered rim with his tongue. It was his turn to hear those wonderful obscene moans and groans. The mixture of English and Italian amused him.

He lapped inside Elia’s thighs, chewing the hairless skin, working his way to his heavy balls. Each one he sucked inside his mouth, circling them with his tongue, savoring them. When he had given Elia’s testicles a good licking,

Rick went back to that delightful rim. With long, wet tongue lashes, he ran up Elia's crack to his balls, until he was dripping with saliva.

Elia was writhing on the bed and gripping Rick's shoulders in iron fists.

When Rick made his way to Elia's erection, Rick was again fully aroused and hot to fuck. Rick pointed Elia's cock towards his mouth and sucked him down to the base, using his slick spit to slide his fingers in and out of Elia's ass.

Elia hissed out in Italian the same phrase again and again. Each time with more urgency.

Rick finally asked, "What are you telling me to do?"

"Fuck me! Now!"

"Oh. Why didn't you say so?" Rick reached into his nightstand for a condom and lubrication.

As Rick prepared, Elia held his own knees to open his body up and rocked anxiously on the bed.

"You are so beautiful, Elia."

"*Si. Bello...* now fuck me."

Rick smiled wryly and placed the head of his cock on Elia's lubricated rim. He pushed his dick-head in and paused, letting Elia get used to it.

When Elia gripped Rick's body and jammed his hips upwards, causing Rick's cock to penetrate him to the hilt, Rick gasped and steadied himself on the bed. "Holy fuck!"

"Push!"

Rick began thrusting his hips with more determination. As he propped himself up over Elia's body, Elia gripped his own cock in both hands and began fisting himself furiously.

"Mother-fucker." Rick felt his body prepare for takeoff as he watched Elia's expression turn from lust to euphoria and his hands become a blur of motion.

Elia's body tensed around Rick's cock and his seed erupted out of him, spraying his chest and stomach. Rick jammed inside Elia quick and hard, coming for a second time, more intensely and richly than the first. "Oh! God!" *I could screw this man all my fucking life!*

They grunted and humped like animals until the sensations subsided. Rick collapsed on top of Elia, unable to catch his breath, both of them drenched in sweat and spunk.

“Rick, Rick...”

Rick smiled. He loved the way Elia said his name. *Re’ak. Re’ak.* “Yes, babe?”

“I am no move. I am...oh, how you say?” he moaned.

“I know.”

“I can no move. No.”

Rick had to move, unfortunately. “Stay there.” He pulled out, holding the base of the rubber.

“Stay here? I no can move.”

On wobbling legs, Rick stood, removed the rubber and peeked out into the hall. He raced to the bathroom, disposed of the garbage, grabbed a wet cloth and a towel and sprinted back.

With care, Rick cleaned the mess off of Elia, then himself. Once they were both tended, Rick cradled Elia in his arms and kissed his hair. In seconds he was fast asleep.

“Rick? Honey?”

Rick heard his name from a far off place.

“Elia? Rick? Are you awake?”

His mother’s voice began to bring Rick around. He opened his eyes and found Elia coiled around him, sound asleep on his chest.

“Rick?”

“What, Ma?” Rick tried to reply quietly.

“What time do you want breakfast?”

“What time is it?” Rick tried to read his digital clock but he didn’t want to move.

“Almost eleven.”

“Eleven?”

At his exclamation, Elia stirred awake.

“Yes, dear.”

Rick heard her jiggle the door handle and was glad his door had a lock.

“Is Elia still sleeping?”

Rick and Elia exchanged stares. “No, Ma, he’s awake now.”

“I just didn’t know how long to let you sleep.”

“It’s okay.” Rick smiled and brushed Elia’s long hair back from his face.

“Should I make something for you?”

“Give us a few minutes.”

“Okay, sweetie.”

Her padding footfalls receded down the hall.

“Morning.” Rick smiled.

“*Buongiorno.*”

“Sleep well?”

“Like a bambino.”

Rick felt the poke of a stiff cock. “You were amazing last night.”

“Me? No. You amaze me.”

Rick cupped his face tenderly. “I can get used to you in my bed.”

Elia smiled shyly. “Is only four weeks. Get used to fast.”

“Four. Glorious. Weeks.” Rick ground his hard-on against Elia’s.

“Your mother. She must know.” Elia toyed with Rick’s nipple.

“I don’t know if she suspects, but we’ve never discussed it openly.”

“Why? My family knows. Are you afraid?”

“A little.”

Elia scooted back and held their cocks together in his hand, side by side. “How can this be afraid? Eh? Look how beautiful.”

Rick leaned up to have a peek. “Wow. I’ll say.”

“I make them spurt, yes?”

“Yes!” Rick propped his head up on the pillow.

Elia used both hands to press their lengths together, then he began pumping them.

“Nice.” Rick moved his hips in time with the rhythm of Elia’s hands.

“It no take me much.”

“Me neither.” Rick closed his eyes and clasped both his hands around Elia’s to join in.

“Now. Now.” Elia panted, jerking off faster.

“Now.” Rick barely choked out the word and came. Both their sperm coated Rick’s skin in streaming ribbons.

