

Revelations

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by

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Chapter One

Matt Van Landingham kicked off his Adidas and stepped up onto the champagne color sofa, using both feet to carefully balance his 6' 2", 198 lb former All-American frame. He gingerly hefted the oversized photograph of a schooner skimming the smooth-as-glass surface of the bay beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. With its sails down, the vessel still reminded him of a ghost ship—its 3 skeletal masts appeared eerily draped in shrouds of fog as it crept under its auxiliary power toward the harbor in the foreground. He sighed over aching memories and then grunted as he hefted the heavy brushed metal frame upward; this being one of the few possessions that he had been able to grab and bring with him after that fateful night when he and his father. . . .

Well, what happened back at the ranch was ancient history. An ironic take on the old adage, 'Water under the bridge' he thought with a tight smirk as he stared into the bowels of the ghost ship. Somehow, he felt as if he should be aboard—having become a ghost to his family and friends back home. Well, it is

ancient history, he reassured himself. Carved up and buried. Beyond resurrecting. Beyond . . . anything, really.

Wasn't it?

Just as he was attempting to slip the picture wire over the hooks, there was a knock at the door to his condo.

Matt let out a soft groan. Debate time—photograph? Door? Photograph? Door. . . .

Another knock registered its vote—knuckles to steel casement. Louder. More insistent. Matt's forehead dropped against the wall and he let out a frustrated sigh. “Yeah!” he called into the bowels of that ghost schooner. “Just a sec! I’m. . . .” He made three quick attempts to slip the wire over the closest hook. Failure. Failure. And, failure. “I’m. . . . coming.”

Matt studied the most treasured possession of his life, a gift that meant more to him than probably anyone would ever know; he gently set it down on the back of the plush cushions and then tenderly leaned the photograph against the wall. He slid off the couch and ambled across the room to the door. As he grabbed the handle—annoyed by the interruption, he glanced back just in time to see the photograph take a slow, graceful dive onto the overstuffed seat cushions and come to an awkward rest—half on, half off the couch.

“Figures, you son of a. . . .”

Eyes rolling, his head snapped back toward the door—drawn by another round of sharp raps against the metal casement. Matt yanked the door violently, ready to lay into his late evening, uninvited caller. Instead, he felt his jaw drop as his heart sailed into his throat. A millisecond later, his knees began to melt.

That crooked smile that seemed ever on the verge of creasing into a smirk. That brow that could arch its way into a smorgasbord of amusement, inquiry, and taunt. Those ever present Sketchers, a pair of coffee & cream toned cords that had to be greased up before they were slipped over thick swimmer and gymnast’s thighs. All, topped by a long sleeve scarlet gauze shirt—unbuttoned and sleeves rolled once, twice, and a third time over a crisp, white sleeveless tee.

Matt stepped aside to allow entry into the plush living room with its floor-to-ceiling glass wall overlooking that very harbor that was highlighted in the photograph he had so unsuccessfully been attempting to hang. His eyes caressed their way over the body before him. *God, those cords hug his butt to the point of perfectio. . . . Shit! What are you thinking? He’s your fucking baby brother!* His eyes rolled again as the thought lingered. *Yeah—my baby brother with a butt that you could. . . .*

Tearing his eyes away from those cords and back up to that angelic face, he stopped and regrouped. “Cody?”

Cody Van Landingham walked to the center of the room and made a quick survey; nodding his approval of what his big brother had done so far. Matthew had always had impeccable taste. He made a slow

pivot—perusing the loft space, its décor in-process. Impressed, he finally turned his attention to his brother.

Matt was wearing a pair of white boxer-style mesh shorts that left little to the imagination, and—quite obviously, nothing under them. Nothing but Matthew. All Matthew. His brother's chest was strong and muscled, with a sprinkling of hair that tapered into a fine trail before it disappeared beneath that flimsy mesh material. He wondered now, as he had so many times over the last couple of years, which great Renaissance Master had reincarnated into the softest of feathers to dip in gold dust and then splay those sprinkles and that feathery line down his brother's 8-pack into what he remembered to be a massive dick. He had checked it out a number of times, of course, being the idolizing little brother. Cody shook himself from those remembrances and took his big brother in his arms and hugged him tight.

“I’ve missed you, Matthew,” Cody said into his brother’s chest. His skin goose bumped at the touch of Matt’s sculpted arms as they hesitantly slipped around his waist; his 5’ 6” body being pulled into Matthew’s strength, his scent—his essence.

