

# Contradictions

By Brock Archer

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The story depicts gay, straight, and bisexual activities among consenting teens and consenting adults; however, there is no sexual contact between adults and minors. There are elements of “rough sex,” but not sado-masochism. Anyone who is below the age of 18, living in a jurisdiction where such material is illegal, or easily offended by such material should stop reading at this point and exit this Web page immediately.

Though the author has tried to make the story as authentic as possible, the reader should remember that it is a work of fiction, which means that some suspension of belief is expected. Some of the scenes involve unsafe sex practices. The author neither condones nor encourages such activity in real life. Everyone is urged to practice safe sex at all times.

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## Chapter 9: That Fateful Day

Throughout college, Jay continued to work in the shop, as he had promised his parents he would. It helped him get his mind off of Rick. Besides, he really liked delivering the furniture because he enjoyed seeing the customers' delighted faces when they saw their finished masterpieces for the first time. He also helped his mom with the bookkeeping and even some personnel matters. In short, he eventually learned just about every aspect of the business.

At San Jose State, he majored in sociology and minored in psychology with the goal of going on and getting his Ph.D. His senior year, he applied to several graduate schools, but his first choice was Harvard. He was 22 years old, and he thought it was about time that he got out on his own, and the best way to do that was to go to school clear on the other side of the country. The day he got his acceptance letter from Harvard, his parents were more thrilled than he was.

The following week, Mr. Sherwood had to go to Mendocino to meet with a client, and Mr. Donovan, the father of the cute young swimmer we met at the beginning of this story, was going with him to talk with a potential supplier. “Why don’t you and your mom come with us? It’ll give us a chance to chat about your plans for Harvard.” Jay really loved his dad, especially after what Rick had told him about him, so Jay jumped at the chance. Mendocino is a long drive from the Bay Area, and there are not many flights, so Mr. Sherwood chartered a plane to take the four of them. When they got there, Mr. Sherwood and Mr. Donovan took care of their business, and Mrs. Sherwood and Jay did some sightseeing and a little bit of shopping. On the flight back, however, they hit some turbulent weather. Whether it was pilot error, malfunctioning equipment, or just piss-poor luck, the plane began to jerk violently from side to side before it dropped into a free fall. Appendages flew off the fuselage as the plane spiraled down like a toy being sucked down a drain. The plane crashed into the serene redwood forest, and when the rescue team arrived, Jay was the only one found alive.

Jay escaped with only minor injuries—physical injuries, that is, but he remained emotionally scarred from the trauma. Sometimes he would wake up in the middle of the night screaming and sweating from terrifying nightmares. He hated traveling alone, and when someone would cut him off on the road, he would go into a panic attack. The doctors call it post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He just knew his world had come to an end.

Over 500 people showed up at the Sherwoods’ funeral—customers, friends, neighbors, employees (past and present), people the Sherwoods had helped over the years. Of course, Mrs. Donovan was there with her son Matt, who was then 14.

Edward McClelland approached Jay to offer his sympathies, and at the same time he handed him one of his business cards. “As you know, Jay, I was one of your dad’s customers, but I was also his friend and his attorney. There are some things we need to talk about. When you are ready, give me a call.” Jay pocketed the card and did not think any more about it. Then, a few days later he got a phone call.

“Mr. Sherwood?”

“He’s not.... Are you calling for Walter Sherwood or Jay Sherwood?”

“I am calling from the law offices of McClelland and Feingold, Mr. Sherwood...Jay. Mr. McClelland has asked me to schedule an appointment for you to come in and meet with him.”

“Oh, yeah. I dunno. I’ve just buried my parents, and I’ve got a lot on my plate right now.”

“Yes, I know. My sincerest condolences, Mr. Sherwood, but that is what Mr. McClelland needs to talk with you about. He really feels that it would be to your benefit to come in as soon as possible. Can you make it tomorrow morning? Say, nine o’clock?”

“Oh, all right.”

“Would you like me to send a car to pick you up?”

The question caught him off guard. He had never been asked a question like that before. Did Mr. McClelland know about his problem with PTSD? “Uh, OK, I guess. Sure. What time should I be ready?”

“I’ll instruct the driver to be there at 8:30 if that’s all right with you.”

“Yeah, I guess I can be ready at 8:30.”

“Oh, and Mr. Sherwood, there will be coffee and a breakfast tray waiting for you in the limo.”

“Limo? Uh, OK.”

“Good. I’ll let Mr. McClelland know to expect you tomorrow morning at 9:00. Good day, Mr. Sherwood.”

“You too. Uh, thank you.”

When Jay arrived at Ed McClelland’s office the next morning, the receptionist escorted him into his office. Gold plaques attesting to his many contributions in service to the community, along with his framed degrees from USC and Stanford Law, adorned the forest green walls, which beautifully complemented the redwood desk and credenza that Jay recognized immediately as his dad’s handiwork.

“Have a seat, Mr. Sherwood. Mr. McClelland will be with you shortly. Is there anything I can get you while you wait?”

“No, I’m fine thank you.”