“Hey, big brother.” One of his sisters’ voices came through the door.

“Not now, Rhonda.” Rick caught his breath as Elia slowed down his fisting.

“What the hell you guys doing in there? It’s almost lunchtime. Are you ever coming out of the bedroom?”

“Rhonda, go away.”

“We be out soon. No worry.” Elia laughed.

“Wow.” Rhonda said from the other side of the door, “Must be good.”

“Shut up, sis.” Rick chuckled.

“She know.” Elia shrugged.

“Yeah. She does.” Rick peered down at his messy chest. “Damn, that’s nice to wake up to.”

“Is nicer than by self.”

“Yes. Much nicer.” Rick reached for the towel he had left on the floor from earlier and wiped off his skin.

Elia pecked his lips. “We must make start the day.”

“Yup. Go shower. Meet me for breakfast.”

“*Buono.*”

Rick once again used his mother’s bathroom to shower, dressing in a light pair of cotton shorts and a US Air Force t-shirt he’d picked up at the Wright Paterson Air Force museum.

When he entered the kitchen, his mother and two sisters stared strangely at him. While he poured two cups of coffee, he asked, “What?”

“Just tell them,” Rhonda said.

“Rhonda!” Rick admonished and blushed.

“Rick, they know.” Rhonda shook her head.

“If they know, why do I need to tell them?” Rick couldn’t even imagine looking at his mother at the moment. “Change the subject.” He put milk into both cups and set

both of them down on the kitchen table. Sitting down and sipping his, he found them all staring again. "Lay off."

"Are you gay?" Jenny did not seem pleased.

"Do I really have to have this conversation?"

"*Buongiorno!*" Elia entered the room and stopped short. "I come into something?"

"No." Rick held up his coffee. "Have a seat."

"*Grazie, bello.*" Elia relaxed in the chair beside him and sipped the cup. "Good. Strong. I like it."

Rick paused and grew angry at his family's blank expressions. "People!" he said, "Hello?"

Jenny broke her trance. "What would you like for breakfast, Elia?"

"No go to trouble."

"It's no trouble." She opened the refrigerator.

"We already had breakfast," Connie said. "Hours ago!"

"Mom?" Rick asked, "You want me to make something? You don't have to."

"I said I don't mind."

"I hear what you're saying but your tone isn't agreeing with you." Rick caught Elia's concerned expression.

"Just tell her!" Rhonda repeated.

"I go?" Elia made a move to leave the room.

"No." Rick held his arm. "You don't need to go anywhere."

"This is getting ridiculous." Rhonda rolled her eyes. "Hello yourself, Rick. What are we, stupid? The walls in this house are thin. Duh?"

Rick felt the blood drain from his face and forced himself to look at his mother. She appeared pinched.

"*Mama mia.*" Elia rubbed his face. "*Per favore.* I make mess for family? I no mean to."

"You?" Rick replied. "Don't you dare blame yourself."

"Who do we blame, Rick?" Jenny glared at him.

Rick gestured to his mother and said to Rhonda, "Happy now?"

"Me? You guys were humping all night. Don't blame me."

Elia seemed about to crawl under the table.

“Jesus. Doesn’t anyone around here have any tact?” Rick was about to die. Not this way. He didn’t want it to come out like this. It should have been a quiet, fireside chat. A smile and a hug of reassurance, not his mouthy fifteen-year-old sister accusing him of humping the exchange student who was supposed to be a girl but turned out to be the most beautiful nineteen-year-old man Rick had ever seen in his life.

“Tact?” Jenny gave him a look of disbelief.

“Oh!” Elia moaned, “*Scusi!* What I have done? No. I so to blame.” He stood up. “I make you fight. No. Please.”

Elia ran out of the room before Rick could prevent it.

Rick rose up and felt like breaking something. He was infuriated. “Fine! You want it like this? Here you go. I’m gay, Ma! Okay? There. I’m out. Fuck you all.” He raced after Elia and found him packing frantically.

“What the hell are you doing?” Rick stopped him.

“I make you fight. I out you. No.”

“Baby.” Rick folded Elia into his arms and rocked him. “It’s long overdue. You helped me.”

“No. No be stupid. No. I make mess.”

“Stop. Please. You’re not going anywhere. Isn’t it bad enough we only have four weeks?”

Elia stopped struggling and met Rick’s gaze. “Four weeks.”

Rick nodded and hated the way Elia’s eyes were watering from his guilt. “That’s it.”

“Rick?” Jenny called through the door.

Rick whispered to Elia, “You okay?”

Elia bit his lip and nodded.

“Come in, Ma.” He released Elia and faced his mother.

“Why did you wait so long to tell me?”

“I go?” Elia pointed to his own chest.

“No.” Rick held his hand and sat with Elia on his bed, then he reached out his free hand for his mother.

She was reluctant at first but sat on the opposite side as Elia, next to Rick on the bed.

“I kept trying to find the right time.” Rick squeezed Elia’s hand. “But because Dad left I kept feeling like I had to be the ‘man’ of the family. I didn’t know if you could handle me being a gay man.”

“How long have you felt this way?”

“All my life.”