Matt’s nose nestled in his brother’s hair as he luxuriated in the feel of Cody’s body pressed into his own. He inhaled deeply; huh—when had the kid started wearing his standby cologne and using his shampoo? No matter, it didn’t lessen that other scent. Cody. Pure. Total. Complete. Cody. He breathed in again. And, again. And once more before he broke away to stare into the deep blue lagoons that were his eyes. God—those eyes were captivating. Entrancing. Mischievous. Eyes that were dangerous as hell. Eyes that solicited erotic and sweat soaked dreams. Eyes that often produced equally soaked nightmares. Eyes—that with an uncanny regularity, conjured unfulfilled fantasies.

“Dad knows you’re here?”

“No.” The answer was short. Defiant. Cody.

Matt sighed as his brother attempted to step back into their embrace. He rebuffed the hug and stepped away; returning to his unfinished project—the couch and his oversized nemesis.

Cody’s head tilted and his eyes shifted from his brother’s perfectly sculpted body to the photograph that had been giving him such fits before his arrival. His gaze became more intense. More scrutinizing. And, then—worshipful.

“That’s my shot; the one I gave you for your birthday last year?”

Matt nodded as he again hefted the frame upward and back over the couch. The fingers of his right hand sifted down the wire and pulled it taut so that he could slip it—hopefully in one move this time—over the set of hooks that were standing at attention, waiting to perform their duty.

“You know it, buddy,” he said without turning from his task. “My most prized possession.”

Cody’s lower lip buckled into a pout. His eyes sparkled in playful defiance. The tilt of his head took a stronger angle. “I thought *I* was your most prized possession. . . .”

Matt let out a soft chuckle as he knelt back to study the photograph. He fingered the left side of the frame and pushed upward. Satisfied, he eased into the thick cushions and let his head drift backward in successful bliss; although, still puzzling as to what his younger brother was doing here so late at night.

“The photograph is a possession, Cody. My most prized *possession*,” he corrected without raising his head. “*You*—are my heart and my soul. *You* are the most important piece of my life.”

No response.

Matt fought back an experience-driven grin. He knew that right about now, color was flooding across those cherubic cheeks and his little brother’s hand was probably sifting through his mop of medium length waves and curls. Undoubtedly, his eyes were rolling like a wind swept sea—not accepting the explanation. Embarrassed, and yet—idolizing. Yeah, he knew his little brother very well. Matt inhaled deeply and tried to swallow his uneasiness as he took the plunge.

“So, if Dad doesn’t know you’re here. . . .” He finally lifted his head and peered across the room to where Cody stood gazing at the photograph as though it were a living and breathing, sentient being. Those piercing blue sparklers cautiously drifted down to meet his. “‘sup, Cody?”

Cody shrugged as he crossed the room to take a seat on the armrest; his left leg dangling to the floor and his right snaking outward to spread across the cushions and press up against Matt’s thigh. His toes sifted through the fine hairs on that well-muscled thigh; it felt good to touch him again. Even playfully. He frowned when Matt’s leg slid away. Okay, what was that about? He’d always played with the hairs on Matt’s legs when they lay on the couch and watched a game or when they stayed up late reading side-by-side in bed. He waited several moments for Matt’s leg to move back where it belonged—it didn’t. He decided it was time to embark on his explanation; his eyes caught sight of a bowl of mints and his stomach reminded him it had been a couple of hours since it had been fed.

“I came down for the opening of that new impressionist gallery at the museum of art Saturday afternoon. After that, I was sitting in the park across from the terminal—eating dogs and kraut. I saw you come down the sidewalk with grocery sacks. I followed you,” he explained nonchalantly.

Old hat to the both of them. How many times had they listened to the boasts and cajoles as to how most people were so locked into their daily, minute-to-minute routine that they could easily be traced and tracked. Having few cares, the guard goes down. He gave in to his stomach’s plea; he leaned forward and scooped a handful of those mint pillows from the crystal bowl on the coffee table.

“Dad headed out after dinner tonight; said he’d be gone for several days. Undercover crap,” he said just as casually as he sorted out and then popped several of the green candy tufts into his mouth.

Both brothers were very used to undercover operations in their father’s life. A shrug off, as though it was the most natural thing in the world for Cody to be 100 miles from home, at night, in the city, and showing up on his big brother’s door step unannounced.