The receptionist paused when she reached the door and turned back toward Jay. “Mr. Sherwood, I want you to know that everyone in this office loved your parents. They even got me this job when my husband left me right after I got pregnant. I don’t know how I would have made it without them.”

Jay stared at the woman and choked out the only words he could muster: “Thank you.”

A couple of minutes later, Mr. McClelland entered, but he was not alone. “This is Daniel Hammond, Jay. I asked Dan to join us because he has some pertinent information to share if that’s all right with you.”

“Sure, Mr. McClelland. If you say it’s OK, then I’m OK with it.”

Ed McClelland was only a couple of years younger than Jay’s folks, but he had a slender build and a baby face that made him look much younger. Dan Hammond was younger than Mr. McClelland, in his late 20s maybe, and very handsome in his \$6,000 Dolce & Gabbana business suit, Forzieri tie, custom-tailored shirt, diamond-studded gold Bulgari cufflinks, and Berluti shoes. Whatever he did, he was obviously very successful at it.

“Thank you for coming in, Jay. As your parents’ attorney, I drew up their will and am the executor of their estate.”

Estate? Jay knew that was the legal term for it, but it just didn’t sound right.

“As their only heir,” he continued, “naturally, you inherit all of their assets: the house, the cars, approximately \$50,000 in cash, stocks, and other financial holdings—and the business. In addition, you will be receiving a check from their life insurance policies, \$1 million on each of them.”

“Wow! I hadn’t really given any thought to an inheritance.”

“That’s understandable. You’ve had a lot to deal with these past few days.”

“Yes, sir. I have.”

“Now, you should know that you have also inherited your parents’ liabilities.”

“Liabilities?”

“Yes, debts.”

“Oh. What kind of debts?”

“Don’t worry. They’re not substantial. Your parents had mortgage insurance, so the house is paid for. If you wish to keep the cars, you will have to finish paying them off. As far as I know, your parents had no other personal debts, and the business is in good financial condition.”

“That’s good.”

“There’s more, Jay. Your dad was a brilliant artist, but as you probably know, your mom was the financial wizard.”

“Yeah, I’ve never heard it put that way, but I guess she was.”

“Oh, believe me, she was, and that’s where Mr. Hammond comes in.”

The young man in the flashy suit slid forward to the edge of his chair and looked at Jay with dreamy emerald eyes that projected both compassion and sensuality and almost made Jay forget why he was there.

“I had the privilege of serving your mother as her financial adviser,” he said.

“Financial adviser? I didn’t know she had one.”

“Well, as much as I hate to admit it, I think she should have been advising me,” he smiled delicately.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, while your father was building the business, your mother was silently and meticulously investing money in the stock market and other ventures.”

“Stock market? Oh, my God. Don’t tell me that she lost everything.”

“On the contrary. She got in on the technology boom on the ground floor and rode it to the top, but she was also smart enough to get out before it crashed. And with the money she made, she set up two trust funds, one for her and your father in their retirement and one for you. You were not supposed to have access to your fund until you turned 25, but since she and your father are now deceased, the money in both funds is available to you immediately if you want to use it.”

“How much money are we talking about here?”

“Well, I’ll have to do a full accounting in the morning, but the last time I checked it was in the neighborhood of \$234 million.”

“Are you all right, Jay?” Mr. McClelland asked.

When Jay didn’t answer, McClelland reached into his credenza and pulled out a bottle of brandy and poured a snifter. “Here, I think you could use this right now.”

Jay took a sip of the brandy and then a gulp, but he was still in shock. Mr. Hammond gave him his card and told him to call.

After Hammond left, Mr. McClelland called the receptionist and told her to have the driver take Jay back home. As McClelland led Jay to the door, he put his arm around him and said, “Your parents were very proud of you, Jay. The day you got your acceptance letter from Harvard, your dad called me and told me that you were going to be the best damned scholar that Harvard had ever seen. Go to graduate school, Jay. Sell the business or hire someone to manage it, but don’t give up your dream.”

“I appreciate that, Mr. McClelland. I really do, but right now there are lots of people counting on me. I may not be the best businessman in the world, and I’m certainly not the artist that my dad was, but I do know more about the business than anyone else, and my dad wouldn’t want me to let those 40 employees down. What’s more, there’s a 14-year-old boy who also lost his father in that plane crash. I can never replace his dad, but maybe I can be a big brother to him. At least, I have to try. Maybe some day I can go to graduate school and get my Ph.D., but right now, I have other priorities.”

“Your parents did one hell of a job in raising you, Jay. Like I told you at the funeral, I was more than a customer and more than your parents’ attorney. I was also their friend. I hope that I can be your friend too. If there’s ever anything you need, anything at all, you’ll call me, won’t you?”

“Yeah, Mr. McClelland, I will.”

“Ed. If we’re going to be friends, you should start calling me Ed.”

“All right. Ed.”

He reached out to take Jay’s hand, but then he pulled him close and gave him a long embrace before they said their goodbyes.

[Author's note: In Chapter 10, Jay gets more than just financial advice from Dan Hammond.]