Jenny’s eyes appeared to unfocus.

“Mom. All my life. Honest. I just tried to find the right way to tell you. It never felt right.”

“Elia?”

“Si? Yes, Jenny?”

“Do your parents know about you?”

“Yes. They do. I am sorry.”

Rick gripped his hand tighter. “You have nothing to be sorry about.”

“I make you say things to your family you no ready to.”

“No. You helped me finally say it.” Rick looked back at his mother. “Hate me now?”

“No. I can never hate you. But I wish you weren’t living a lie for the last God-knows-how-many-years.”

“I was twelve.” Rick smiled. “Seven years.”

“Twelve?” Jenny gasped.

“Yup.”

“Oh, Rick. That was too long.”

“Sorry, Mom.” He shrugged.

There was a pause.

“What now?” Rick asked. “If you think Elia’s going anywhere, you’re wrong.”

“He doesn’t have to leave. You’re both adults. If what you’re doing is consensual, I have no opinion.”

“No, Mom, you do. It’s your house.”

Elia moaned in sympathy.

Rick kissed his hand in comfort.

Jenny asked, “You two are already this close? In one day?”

Smiling, Rick turned to look at Elia. “Are we?”

“I embarrassed to say. I lay heart out? Is that the way Americans do it?” Elia’s eyes sparkled with his smile.

“No. Americans don’t do it that way.” Rick winked.

“Then no expect me to. No. I play hard to buy.”

“Hard to get.” Rick laughed.

Jenny started laughing as well. “The two of you. Unbelievable.”

“You making pancakes or what?” Rick smiled

Jenny stood off the bed, kissed Rick on the cheek, and then gave Elia a kiss as well.

When she left, Rick grinned at Elia. “Looks like I’m out.”

With a gesture of exaggeration, Elia wiped his brow with his arm and said, “Phew!”

“It’s your fault. You made me come too hard.” Rick stood and brought Elia with him down the hall.

“Me? You the one with the ‘Ahhgaad! And ‘Holy fuck!’ You make me blush.”

Rick drew him into his arms and embraced him. “I don’t think four weeks is going to be enough of you.”

“It must do for now. We both go back to university in fall, yes? And this is the time I pick for exchange.”

“Yes.” Rick pecked his lips and held his hand. He could smell bacon cooking. When he entered the kitchen he met three sets of eyes again, but this time they were all smiling at him.

Afterward

"I never knew I could fall in love with you so deeply, so completely. I've got time off for Christmas. I've already bought the tickets and will send you the confirmation on email. Tell me you love me again, babe.

Elia, you are all I think about. Once we graduate college we have to decide what to do. My love. Wait for me. Wait for me."

Rick hit the send button on the computer and sat back in his chair. Water filled his eyes. How he could have fallen in love with an exchange student from Italy was beyond him. But he had. Madly in love.

He threw a kiss at his lover's photo which hung near his desk in the dorm, dreaming of the meeting in the airport and their reunion in Elia's bed.

About the Author

Author G.A. Hauser is from Fair Lawn, New Jersey, USA. She attended university at The Fashion Institute of Technology in NYC, and has a BA in Fine Art from William Paterson College in Wayne NJ where she graduated Cum Laude. As well as degrees in art, G.A. is a Graduate Gemologist from the Gemological Institute of America (GIA). In 1994 G.A. graduated the Washington State Police academy as a Peace Officer for the Seattle Police Department in Washington where she worked on the patrol division. She was awarded Officer of the Month in February 2000 for her work with recovering stolen vehicles and fingerprint matches to auto-theft and bank robbery suspects. After working for the Seattle Police, G.A. moved to Hertfordshire, England where she began to write full length gay romance novels. Now a full-time writer, G.A. has penned over 140 novels and short stories. Breaking into independent film, G. A. was the executive producer for her first feature film, CAPITAL GAMES which included TV star Shane Keough in its cast. CAPITAL GAMES had its Film Festival Premiere at Philly's Qfest, and its television premiere on OutTV. G.A. is the director and executive producer for her second film NAKED DRAGON, which is an interracial gay police/FBI drama filmed in Los Angeles with the outstanding cinematographer, Pete Borosh. (also the Cinematographer for Capital Games)

The cover photographs of G.A.'s novels have been selected from talented and prolific photographers such as Dennis Dean, Dan Skinner, Michael Stokes, Tuta Veloso, Hans Withoos, and CJC Photography, as well as graphic comic artist, Arlen Schumer. Her cover designs have featured actors Chris Salvatore, Jeffery Patrick Olson, Tom Wolfe, and models Brian James Bradley, Bryan Feiss, Jimmy Thomas, Andre Flagger, Grigoris Drakakis, among many others.

Her advertisements have been printed in Attitude Magazine, LA Frontiers, and Gay Times.

G. A. has won awards from All Romance eBooks for Best Author 2009, Best Novel 2008, *Mile High*, Best Author 2008, Best Novel 2007, *Secrets and Misdemeanors*, and Best Author 2007.

G.A. was the guest speaker at the SLA conference in San Diego, in 2013, where she discussed women writing gay erotica and has attended numerous writers' conventions across the country.

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