“I gave the dogs what they wanted, then I fed them, turned on the security system, and then . . . well—here I am.”

Pink tufts this time, Matt noted. Like colors. Always like colors. Speaking of routine. Or was it compulsion?

“I wanted to see you, Matthew,” offered with a shrug as he popped more mints.

Still unsure as to why his little brother had made this trek, Matt’s mind considered the prospects. There was going to be hell to pay if their father found out that Cody had come into the city to find him. He drifted into a pained silence, he felt his jaw grinding and he locked into a tight but strained smile and reminded himself to stop and buy more mints. “I hated leaving like that, Cody, but. . . .”

“What’s going on, Matthew?”

Crap—here it comes. Matt let his head once again fall back into the cushions; he wondered if the god of couches could suddenly take possession of this one and have it swallow him whole and sail him away before they got into what he now knew was about to come to a head between him and his little brother. What was that god’s name—Couchonius Cushionus Maximus?

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean, Matthew,” Cody interjected sarcastically. As much as he worshiped him, he hated it when his brother treated him as though he was still a little kid. “Dad said that you both just decided that it was time for you to be out on your own.” He snorted before popping more mints; back to green this time. All green. One color. Always one color at a time. He wondered why that was; but as he considered it, he couldn’t remember a time that he didn’t separate things in similar fashion. “That’s bullshit, Matthew.” He stared deeply into his brother’s eyes. “I *heard* you that night? The night you left? I’ve never heard you and Dad fight like that. Not ever.” He slid onto the couch beside his brother and his right hand took up residence on a thigh; the muscle tensed under his touch. He squeezed it playfully. It tensed even more but did not escape his grasp, nor—did it really make any attempt to escape from beneath his softly stroking fingers. He wondered if he had just caught a sudden and rather violent lurch in that mesh-covered crotch. “Don’t try to push me away, here,” he demanded with a voice quaking with emotion. “Why did you leave the ranch, Matthew?”

“You want something to drink?”

The question came even as Matthew was up and making a hasty exit to the kitchen. Moments became minutes as he leaned against the cooktop while he tried to figure out a way to change the course of this interrogation. Cody was right; he wasn’t a little kid any longer and he did deserve the truth. But, why now? Why not later; say—90 years? Their father would hunt him down like a diseased animal and annihilate him if he explained.

Once his heart had settled enough to go back and face his little brother, he grabbed two cans of beer; what the hell, he was gonna get massacred anyway. He might as well add fuel to the fire by soaking Cody in alcohol. As he walked across the living room, his eyes fell on his brother once more—draped over the couch, playfully tossing a cushion into the air and catching it like a 6-month old kitten grappling with a ball of yarn. His eyes took in the sight of rock hard abs as Cody’s white tee pulled from his cords and

rose up along his own misting of treasure trail. He focused again on that bulging crotch and then followed quickly up to that face. God—he was beautiful.

As he stepped up beside the couch, Matt handed off one of the cans of beer. Cody's taking it caused their fingers to slide across each other and sparks of electricity shot through Matt's entire body; sparks that went straight into his cock which responded with a resounding throb.

Okay—wrong. His heart hadn't settled down at all. He retreated. He walked across the living room and stepped through the French doors out onto the balcony. He stood there. Like a stone sentinel. Silent. Shaking slightly as he gazed out over the bay. It was a beautiful night. But, the fog was coming. He could smell it. He could feel it. Soon, it would be rolling in to envelop the bridge, the wharves—the entire city. He hoped to hell that the fog would envelop him very soon, too; the last thing he needed right now was for his brother to see him fully boned and throbbing in his shorts.

God—I need to get laid.

It took several moments for Matt to realize that he was not alone. Cody's presence jarred him back to reality. To now. To what Cody wanted to hear. To what he deserved to hear. Not from their father. Not from anyone. But, from him.

Yeah—Cody needed to hear it from him.

Only him.

“Answer me, Matthew. We've never kept anything from each other before; except maybe for this . . . whatever it is. Don't do that to me.”

Cody was right. Matt knew that. They had always been straight with each other about everything. Everything but this. This was the one thing that he had never had the balls to tell his little brother. But, looking at him now—geez, he so wasn't that little kid any longer. However, if their father found out that he had talked with Cody. . . . If their dad knew that Cody was here? He'd kill Matt. Literally. Once you've been written off by Robert Van Landingham. . . . Yeah—that's just how it was with their father. The man didn't live on sentiment. Never had. Never would. Matt gazed into those waiting eyes and felt his knees start to buckle again. This was going to be hard. He had always known it would be hard, but—fuck!

Matt sucked in the moist night air and let it whisper through his teeth as he debated silently his response. The pros. The cons. The pack your bags and run for the hills. . . . Whatever. It was a response that he knew had to come. A response that was clearly in its time and its place—here and now.

“We,” he stopped almost immediately. He gulped at his beer. “You know Dad and me, Cody. We have differing opinions. We always have.” His brother nodded knowingly with another of those infamous eye rolls as if to say, *Sheah, tell me about it.* “There are. . . .” Another gulp of beer. Another suck of air. More hesitation. “There are things in my life, Cody. Things that Dad doesn't want inside his house. Things . . . that,” he paused to drain the beer and shifted his focus toward the clanging of a trolley as it passed below them. “There are things about me that Dad doesn't want you to be exposed to.”

He silently beseeched his brother to accept that shit-ass response and let it slide. He lost a battle with a smirk of his own. Yeah, right—like that would ever happen. Cody was like a rabid Chihuahua; once he sank his teeth into something, he never let it slide.

“Let it go, Cody. Just let it go.”

True to form, Cody pounced.

“You’re not a drug dealer. You aren’t an ax murderer.” He offered up one of his disarming iceberg melters. “I checked for evidence; no dead axes around the ranch.” The levity was short lived; his smile ebbed into a frown. Matthew wasn’t laughing. His brows came together and his face scrunched into another pout. Was his charm fading? That had always worked for him. Maybe he was getting old? *Okay, don’t go there. You’re in attack mode, here. No prisoners. Full assault. Go for it!*

“I’d know before anyone if you were a drunk or a druggie, or. . . .” He followed his suddenly retreating brother back through the French doors and into the living room. “What could you have done that would be so bad that Dad would throw you out in the middle of the night and tell you not to ever darken his doorstep or his life ever again?”

Shit—the kid really had heard the argument. But, how much had he heard? Million dollar question with an answer Matt was not sure he was prepared to hear.

“It’s just that I’m. . . . I’m. . . .” Matt stumbled clumsily through a rapid-fire list of a dozen angles, here. None of them wanted to be uprooted from their firm grasp in his throat and tumble out into the open. “It’s just that. . . .” He groaned in exasperation and smashed his clenched fists into the sides of his head. He took several deep breaths and tried to compose. His own eyes took on one of those barrel rolls that were usually as effective as his little brother’s. “Don’t push this, Cody. Let it go.”

An internal smirk creased his mind. *Yeah, what planet are you on, Matthew? Rabid Chihuahua in the condo, remember?*

Not to be derailed, Cody pushed harder. “You’re my hero? Do you know that?” He nodded affirmatively in response to his brother’s incredulous expression. “You always have been. I never told you because I was afraid you would think I was just a stupid kid. But, you *are* my hero. My hero and my best friend, Matthew.” He leaned closer to his brother; so close, in fact that he could smell the blended aromas of Armani and Matt sweat. “Be straight with me, Matthew.”

Matt stared at the handsome teenager. And, he was handsome. Gone were the days of the gawky, lanky little kid with the crooked smile and the spaces between his front teeth. The freckles were still there but this was a man standing in front of him. One hell of a hot, sexy, stud muffin of a man. The insanity fueling giggle that could go on and on and on was still present. He actually hoped that Cody would never grow out of that giggle; as maddening as it was and as crazy as it often times drove him, he loved that giggle. He held his breath as his eyes broke from the mental chains he had encased them in and they drifted downward from that beautiful face to flow hungrily over that nicely formed chest, and farther—to that magnificently stuffed crotch. God—cords on this kid were maddening! His little brother was loaded, no doubt about that. And that butt. God—that butt. What he could do with that butt.

Reality check. Back to reality, Matthew. Yeah, back to fuckin' reality.

Matt turned and walked away before he fell completely under his kid brother's spell. It wouldn't be the first time. But this was not the time to be one of *those* times.

"Just let it go, Cody. You wouldn't understand."

Lightning bolts blazed through those blue pools and a fist swung wildly through the air—not particularly at anything. Cody let out a growl that was so guttural, so deeply resounding—Matt almost wondered if there was a register on the quake-o-meters somewhere in the state.

"Don't tell me I wouldn't understand! Don't . . . do . . . that to me, Matthew!" Cody paused momentarily; he wondered where that had come from. Had he ever screamed at his big brother before? No—he was sure he had not. He forced himself to count to five and then altered his 'tude. "I love you, Matthew. I hate you being gone. I hate not having my big brother at home. Tell me what the hel . . ." He checked himself again. God—he hoped he hadn't ended up with their Dad's gene, the one that exploded and went off half-cocked like some maniacal Pomeranian. Chihuahua? No—he had bangs. Definitely a Pomeranian. He took three deep breaths and waited for his blood to creep back from boiling to a simple rolling simmer. "Tell . . . me, Matthew."

The brothers stood their ground. Cody, holding Matt's shoulders so tightly that the skin was turning white beneath his fingers. Matt, staring in stunned silence at his brother's outburst. Where had the kid grown that set of balls? After several tense moments, Matt wavered. Broke their stare. Relented. His voice shaking, he took a deep breath and offered the explanation that his brother had demanded. The truth.

"Dad . . . threw me out of the house," he stammered.

"Duh," Cody shot back with a snort as he backhanded a nose scratch. *Again with yesterday's news? That's been printed, wadded up, and it's already tossed into the recycling bin. Tell me something I don't know already—geez!*

Air turtle-raced into Matt's lungs as he gazed into his brother's eyes. Those eyes. Those beautiful eyes. Those sparkling, piercing blue pools that could go from adorable to Titanic-sinking in a blink. Those . . . fucking . . . eyes.

God—Matt had known this day was coming. It had to. It fucking had to. But why now? He reached up to run his fingers through his hair. Shakes? Oh yeah. Nerves? Hell yes. Sweating? Ditto. Shit—even his scalp was sweating. Double shit—he even felt his balls sweating and there wasn't a mouth, tongue, or butt in sight. Well, not one that was ready to. . . . He shook his head.

God—I really need to get laid.

So this is what it feels like to be a cornered animal, Matt thought as he delayed the inevitable. Cody was not going to back down. He was standing firm and strong, like he always had. He was showing his tungsten-coated balls just like Matt had taught him to do. Why the fuck had the kid decided to listen to him?

The air surrounding them hung heavily with the single word that finally slid through Matt Van Landingham's lips. It came out of his mouth so softly, so hoarsely, so faintly that he hardly heard it himself.

"Gay."

"Wha. . ." Cody's head bobbed, unsure that he had heard his brother correctly; even more—unsure that something so minor as someone's sexuality could be the cause for so much anguish at home. Minor? Oh yeah, wait—he forgot about their father's archaic sense of 'normalcy.'

"I'm gay, Cody," Matt said again, just as hoarsely—his voice cracked slightly as the words came out; the moment of truth had arrived. He had put the ball in play and now waited anxiously for his brother's return to his serve. He stared at his little brother—waiting. Praying this would not turn out like it had when their father had abruptly confronted him after walking in on him and his best friend, Tanner Grindhaus. He held his breath for longer than he thought lungs were allowed to do under their warranty papers; and, he waited. And, he waited. And . . . he . . . waited.

Cody stood motionless as he soaked in his brother's admission, gazing at the harbor and bridge—the fog enveloping them and all that lined them—as though that photograph was grasping the irony filling the room at that very moment and was giving credence to what was taking place. Emotion ran the gamut as he stood there, facing the photograph. Staring reality in the face. He inhaled deeply as he turned to his big brother whom he loved more than life itself—even more than those little pink and green mint pillows he'd been munching since he got here. He wondered if Matthew had any peanuts. Mmm, yeah—mint and peanuts. And chocolate. Chocolate was the answer to anything. Yeah—mints, peanuts, and chocolate. *Damn, I'm hungry. I'm just a growing boy; I haven't eaten for 3 hours.*

Cody Van Landingham cocked his head and studied his brother's handsome face, a tear streaking its way down his slightly bristled cheek. He saw the quaking in Matthew's usually peaceful eyes and he knew that his big brother was on the edge of the cliff between doubt and panic. Waiting for a reaction. Waiting for a reply. Waiting for . . . acceptance, or—the disintegration of the final link to their family. As if that would ever happen as long as Cody was alive. He let slip another of those trademark 'berg melters and then leaned forward to soccer bounce his head against his brother's perfectly muscled chest.

"Got food?"

(End of Chapter)

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